

# *HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance*

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## *Ravenshoe*

A public meeting was held in the School of Arts building, Ravenshoe on Sunday 13 October 1918 to consider the advisability of providing an ambulance quad car on the line at Ravenshoe or an Ambulance Station, or both. The Chairperson and a member of the QATB Atherton Committee and Superintendent Browning were present.

Following addresses by the Atherton Committee representatives a motion was carried that an application be made to the QATB Atherton Committee to establish an Honorary Centre in Ravenshoe. In 1919 an Honorary Centre was established with Honorary Bearer H.C. Neilson in charge. He was assisted by Honorary Bearers A.J. Rayment and E.P. Grigg. In the same year, the Atherton Committee procured a new Quad Rail Ambulance for Ravenshoe and it proved very useful in conveying patients with greater comfort and speed to Herberton than had been possible before.

On 18 January 1922, a public meeting was convened to discuss the matter of having a permanent ambulance officer stationed in Ravenshoe. Superintendent Browning, who was present by invitation, expressed the view that the residents of Ravenshoe, Tumoulin and Kaban were capable of supplying sufficient finance to employ a permanent ambulance officer in the district.

The Atherton Committee deemed it advisable to place a permanent officer at Ravenshoe and sent Ambulance Officer T.J. Edwards to the area as temporary Officer-in-Charge. The Committee then sought the approval of the State Executive to have the service at Ravenshoe classified a Sub-Centre. In September 1922 following the gazettal of the Sub-Centre, Bearer M.T. (Tom) Chambers of Atherton was appointed Officer-in-Charge. The service was operated from rented premises. By June 1924 the service had moved to a more suitable building.

In March 1925 Tom Chambers was appointed Superintendent of the Wowan Centre and was succeeded by Ambulance Officer F.M. Noble.

At its meeting in July 1925 the Atherton Committee was in receipt of a letter from the Herberton Shire Council advising that although permission had been granted for the Ambulance horse to graze in the streets of Ravenshoe the Committee should place a distinguishing mark on the neck strap worn by the horse.

Mr Noble resigned in December 1926 and was replaced by Senior Ambulance Officer Eddie O'Brien of the Cairns Centre.

In 1927 the Atherton Committee purchased land in Grigg Street next door to the Ravenshoe Police Station for the sum of £50. New quarters were erected on this land. All timbers were donated by many of the residents and the logs were cut into building lengths at no cost in the local sawmills. At this time the Ravenshoe Advisory Committee consisted of A.G. Adams (Chairperson), W.H. Glover, J.E. Edwards, G. King, F. Edwards, W. Clarke and G.J. Jones.

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*First Centre building erected 1927*

Ravenshoe became a self-governing Centre in 1931 and the first Committee comprised F.G. McCarthy (Chairperson), L.H. Toft (Hon Treasurer), W. Glover, J.E. Edwards, F.J. Edwards, R.J. Lindsey and G.H. King. The first Superintendent/ Secretary was Mr Jack Dempsey who had been a member of the permanent staff at Atherton.

Jack Dempsey did not have the benefit of bitumen roads for a few years and during the wet season the average round trip to Herberton (some 22 miles' distance) by ambulance car took eight hours of concentrated driving.

On one occasion, the Ravenshoe ambulance made a particularly difficult journey. Alec Brown, a stockman employed on Wairuna Station, was attacked by other men and had had one of his kidneys hacked out. He had been left where he was attacked. He was later found and his employer, Mr Atkinson, contacted the Ambulance to provide transport to the Herberton Hospital. Jack Dempsey picked up his patient who had a deep hole in his back and advancing gangrene. Jack covered the wound after filling the hole with Listerine and commenced the 18-hour return trip. The stench was so intense in the warm weather that the only possible way to offset it was to fill the car with branches from a eucalypt tree and tie bundles of leaves with handkerchiefs and place these over his nostrils. Not one tiny moan escaped the patient's lips during the long hot trip. Alec Brown died in hospital several days later.

The Ravenshoe Centre's boundaries to the west were, more or less, limitless and extended as far as Einasleigh - a two-day trip and the same to return. Within this area were also Mount Garnet, and Innot Hot Springs and Cashmere, Gunnawarra and Wairuna cattle stations (whose race meetings were also attended each year). Trips to these stations were never under 36 hours and the roads were only bush tracks, which, in the wet season, were often washed out before the return trip. Yet Jack Dempsey was never forced to either abandon his vehicle or seek outside help, and every patient was safely delivered to hospital.

In 1939 Jack Dempsey transferred to the Pomona Centre.

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In the same year, as a consequence of the vast improvement in the condition of the roads on the Tableland, the Ravenshoe Committee sold its Rail Ambulance to the Provisional Committee of the QATB Honorary Centre at Mareeba.

After many years of planning, the present Ambulance Centre building and Superintendent's residence were erected at a contract price of £11,377. The official opening was performed by Mr J.P. McElhinney, Chairperson of the Committee, on 15 October 1961.

Other officers who have served in the positions of Superintendent and Secretary at Ravenshoe are:

<b>1939 – 1943</b>	J.G. Simpson, T. Leach and D. Gilvarry in a relieving capacity during the period in which Jim Simpson served in the Defence Forces
<b>1943 – 1947</b>	W.H. Clark
<b>1947 – 1949</b>	R.P. Fleming
<b>1949 – 1951</b>	R.J. Peterson
<b>1951 – 1955</b>	G.J. Jefferies
<b>1955 – 1971</b>	W.C. Payne
<b>1971 – 1973</b>	B.D. Clutterbuck
<b>1973 – 1976</b>	P.L. Moore
<b>1976 – 1983</b>	E. Robertson
<b>1983 – 1985</b>	M.W. Hampson
<b>1985 – 1998</b>	R. Singh
<b>Present occupant Superintendent</b>	Bob Medlin

Since the gazettal of Ravenshoe as a self-governing Centre the following people have filled the position of Chairperson of the Committee:

<b>1931 – 1934</b>	F.G. McCarthy
<b>1933 – 1939</b>	R.J. Lindsey
<b>1939 – 1942</b>	B.G. Grigg
<b>1942 – 1948</b>	T. Gillespie
<b>1948 – 1949</b>	H. Meixner
<b>1949 – 1958 and 1960 – 1963</b>	J.P. McElhinney
<b>1958 – 1960</b>	R. Divyer
<b>1963 – 1973</b>	L.W. Smith
<b>1973 – 1979</b>	N.G. Harris
<b>1979 – 1981</b>	G.R. O'Brien
<b>1981 – 1982</b>	W. Dixon
<b>1982 – 1985</b>	K.A. Allan
<b>Present occupant Chairperson</b>	A. Maiden