

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Stanthorpe

Prior to September 1915, ambulance transport in the Stanthorpe District was under the jurisdiction of the Warwick Centre of the QATB with the exception of local transport to the Stanthorpe Hospital.

The first record of ambulance service in the district dates back to 1911 when two local business men in Stanthorpe gave very good service to the public by offering their services to assist the sick and injured although their equipment was almost nil. Mr B. Ricaby, a saddler whose business was on the site where Woolworths now stands, was in charge of a two-wheel hand litter. When a call was received Mr Ricaby, assisted by Mr E. Hockday, responded to the call. Patients requiring transport were pushed to the local hospital.

A move to establish a full-time QATB service was inaugurated in 1913 when Lieut. Colonel Hubert Harris (General Secretary of the Executive Committee), accompanied by Superintendent J.D. Kennett of Warwick, spent a few days in Stanthorpe and found a very strong desire on the part of the residents for the establishment of a QATB service. A public meeting was convened on 15 November presided over by Dr Eustace Russell. Those present at the meeting resolved to request the QATB Warwick Committee to establish a service under its jurisdiction. This was agreed to by that body and a Sub-Centre was formally opened on 1 December for a trial period of three months. The Officer-in-Charge was Mr A.E. Kennett (son of Superintendent J.D. Kennett) who held the rank of Deputy Superintendent.



Centre building

A four-wheel wagon was loaned by the Warwick Centre, and a horse to pull the wagon was donated by Mr G.F. White of Pikedale. The wagon was stationed at the premises of Mr A.E. Bateman at the corner of Locke and High Streets and Deputy Superintendent Kennett was accommodated at the Royal Hotel.

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During the trial period Deputy Superintendent Kennett was appointed Superintendent of the Cairns Centre.

On 26 February 1914, a meeting of contributors was held in the School of Arts, and at that meeting it was unanimously decided to continue as a Sub-Centre attached to the Warwick Centre until the end of the year. Senior Ambulance Officer A.W. Thygesen of the Brisbane Centre was appointed Deputy Superintendent in charge.

The Sub-Centre continued to function very well. In spite of the fact that no fault was to be found with the administration by the Warwick Committee, there was a feeling among those interested in the welfare of the Brigade that the time had arrived for Stanthorpe to become an independent centre governed by a committee of local contributors. With that end in view, a public meeting of contributors was called for the 17 August 1915. Superintendent J.D. Kennett of Warwick and Mr R.B. Barrett (the then General Secretary QATB Executive Committee) were present at that meeting. After Mr Barrett had fully explained the obligations resting on a Committee accepting the responsibility of taking on the management of an independent Centre it was decided to make application to the Executive Committee to have Stanthorpe converted from a Sub-Centre to a Centre.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held on 9 September 1915, approval was given to the request of the Stanthorpe contributors for an independent Centre and to the appointment of Mr A.W. Thygesen as the first Superintendent.

A Provisional Committee was elected and consisted of Dr S. Roberts (Chairperson), Dr A.F. Kelly, J.V. Scully (Honorary Treasurer), B. Rickaby, C. Glass, J. Michel, A.G. Wareham, F. Sellars, W.C. Wilmot, R.M. Corden, W.L. Rudder, J. McLucas, E. Gleeson and W.G. Wilkinson, with Superintendent A.W. Thygesen as Secretary.

An Honorary Centre was opened at Dalveen with Honorary Ambulance Officer L.H. Guppy in charge. Other Officers who assisted Superintendent Thygesen in 1915 were Honorary Members B. Ricaby, H. Taudevin and H. Michel.

A typical month's mileage at that time was 396 by train, 67 by horse wagon, 22 by foot and 6 by private car - a total of 491.

The Brigade premises at that time were situated in a rented house in Corundum Street. The first building to house the wagon and plant was constructed by voluntary labour and completed in one day. The work was in charge of Mr W.C. Wilmot.

It was not until 1917 that a move was made to replace the horse wagon with a motor vehicle. A six-cylinder Buick was purchased locally and then taken to Peels Ltd. Brisbane to have an ambulance body constructed. The annual financial statement for the year 1917 discloses that the cost of purchasing and equipping the vehicle was £347.

In 1917 the State Executive Committee received a request from Superintendent Thygesen for permission to act as the town Health Inspector. Dr Roberts supported the request. Permission was refused because Brigade Rules precluded an ambulance officer fulfilling a position outside the Brigade.

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The Brigade continued to operate from the Corundum Street premises and in 1918 a move was made to secure a suitable property to build new premises. An approach was made to the Minister for Lands to secure a portion of the old showgrounds and a parcel of land was granted early in 1919.

In 1919 Superintendent Thygesen transferred to the Charleville Centre becoming that Centre's first Superintendent. He commenced duty there in July and died after a few weeks' service. He had gone west for health reasons.

Senior Ambulance Officer H.G. Reilly of the Toowoomba Centre was appointed to the vacant position of Superintendent at Stanthorpe.

Early in 1920 consideration was given to financing the construction of a building on the new site, and an architect was engaged to prepare plans for a suitable structure. In October of the same year a tender of £1,246,17s was accepted for the construction of a new centre building. The matter of a residence for the Superintendent was held over on account of the financial situation of the Committee.



Superintendent H.G. Reilly

The Superintendent's residence was constructed in 1922 at a cost of £900.

The Stanthorpe Centre continued to function with one paid officer until 1927 when Mr Fred Thorpe who had served as an Honorary Ambulance Officer for some years was appointed to the permanent staff.

When Superintendent Reilly retired in 1932, Mr Thorpe was appointed to fill the vacancy. With two cars and two men and an increased workload, award conditions demanded additional staff appointments.

Early in 1959, with the retirement of Superintendent Thorpe, the Centre had four cars and three permanent officers assisting the Superintendent.

The work had increased to what could be called a busy month handling 225 patients and travelling 2490 miles.

Prior to the appointment of Superintendent Eric Eggleton (of the Charleville Centre) in February 1959, oxygen equipment and two-way radio equipment were installed in the brigade vehicles.

The Centre building had by this time served a very useful purpose and, with the exception of the front doors, was a very sound building. The old wooden doors and supports had rotted and it was decided that when replacing the doors consideration be given to improving the front of the building to enable easy access for the new vehicle which was larger than the older-type ambulances. A contract to modernise the front appearance of the building and install a new lift-up steel door was let in 1961. A steel concrete retaining wall and steel tubular fence were erected.

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With the passage of time the workload increased necessitating increases in plant and staff. Additional space became a matter of urgency and on Saturday 17 February 1979, a new building extension was officially opened by Mr Peter McKechnie MLA. Among the 150-people present were Dr A.D.D. Pye CBE, (Deputy President of the QATB State Council) and Mr E.C. Bradley (State Secretary).

Superintendent Eggleton retired in March 1968 and he was succeeded by Superintendent Frank Gurney of the Dayboro Centre. Frank Gurney retired in 1983 and the present Superintendent Mr Vic Torrens (at the time Superintendent at Winton) was appointed to the vacant position.

Since the establishment of the service in Stanthorpe the following people have filled the position of Chairperson:

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| 1915 – 1919 | Dr S. Roberts |
| 1919 – 1921 | C. Glass |
| 1921 – 1924 | R.M. Corden |
| 1924 – 1925 | W.E. Whitehead |
| 1925 – 1958 | S.J. Pierpoint |
| 1958 – 1959 | W. McGaw |
| 1959 – 1964 | H. Withers |
| 1964 – 1983 | J.P. Mathison |
| Present occupant Chairperson | Lt Col A.C. Jamieson |