

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Toowoomba

Dr Reginald Freshney, the Medical Superintendent of the Toowoomba Hospital was often shocked to see the manner in which accident cases were brought to the Hospital, sometimes in a springcart, sulky, dray or anything that may be handy to be used as a conveyance of the injured to the Hospital. It was not until after the arrival there that first aid could be rendered. Because the journey was often made over many miles of rough country, the absence of skilled treatment at its commencement meant torture and sometimes death.

Mr Robert Aland (Chairman of the Hospital Committee) agreed with Dr Freshney that it would be a grand thing if some system of ambulance service could be organised. The result was that Mr Aland and Dr Freshney obtained some money from sympathetic citizens, and Mr Aland purchased a stretcher, which was initially kept at his grocery store at the corner of Ruthven and Russell Streets. A few volunteers were enrolled and, when called upon, acted as honorary bearers. Later the stretcher was placed at the Railway Station after the approval of the Railways Department had been obtained. The suggestion of an ambulance centre for Toowoomba was warmly supported by a number of residents. Subsequently a public meeting was held in the Town Hall in June 1902 and Mr R. Nye Stevens, General Secretary of the State Executive and Superintendent of the Brisbane Centre addressed the meeting. The information imparted impressed all present, and it was then unanimously decided to establish a branch centre in Toowoomba.



First ambulance building

The first Provisional Committee appointed in July 1902 consisted of C. Rowbotham (Chairperson), A. Mayes (Hon Treasurer), G.A.E. Allom, H.J. Goodsall, J. Melvin. H. Yeates (Hon Secretary) and Dr R. Freshney.

Superintendent Stevens again visited Toowoomba, bringing with him from Brisbane Centre Mr A. Worth who was appointed the first Superintendent and Secretary and Mr R.B. Dalzell as Bearer. On 5 August 1902, the Toowoomba Centre was opened, and by kind permission of the Fire Brigade Board, a portion of the Fire Station in Neil Street was placed at the disposal of the QATB Committee.

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The plant at this time consisted of two Ashford Litters, one kindly lent by the Toowoomba Hospital Committee, and a collapsible stretcher, with all the necessary first aid material.

At its meeting held in the Club Hotel on 25 August 1902, the Committee accepted the application of the following who were desirous of becoming honorary ambulance officers: J.H. Radford, F.J. Taylor, J. Dunn, P.N. Hardies, R. Gant, E.V. Sexton and L. Le Grand.

The first annual report for the five months ending 31 December 1902, presented to the subscribers at the Town Hall on 29 January 1903 showed that during that period the staff had attended to 223 patients - 67 being treated at the Centre. Eight hundred and eight miles were travelled on foot in the handling of 90 accident victims and 66 medical cases. The staff consisted of three paid and six honorary officers. The revenue for the five months under review was £392,7s 9d and the expenditure was £283. Mr F.W.G. Annand was appointed the first auditor and Mr C. Rowbotham (the Chairperson) as the Committee's first representative on the State Executive Committee.

In September 1903 it was necessary to make an alteration to the personnel of the staff. Mr R.B. Dalzell was appointed Superintendent, Mr R. Gant Senior Ambulance Officer, Mr L. Le Grand, Ambulance Officer and Mr H.J. Goodsall, Honorary Secretary. During 1903, a horse and sulky were added to the plant to ensure a more prompt response, especially to accident calls.

At a special meeting of the Committee, held in the Club Hotel on 15 February 1904, the offer of Mr Rowbotham to sell his property in Herries Street to the Committee for £450 was accepted. On this property was a small building which, after alteration, housed the brigade plant. It was necessary to procure a loan of £200 from the State Executive Committee to complete this purchase.

In March 1904, Mr Goodsall resigned his position as Honorary Secretary and Superintendent R.B. Dalzell was appointed to the dual position of Superintendent and Secretary. In August of the same year, an Honorary Centre was opened at Westbrook with Honorary Bearer Barron in charge.

During 1905 hand litters were placed at Pittsworth and Oakey and Honorary Centres opened at Oakey (Hon Bearer C.W. Reynolds) and Pechey (Hon Bearer A. Wright). Honorary Centres were opened at Mount Kent (Hon Bearer O. Bartlett) and at Jondaryan in 1907.

Tenders were called for the erection of a new Centre building on the Herries Street property in June 1906. A contract was let to Mr A. Renwick for the sum of £925. The following is an extract from an article published in the Toowoomba Chronicle of 12 February 1907.

‘The new Toowoomba Ambulance Centre is a structure that any community might be proud of. It is of bluish brick, with white facings, of two stories and with a fine frontage. The ground floor is devoted to business, and the second storey comprises six dwelling rooms for the Superintendent and family. Verandah and balcony towards the east. The ground space within the building is allotted in this manner the western half is assigned to the various vehicles, and upon a level block floor stand in readiness for instant action the two seated gig, with harness in position to descend upon the fleet ‘Fairy’ (the horse) at a moment’s notice, the several litters, etc, in trim order. Behind these are the stalls. On the eastern side are consecutively, public office, private office bearer’s dormitories, and casualty room. All are suitably appointed.

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The exit folding doors from the vehicles are exceedingly effective. They are worked most ingeniously by battery power. A stout cord connects the harness and the doors by overhead communication. When the horse is harnessed, and the driver in his seat, the latter pulls the reins in a peculiar manner, and a knot in the cord forces up a metal place, which completes the circuit. Immediately, as if by magic, the four leaves of the door swing open and the conveyance exit is available.'

It should be noted that the various vehicles referred to in the above newspaper article consisted of one sulky, five litters and one bicycle.

At the first Committee meeting in 1907, Dr R. Freshney was elected Chairperson. This was a very troubled year in connection with the staff, and it was only careful inquiry and firm action that prevented disaster. Deputy Superintendent Edgar Slaughter and two officers were sent up from Brisbane to operate the service until matters were settled. It was necessary for the Committee to make a complete change in the personnel of the staff. Applications were called for two positions namely Superintendent and Bearer. Senior Bearer E.J. Llewellyn of the Ipswich Centre was appointed Superintendent on 23 March 1907, at a salary of £3 per week plus quarters. One Bearer was appointed, Mr G.H. Fry, and Mr J.J. Harland was appointed shortly afterwards. These ambulance officers had a commencing salary of £2 per week.

Consideration was given to the installation of a horse ambulance wagon and in October 1907 an order was placed with the Trevethan Coach Works to build a wagon to the design submitted. This wagon, which cost £65, enabled the Brigade to respond to much longer-distant country calls than before without fatigue to the staff.



Centre building 1907

In 1908 Honorary Centres were established at Goombungee (Hon Bearer C.F. Bardsley) and Pittsworth (Hon Bearer A. Baker) and buildings erected at Pittsworth and Oakey.

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July 24 1909 was the date of an appalling railway disaster at Macalister, when two people were killed and eighteen seriously injured. Dr R. Freshney and members of the Ambulance staff went out by special train and rendered every assistance, and undertook the transport of the injured to Toowoomba and Brisbane. The Secretary to the Railway Commissioner, forwarded a letter of appreciation and thanks for the excellent service rendered by the Brigade, and enclosed a cheque for £25.

In 1910 the Committee purchased the cottage and land at the side of the Centre to accommodate the Superintendent and his family, at a cost of £725. The upstairs of the Brigade building, originally the Superintendent's quarters, was remodelled for the staff at a cost of £709. During this year Honorary Centres were opened at King's Siding, Kooroongarra and Chinchilla. In 1911 Honorary Centres were opened at Yeulba and Mitchell.

In 1912 Superintendent Llewellyn visited Mitchell and with the assistance of Honorary Bearer G.W. Lewis, officially opened the Honorary Centre. This was later made a Sub-Centre, and Mr Lewis was appointed Deputy Superintendent in charge, assisted by Honorary Bearer T.R.E. Evans.

An Honorary Centre was also opened at Millmerran with Honorary Bearer R.A. Knight in charge. In October 1912 Dr R. Freshney, the General Secretary (Colonel Hubert Harris) and Superintendent Llewellyn, visited Roma and called a public meeting. It was decided to open a Sub-Centre attached to Toowoomba and Bearer J.J. Harland of the Toowoomba Centre was placed in charge with the rank of Deputy Superintendent.



Superintendent E.J. Llewellyn

Then again in November the same Brigade officials visited Dalby, which at that time was included in the Toowoomba Ambulance area. At a public meeting a Committee was formed, and a self-governing Centre opened. Deputy Superintendent Chas Williams of the Mackay Centre was appointed Superintendent. The Chinchilla Honorary Centre at this time was handed over to the Dalby Committee as well as a small building which had been erected to house the litter.

The Toowoomba staff at this time comprised the Superintendent, two Deputy Superintendents (one at Mitchell and one at Roma), three Bearers and a Typist.

On Thursday 30 January 1913, the Brigade again proved its usefulness in connection with the Murphy's Creek railway disaster. On that occasion Doctors Freshney and Falkner, and members of the Brigade, ably assisted by Mr J. Featherstone of the Railway Ambulance Corps, did wonderful work and earned not only the appreciation of the Railway Department but of the whole community.

July of 1913 was a memorable occasion when the Centre's first motor car, a 15 hp Napier was purchased, with body complete for the sum of £707,7s.

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The Mitchell Sub-Centre was raised to the full status of a self-governing Centre on 7 January 1915, and Deputy Superintendent G.W. Lewis was appointed Superintendent.

Then again on 22 November 1915 the Roma Sub-Centre was granted selfgoverning status and Deputy Superintendent J.J. Harland was appointed Superintendent.

Roma, in particular, forged ahead, and it was not long before their building was erected by Mr G.P. Williams for the sum on £1,275, and was opened free of debt.

During the year 1916, Millmerran came greatly to the fore and by their united efforts £220 was raised. A Ford Ambulance car was purchased for £256 and was installed at Millmerran and gave good service under the guidance of Honorary Bearer R.A. Knight, as Officer-in-Charge.

The Cooyar Honorary Centre was opened in 1917 and Honorary Bearer P.J. Hickey was placed in charge.

The year 1922 marked the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Brigade in Toowoomba. The plant at this time consisted of six well-equipped cars, and eight permanent officers were employed. The calls for the first year numbered 223 and 808 miles were travelled (all by foot), while for the year ended 30 June 1922, the staff responded to 3623 calls and travelled 41 413 miles, 41 of which were by foot. During this year, an Honorary Centre was opened a Wyreema with Honorary Bearer W. Smith in charge.

In 1923 it became necessary to consider additions to the Toowoomba Centre building and property, and upon expert advice being obtained, a garage and workshop were constructed at a cost of £1,187, and machinery installed in the garage at a cost of £328.

Superintendent E.J. Llewellyn, who for 18 years had guided the destinies of the brigade so successfully, tendered his resignation in 1925 following his election to the Queensland Parliament as the member for Toowoomba. He was replaced by Superintendent T.W. Duffill who had been Superintendent of the Mount Morgan Centre since 1913.

In January 1926 Senior Bearer H.G. Toner was appointed Superintendent and Secretary at Toogoolawah, and in the same year Senior Bearer W.J.F. Weedon was appointed to a similar position at Tully.

On 15 July Bearer H. Biddle was promoted to the rank of Superintendent of the Kingaroy Centre which at the time was not affiliated with the QATB.

At the annual meeting held in July 1927, at which a large and representative gathering of contributors were present, the Mayor (Ald J.D. Annand) unveiled an enlarged photograph of the Chairperson, Dr R. Freshney, in honour of his 25 years as a member of the Committee, and the completion of 20 years in the chair.

On the evening of 15 October 1935 Superintendent Duffill collapsed at the Ambulance building prior to entering the lecture room to lecture students attending a Home Nursing class. Medical aid was quickly summoned. Mr Duffill passed away at his residence a few hours later.

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Deputy Superintendent A. Leamon was placed in charge pending the appointment of a permanent Superintendent. The successful applicant for the vacant position was Mr E.J. Llewellyn (a former Superintendent) who resigned from Parliament and commenced duty on 1 January 1936.

Superintendent Llewellyn retired in 1954 and was succeeded by Deputy Superintendent Leo Behan who had been a member of the permanent staff since 1924.

In 1968 the Committee decided to replace the 60 year-old Centre building with a single storey building costing \$71,318. To construct the building as designed it was necessary to demolish both the existing building and the adjoining Superintendent's residence. The new building was officially opened by the Honourable R. Swartz, Minister for Civil Aviation on 14 December 1968. Since that time numerous additions and alterations have been made to cater for the increase in the numbers of staff and vehicles and to provide rooms for staff in-service training and public first aid classes.

After serving in the dual position of Superintendent and Secretary for a period of 16 years Mr Behan retired on 1970 and Superintendent Doug Henning of the Warwick Centre was appointed to fill the vacancy. Superintendent Henning retired in 1984 and was succeeded by Superintendent Bob Haswell of Emerald.

In 1987 a Sub-Centre for Crows Nest was proposed in response to Committee concern at the increase in both accident and medical cases in the area, particularly when related to the difficulty in travelling to Crows Nest.

On 4 August 1990 Hon T. Mackenroth MLA, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, performed the official opening of the new Sub-Centre building at Crows Nest. The Sub-Centre which had been in operation since 15 June 1990 was completed and equipped at an all-up cost of approximately \$600,000. The local Lions Club sponsored a community committee which raised the sum of \$70,000 to assist in financing the cost of the building.

Brigade records show that as far back as 1905 the Crows Nest Progress Association, for a time, had been raising funds for the establishment of a Sub-Centre.

Since the inception of the ambulance service in Toowoomba the following people have filled the position of Chairperson of the Committee:

1902 – 1905	C. Rowbotham
1905	A. Mayes
1906	G.A.E. Allom
1907 – 1929	Dr R. Freshney
1929 – 1935	J.E. Stone
1935 – 1943	H. Yeates
1943 – 1961	A.E. Lavers
1961 – 1964	Dr G.V. Hickey
1964 – 1976	W. Bruce
Present occupant Chairperson	Dr J.W.P. Henderson