

HISTORY OF THE *Queensland Ambulance*

South Johnstone

The erection of the new sugar mill at South Johnstone in 1915, and the opening up of new lands in and around the Innisfail district made the work of the Cairns Sub-Centre at Innisfail heavier than usual. Mr J. Loth, who had been an Honorary Officer at the Babinda Sub-Centre, took up residence at South Johnstone and joined the Innisfail Honorary Staff.

Mr Loth made many sacrifices in order to help the sick and injured residents of South Johnstone. At the close of 1915 the Cairns Committee engaged Honorary Bearer Henry Anderson of Cairns to be stationed at Japoon Valley where a number of people were employed in constructing the tramway lines. Mr John Hendry became attached to the Honorary Staff at South Johnstone in 1916 and assisted in the work along the Japoon and Liverpool Creek tramlines.

The Innisfail Centre gained self-government in April 1917, and on 9 June 1917, established a Sub-Centre at South Johnstone. Honorary Officer J. Hendry was appointed Officer-in-Charge with the rank of Deputy Superintendent.

At its meeting on 21 August 1919, the State Executive Committee considered an application by the AWU representative at South Johnstone for the establishment of an independent branch centre. Approval was given and subsequently at a public meeting held in the Olympia Hall, South Johnstone on 7 September 1919. A resolution was carried 'that a Centre of the QATB be established at South Johnstone'.

Mr J. Hendry was appointed Superintendent. The plant consisted of a rail ambulance and stretchers. A ballot was taken for the election of seven committee members. From the 21 candidates, the following people were elected: T.J. Farrell, J.P. O'Donohue, J.H. Taylor, J. Williams, J. Kinsey, D. Driscoll and W. Gilroy. Office bearers appointed were Chairperson (T.J. Farrell), Hon Secretary (J.H. Taylor) and Hon Treasurer (J.P. O'Donohue).



Premises 1950

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Operations as an independent Centre commenced from rented premises and the official opening ceremony on Sunday afternoon 12 October 1991, was performed by Mr W.J. Callandar, Chairperson of the Innisfail Centre Committee.

Mr John Loth (South Johnstone) and Mr Sylvester Mahon (Silkwood) were appointed to the Honorary Staff.

In August 1920 Mr Taylor resigned as Secretary and the secretaryship was given to Superintendent Hendry.

The services of Superintendent Hendry (later appointed Superintendent of the Mossman Centre) were terminated in January 1921 and Ambulance Officer W.J. McConaghie of the Atherton Centre was appointed Superintendent and Secretary.

The following is an extract from the annual report of the Committee for the period 1 January 1920 to 30 June 1921.

It is our intention of immediately proceeding with the erection of a residence for our Superintendent on the southside of the present quarters. The Mill Management has kindly granted us the necessary land. Plans and specifications for the proposed building have been accepted, and the order placed for material. The estimated cost of the building is £,855, but as it is intended to carry out work on the day labour system we anticipate the estimate will be very materially reduced.'



Superintendent W.J. McConaghie

Owing to the increase in the work of the Centre, the Committee found it necessary in September 1921 to engage a second permanent officer and Mr V.B. Field of the Honorary Staff of the Rockhampton Centre was appointed. In August 1922 Officer Vince Field transferred to the Cairns Centre and was succeeded by Mr W.F. Hunt of Goondiwindi.

In December 1923, the Committee took delivery of its first Road Motor Ambulance (Special Six Studebaker). It was then found necessary to build a garage to house the car.

In 1939 the Home Department approved of the Brigade entering into an agreement with the management of the South Johnstone Sugar Mill for the construction of a new Ambulance Centre building with the cost to be repaid to the Mill in the form of rent.

Also in 1939, the Committee established a Sub-Centre at Silkwood. Since 1934 it had been the practice to station a permanent officer at Silkwood during the cane-crushing season. This Sub-Centre became an independent Centre in 1946.

A very pleasant surprise was accorded to Superintendent W.J. (Bill) McConaghie on 17 October 1963, when he was presented with the brigade 50-year Service Award. The presentation was made by the

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QATB State President, Mr J.A. Turner, at a function held at the South Johnstone Bowls Club Pavilion. Bill McConaghie retired in May 1969 after the completion of 56 years of dedicated service with the Brigade.

The next Superintendent was Mr Reg Brennan, Superintendent of the Wowan and former member of the permanent staff at South Johnstone.

In 1973 a new Centre building was erected and officially opened by the Honourable S.D. Tooth, Minister for Health, on 10 June of that year. The Centre was built on the site of the previous building which, before being occupied by the ambulance in 1919, had been a Church then was converted into quarters for cane cutters.

Superintendent Brennan transferred to the Biloela Centre in 1972 and since that time the following officers have served in the positions of Superintendent and Secretary:

1973 – 1980	R.J. Peterson
1980 – 1983	P.R. Oliveri
1983 – 1987	E. Robertson
1987 – 1990	R.J. Leonard
Present occupant Superintendent	Brian Elisavites

Since the establishment of the Centre the position of Chairperson has been filled by the following people:

1919 – 1922	T.J. Farrell
1922 – 1933	D. Driscoll
1933 – 1936	A.W. Braysher
1936 – 1940	F. Putland
1940 – 1943 and 1955 – 1962	W. Richardson
1943 – 1955	W. Evans
1962 – 1968	D.L. Hall
1968 – 1984	L. Brake
Present occupant Chairperson	Mrs L. Brake