The first swimming sports at the School took place on December 2, 1901. Research shows that this was the first swimming carnival to be held in Townsville. This initiative was driven by the Headmaster, F.T. Miller, who was keen on introducing swimming into school activities. The events took place at the City Baths, an enclosed area where Tobruk Pool is now situated. Very few events took place and ladies were banned from attending the carnival. School magazines show that the first swimming event for girls took place in 1926 and consisted of one event: 30 yards handicap.

The 1902 carnival was a great success. At the start of the year the Headmaster employed a Drill teacher [PE teacher] and by the end of the year all but one of the sixty-three boys in the School were able to swim. New events included the long dive, the plate dive, the neat header and the ping-pong race. The only unfortunate incident occurred as the School Magazine reports: “The Life-Saving Competition did not take place. The dummy was thrown into the water some minutes before the time appointed; it sank immediately; but when the life-saving was announced it was found that the current had carried the dummy away, and though a score or more dived in all directions it was never found again.”

No swimming carnivals took place during WWI and WWII but there were annual carnivals between 1919 and 1941. With the growth of independent schools in Charters Towers, interschool competition started in the early 1930s. The rivalry between Grammar and All Souls was particularly keen with both schools dominating. Swimming was again introduced in 1946 and, for the first time, it became an Interhouse Carnival [Hodges won]. Previous to 1946 all the events were free-style but breaststroke and backstroke were introduced at this carnival plus medley events. Mr Whight was keen on fostering girls’ sport so girls were able to take part in the similar events as the boys. In 1966, the first Interhouse Swimming Carnival took place in the School pool. In that year it was, with Tobruk pool, the only fifty metre pool in Townsville.

Not only did the girls dominate interschool carnivals in the 1950s and 1960s but in Fay McKillop and Pam Sergeant the School possessed two world class swimmers. In 1956 Fay McKillop, as a fifteen year old, came close to being selected in the Australian team for the Melbourne Olympics and in 1962 Pam Sergeant, a Year 11 student, broke the world record for the 110 yards backstroke at the Empire Games in Perth. Pam went on to win gold, silver and bronze medals at those Games. Two other girls, Debbie Wade [1993] and Jessica Affleck [2001], have also represented an Australian ‘A’ team at swimming. Ben Affleck [2000] and Regan Leong [2013], have also been selected to represent Australia ‘A’ at swimming. Regan is currently training with the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

In 1981 the appointment of Keith Harron as Sportsmaster led to the introduction of water-polo into the School. Under Mr Harron’s expert coaching many Grammar students went on to represent Australian school teams as well as playing at the senior international level. In 1989, Sharyn Gist, while still at school, played as goal-keeper in the Australian team that won the world title. In 2000 Sharyn was the assistant coach of the Australian Women’s team that won the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics. Ben Lees [1990] went on to coach Queensland teams and was assistant coach of the Australian men’s team. His brother Dylan Lees [1993] represented the Australian men’s team over many years.

Swimming has come a long way since Mr Miller had the vision in 1901 to introduce the sport into the School. At that time the City Baths were thirty yards in length and the swimming carnivals had to be programmed in to coincide with the tides. Now the School has three separate interhouse carnivals for Junior, Middle and Senior students, a dedicated Director of Swimming, a Swim@Grammar training programme and a partnership with the Kokoda Spirit Swim Club that ensures our wonderful pool facility is used 6 days per week, all year, including during winter as a result of supplementary heating.

MR BILL MULLER
School Archivist