

## CYCLONE LEONTA'S LONG TERM EFFECTS

On 9 March, 1903 *Cyclone Leonta* struck Townsville causing enormous damage to the School. The main building, the chemistry block, the gymnasium, laundry and dining room were completely destroyed. Though these were the immediate effects of the cyclone, the long term effects were to have a more marked influence on the development of the School. The School Magazine of June 1903 stated that *"The Trustees had hitherto prided themselves on the fact that Townsville Grammar is the only one in Queensland not to pay interest on borrowed money. The cost of restoring the School, is estimated at £2350 and they have been unable to do more in the way of restoration than to repair and to use material from the ground to build a new chemistry room."*

The Trustees had hoped that government aid would help in the restoration but it was not forthcoming. Under the Grammar Schools Act, the Trustees were entitled to a grant of two-thirds of the rebuilding on the condition that the School could raise the initial third. This was not achievable and thus the Trustees had to finance the entire building itself. It is interesting to note that the subscribers who had been so generous in setting up the School in 1888 could now not help as many had also been devastated financially by the cyclone. The School, however, was able to obtain a government loan of £3000 which was augmented with £200 in 1908 to repair the gymnasium. A further £1000 was borrowed in 1908 to build a new dormitory and for general repairs and fencing. To further complicate matters the government endowment to Grammar Schools was reduced from £1000 to £500.

In the face of such difficulties it is to the credit of the then Headmaster, F.T. Miller, and his staff that the School re-opened on the Paxton Street campus in February 1904. However, at the end of 1904 Mr Miller and his staff all resigned. Mr Rowland, on taking over as Headmaster in 1905, was thus faced with the enormous task of re-building a school. On his arrival there were only thirty-nine students enrolled as many had left because many parents believed the School would not re-open in 1905. Mr Rowland found two teachers willing to travel from Brisbane to join the staff and he then set about increasing numbers. Two methods were used to increase enrolment figures. In 1905 eight girls were enrolled, a record number at that time, and the amount of scholarships available were also increased. Mr Rowland was convinced that an increase of scholarships would help facilitate an interest in the School. By 1908 there were eighteen scholarships available. The Cleveland Masonic Lodge provided four scholarships, the Lodge at St Andrews one, the Trustees eight, the Queensland Government five and Mr Hollis Hopkins and Mr Henlein one each. In the same year the government increased their endowment to £1000 on the condition that the School offer free education to fifteen District Scholars at the rate of five a year. Mr Rowland would also, from time to time, pay the fees of a student who he felt would benefit from a Grammar education.

Under the inspiring leadership of Mr Rowland enrolment numbers increased and, as a consequence, improvements to buildings and a new dormitory block was required. By 1910 further loans were needed to build the new dormitory, install incandescent lamps in the dormitories, build a girls' room and to construct a goat-proof fence around the School grounds. By 1913 the debt was crippling the School and for a period of time the government suspended interest and repayments of their loan. This suspension did not last long and in 1915 the School appealed to the government to write off two-thirds of the loan. This request fell on deaf ears leaving the School to struggle on. In 1927 the government looked into the feasibility of closing the Grammar Schools in Townsville, Rockhampton and Maryborough as they were all struggling financially but little was done until 1935 when the two Maryborough Grammar Schools were closed.

Townsville Grammar, however, survived but a reading of Board Minutes during the 1930s is one of how to keep the School viable. An example of this is a minute of a Special Meeting of the Trustees on 10 February, 1933 which states that Mr Rowland and the staff had intimated that they were willing to have a further five per cent reduction in their salaries. The Board rejected this offer stating that the staff had, in the previous year, already taken a cut in their salaries. It was resolved that the situation called for the strictest economy in the hope that conditions were to improve.

Mr Rowland resigned at the end of 1938 leaving Mr Whight to run the School. His task was made more difficult with the coming of World War Two and having to move to the Rosslea campus in Hermit Park in order to accommodate the RAAF on the school premises. On returning to the North Ward Campus Mr Whight was confronted by a run-down campus and with the fact that the RAAF paid only £3200 in compensation, far less than had been negotiated in 1942. Repairs had to be made and with the increase of numbers new furniture and an improvement in facilities had to be made. The Old Boys and the Parents Association raised £3000 in 1948 and the money was used to establish the War Memorial Oval and to build a pavilion.

At the start of 1949 the School still faced insolvency but to alleviate the debt problem the government provided a special endowment of £450 and waived the Leonta debt which still stood at £435. A loan of £1500 was also provided to meet financial commitments. It was the start of a more positive period for the School. Dr Charles Hopkins M.C., a student from 1923-1927, in his autobiography *How You Take It* sums up the difficulties of the School when he writes *"So the school buildings were rather shabby. But morale and loyalty were extraordinarily high."* It is that loyalty that got the School through very difficult times.

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