

MORE MEMORIES OF THE BABINDA 1918 CYCLONEBy J.F. Howard - MAREEBA

It was with considerable interest I read the account by your Society of the Babinda Cyclone on March 10th 1918, in last Saturday's issue of the "Cairns Post".

As young as I was, I vividly remember the whole episode. At that time, our family was living in Babinda, where my Grandmother was running a boarding house - Mrs Ovens. The boarding house was situated immediately opposite where the Railway Goods Shed is, or was, in the main street going into Babinda from the Cairns side. Our neighbours were a group of Hindus - Turbans and all.

On the day of the blow, it rained hard all day, with varying gusts of wind, which intensified as the day wore on; and around about dark, everyone realised that we were in for a cyclone.

We had our first taste of it shortly after, for an hour or two, and then came the lull, however, this did not last long, and then, she came back stronger, but from a completely different direction; then another lull. About 9 or 9.30pm we were really in for it.

I think the main force of the cyclone hit us about 10pm or a bit after.

Our place was one of the last to go, and I remember my Father and Uncle, Ted Carter, bracing the gable end with a long length of 4 x 2 timber nailed to the floor. The force of the wind snapped it in the middle and then, of course, the complete gable crashed inwards. Fortunately we were all under the big heavy dining room table.

Next went parts of the roof, and we had to move out. Our first shelter was under a dray, owned by a chap by the name of Rasmussen, who, at that time, had a horse and dray delivery service, but with sheets of iron whistling around and past us, and my Mother and Father with five children from 9 years down to about eleven or twelve month, we had to try and get to the Railway Goods Shed.

We eventually got there; most of the women and children were put into a box wagon (Railway wagon closed in), but shortly after the wind, if possible, became stronger. It blew with such a force that it blew the wagon over on its side. There we were, a tangle of skirts, arms and legs; we got out of it without too much damage, and spent the rest of the night at the Goods Shed.

The next day dawned bright and clear, with blue skies, as though it had never happened., but Babinda was just about flattened, and the people had to start cleaning up, preparatory to rebuilding. Our place was rebuilt, but shortly after we moved to Gordonvale about 1920 or 1921 to a farm on O'Leary's Creek.

Our arrival in Gordonvale was a story on its own. The low level old bridge had about three feet of water flooding over it, and the train could not get through. Eventually our whole family boarded an old hand pump car, and were taken across by a couple of Railway men. This was only a taste of what was to come, because every wet season when the creek came down, we had to move up to our neighbour's place, as we were flooded out.

I knew both the Johnstons of the Q.A.T.B. Bill Johnston's brother, Jack, was in Gordonvale with the Q.A.T.B., in 1923-24, when we left to live in Cairns. He treated me for snake bite in December 1923 and I remember his daughter, Dorothy, as she was in the same class at school,

There are lots of things one can recall about those days at Gordonvale, but I think that any more here would become a little boring.