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**1918 CYCLONE**  
**BY THE LATE A. MOFFAT WADDELL**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1918, North Queensland was visited by a cyclone after a week of very hot weather. There were practically no residents at that time who had experienced such a happening. There was no radio communication with the outside world in those days. It was estimated that the cyclone was some seventy miles in width and went inland as far as Herberton. Babinda and Innisfail seemed to be right in the track of the wind and it was at those two places that the greatest damage was caused.

About midnight on the Saturday night, the wind started and by Sunday morning, was blowing with gale force, paw-paw trees, shrubs and outhouses began to topple over. Heavy rain commenced to fall and about dark it seemed to ease somewhat, but that was only because the centre of the disturbance approached. By 8 p.m. the wind intensified, the thunder and lightning were terrific, and the buildings began to blow away and by 11 p.m. the severity had passed. Those people who had their houses blown away sought shelter wherever possible. One young woman sought shelter in a drain pipe which was flooded, another young woman sought shelter under the suction gas plant at Grogan Bros., Butcher Shop, another family sought shelter in the sanitary cart after the wheels were tied to a post.

On the main road - now known as Bruce Highway - those who lost their houses sheltered in the railway carriages standing at the railway platform. A sudden gust of wind acted as a huge "Egg Slice" and turned the carriages on their side. It is marvellous to think that through it all, no casualties occurred in Babinda except one woman who was struck by a piece of timber but not badly hurt. The top storey of the second class of the Babinda Hotel was very badly smashed and water poured into the hotel. Quite a number of people reached the hotel about midnight.

At daylight on the Monday morning one could hardly realise that what was quite a nice town was just a mass of wrecked buildings, tangled wires etc. Word was got to Cairns and a railway gang cleared the railway of trees etc., and the police and railway gangs came out by trolley with some bags of bread which were distributed to those requiring relief Mrs Whittaker (Boarding House) and the hotel and others who fared better than most did a mighty job to keep the unfortunates.

On the Monday morning, the then Mill manager, Mr Cran, and police commandeered all foodstuffs from the stores and had it removed to the State School where it was available by rationing. It is not known how far the barometer fell as most were destroyed but reports say that last reading at Innisfail was 29 inches.

Mr Sampson from Cooktown spent the previous week arranging his Chemist Shop to open on Monday morning but by Monday there was no shop left. It was where Mellicks shop stands today. He rose to the occasion by collecting what stock he could and moved round the town offering assistance to anyone requiring it. The ambulance building was a two storey one but the top section was completely blown away.

Quite an amount of damage was caused at the Mill and for the first few days, a number of folk lived in the sugar room. Cane crops suffered much damage. There was no doctor or hospital in Babinda in those days. A heavy beam from the roof of the Roman Catholic Church was driven through the roof of the dwelling house of one of the Grogans where Mr & Mrs W.O. Brische now live and narrowly missed those sheltering there. At South Johnstone, a woman was killed by a sheet of flying iron.