Mr Billy Wasaga wrote the following history of Horn Island State School in 2003 to mark the school’s 10th anniversary.

After 1970, there were six families of traditional owners living on Ngurupai. The Luta, Bana, Rattler, Eseli, Nawie and Wasaga families. I was the local policeman at the time and looked after the community.

There was a school on the island run by the Church of England. It was called St. Bartholomews and was attended by children of the local families. The school was not only a place for education but served as a place for prayer and public meetings. Later on the children traveled on the Mary Elton ferry to attend school on Thursday Island. It wasn’t easy. Strong winds and rough seas during the monsoon season made the trips frightening.

In the early 70’s I met Ted Tottman, a groundsman at the airport. He did some artwork at Wasaga Hall as part of a community project and was an active member of the Ngurupai community at that time. Ted and other community spirited people even lobbied for many years for the push to have a school. After our friendship was established we discussed a few things, namely the building of a school.

We walked through the bush to a place I had in mind, where a small hill stood. The rocks which made up the hill were carted away. In fact these same rocks provided the structure for the mining wharf. I eventually pegged out the boundary for the school grounds including a place for the children to play. The school would soon become a reality and one that I would be very proud of.

Clearing and construction took place in 1992 and was completed in 1993. Originally, my wish was to name the school Ngurupai State School, but instead it was called Horn Island State School. It is now 2003, 10 years since our school was built, and an even longer time for Ngurupai people who went to school both here and over at Thursday Island for many years. We have a school we can proudly call our own.

Congratulations Horn Island State School on reaching the 10 year milestone.

Mr Billy Wasaga, Chief Tribal Elder, Kaurareg Nation