

UNEXPURGATED HISTORY OF MAYFIELD EAST PUBLIC SCHOOL

In 1983, the writer searched the records of the N.S.W. State Archives for information concerning this school so that a book could be prepared to commemorate the 125th Anniversary. For various reasons, all the material collected was not published, and is collected here for the convenience of those who come after. The files consulted are:-

National Board of Education 1/399 to 1/429

Schools files 5/18019

5/16798 A and B and C

5/16799 A and B and C

5/16800 A,B and C

In addition, various local publications were consulted, and notes written by old identities taken account of, although many facts in these could not be confirmed.

Some of these publications are:-

Newcastle & Hunter Historical Society - "Waratah and the Original Grants" by T.A. Braye (1936)

Journal of Royal Australian Historical Society - "The Development of State Aided Education in Newcastle 1858-1880" by Dr. E.J. Braggett (1968)

Souvenir Booklet of Mayfield's Jubilee Celebrations

Extracts from the Newcastle Chronicle

Extracts from Newcastle Herald

Recollections (handwritten) by W.J. Goold

Memoirs (handwritten in 1936) by J.F. Crebert

The area in which this school now stands was known locally for many years as "The Folly". There are several versions of how this name came about. The first, and probably most accepted refer~~s~~ to the original settler of the district, John Laurie Platt, who received a grant of 2000 acres on the Hunter River in 1823. His homestead "Ironbark" was erected on a 40 acre clearing which was planted with wheat. On a hill overlooking the waterfront he erected a mill with 'Dutch Arms' to grind his wheat, but the whole venture proved unsuccessful due to unsuitable soil and climate. Platt's home was burned down, and his two young sons with it. Old settlers for years referred to his misfortune as Platt's Folly and for years the land from his Mill Paddock to Port Waratah was called by that name.

The second version concerns Charles Simpson, who bought in 1848 36 acres of The Folly land and built "Waratah House", so named, it is said because the waratahs that grew around were the most northerly specimens of that flower. Mr. Simpson was a customs officer in Newcastle, and had himself rowed up the river to his house by his assigned convicts. His agricultural ambitions were also thwarted by climatic factors, and some say it is to his "folly" that the old name refers.

His "Waratah House" was sold to a Mr. Tourle, a well-to-do grazier from the New England district. Old stories have it that Miss Tourle conducted the first school at The Folly in a slab hut at the end of Crebert's vineyard. This cannot be confirmed. Various dates are given for the purchase of Waratah House by the Tourle's - one in 1854, which makes her involvement possible, but another in 1860, which would rule out the possibility. However, it is conceivable that a well-educated maiden lady of that era would interest herself in the education of the local children.

Crebert's vineyard however, can be authenticated. During 1847 a Mr. Kitchner assisted German vine-dressers to migrate from Germany to set up an industry. Peter Crebert was one of these. He bought land in The Folly and by 1859 made the first Newcastle wine. Mayfield in those days was a district of orchards, vineyards and dairy farms. Crebert developed his farm with attractive gardens and walks, and Newcastle people drove out at weekends to visit his "Folly Park" and to buy fruit and wine.

Waratah House was later to give its name to a coal mining company. It was not until after the Great Northern Railway was opened in 1857, with its station called Waratah, that the district became generally known by that name. Locally the old name of the Folly persisted and for many years was applied unofficially to this school.

#### THE FIRST SCHOOL

This information is authenticated in the archives. The first definitely known teacher was Maria Christie, a 20 year old lass born in Scotland, whose family had settled in Newcastle and who were<sup>a</sup> well known musical family connected with the Presbyterian Church. The building was of rough bush slab with a shingled roof and slab floor. The main room was 8m x 4m, and a glazed window and could accommodate 50 pupils. The Rev. Chaucer held church there every second Sunday. There were two other small rooms for the teacher to live in. The classroom was equipped with plenty of forms, but the only desk was aboard set up against a wall. There were "few books and no maps". From information on the original submissions giving particulars of the school, it seems that it was held freehold for the <sup>Presbyterian</sup> Synod of N.S.W., the Rev. Chaucer and John Robertson being Trustees.

Enquiries with the Presbyterian Church have failed to locate such a piece of land owned by them. One local authority (Mr. J. Wall) asserts that it faced the river near where the present road bridge crosses to Kooragang Island.

#### WARATAH BECOMES A NATIONAL SCHOOL

An increasing population after 1851 meant a need for educational facilities. In 1848 the Board of National Education had been established, together with a Denominational Board representing religious interests, to bring education under government control. On 5th May, 1858, an application was made to have the existing school at Waratah brought under the direction of the National Board as a non-vested school. This was a school of 30 or more children started by the local people in an acceptable building. The Board paid the teacher's salary, although it was supplemented by fees, and school books were supplied. The application for Waratah was made by Rev. Wm. Chaucer, Thomas Gray, John Robertson and Peter Crebert, who became the local Patrons. Records state that the school had been "a short time in operation".

The Rev. Chaucer appears to have been a poorly educated cleric attached to the Hamilton Presbyterian Church and the Borehold Chapel, where he was extremely unpopular. Churchgoers were travelling right into Newcastle rather than attend his services.

As a result of the application an inspection was made of both the school buildings and Miss Christie. The rooms for the Teacher's residence were found to be "unfit for occupation until plastered and ceiled". Fortunately Miss Christie preferred to board with a local family. There was an enrolment of 34 pupils, although 26 was the most that attended on any one day. The Inspector reported that the people were poor, but that such a school was badly needed and suggested that if the fees were reduced from one shilling to sixpence per week, as many as 50 children might attend.

Many of the teachers of the day were untrained and inexperienced. In the Inspector's report he says:-

"The attainments of Miss Christie, the proposed teacher, are of such an elementary nature I fear that without training at the Model School in Sydney, she would be incapable of conducting the proposed school with any degree of efficiency. I examined her orally in a simple way upon reading, writing, grammar, geography and arithmetic. She reads and writes fairly, but has very little knowledge of grammar, being unable to name the parts of speech in a plain sentence. She is not much acquainted with geography being unable to name the great divisions of land and water on the earth surface. She can work sums in the Simple and Compound Rules of Arithmetic but deficient in notation and numeration being unable to write from dictation the number 5,684,540.

It was proposed that she attend the Model Training School in Sydney for one month.

The Patrons were required to provide the desks, blackboard, book press and maps. When these conditions were met, it was recommended that the application be accepted, "There being no other school nearer than Newcastle, a distance of four miles."

In June, 1858, Miss Christie went to the Model School. Her report

reads	Reading	Fair
	Writing	Tolerable
	Grammar	Indifferent
	Arithmetic	Fair
	Art of Teaching	Indifferent
	Needlework	Good
	Skill in teaching	Tolerable

General remarks say "Miss Christie is good tempered, patient and her manner is gentle and pleasing, but she is deficient in energy and activity. She was recommended as a Class III teacher "owing to a natural slowness of mind she has not derived all the benefits which could have been desired."

Miss Christie was the innocent and unwitting target in a local feud between sections of the community. Her unhappiness resulted in her application to transfer to Newcastle, but it was refused.

Various parents, Mr. George Grey, Builder, among them, held a meeting in May 1859 to complain about how the school was run. ~~REXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "He had gone to the expense of helping to put up place for teacher to live in - he had four children and kept them home - other parents also - disgruntled that patrons will do nothing - they never go near the school to see if the teacher is there or not"

On the other hand, the Patrons staunchly defended Miss Christie, referring to the jealousies of one or two individuals "who when they found they could not rule both Patrons and System, did what they could to injure the establishment and insult the Patrons."

In January 1860, Rev. Chaucer was writing about the "result of investigations of complaints made against Miss Christie by those who have all along shown opposition to the system. Their fond anticipations of Mr. Cooper's Bill being disappointed, they complain, while Gray, having no child at school had at all events shown himself a master of fabrication."

However he was forced to admit that "a change of teacher might secure a larger attendance as Miss Christie, having to fight the battle with them, had become the butt of their spleen, and the Patrons, especially himself, come in for abuse for maintaining her rights."

Miss Christie was obviously in a most ~~un~~enviable position. By April 1960 the Patrons were recommending that someone else be appointed in her place and that Miss Christie be appointed to another locality "to allay the local ferment" for a time. In the event, Miss Christie applied for higher training at the Fort Street Model School so that she could assist her brother when the Newcastle Glebe School opened.

However, the Patrons and certain locals asked that she be retained for a time as the "closing of the school would be a great calamity to the neighbourhood". They also wrote a letter of support for her.

### EARLY TEACHERS

The National Board of Education Report for 1859 reports an enrolment of 47, with an average attendance of 26. According to the Patrons the attendance was affected by "the nature of the locality, rainy days and the prevalence of epidemics." Enteric and dengue fevers were common.

On the day of the inspection (22nd August, 1859), there were 14 Boys, 17 Girls - a total of 31.

The report says

1. The building is in good repair. The furniture is sufficient in quantity, but rude and ill arranged. The apparatus is scanty. The registers were in an unsatisfactory state and the classification defective.
2. The children are tolerably regular, but not punctual. They are cleanly and well dressed, but the order is indifferent.
3. The instruction is characterized by industry and moderate skill.
4. The proficiency attained is only tolerable; and the pupils are deficient in attention and in mental effort.

### EARLY TEACHERS

In June 1860 Miss Mary Kent was appointed. In the 1860 report "Under the present teacher the moral tone has greatly improved - a decided improvement is perceptible in this school." She left at the end of 1861 to "keep a previous commitment that she had long put off" - probably to marry.

Miss Kent was replaced by Mr. A. Magnay, who suffered a fatal illness in November, 1862. Letters state that he was sinking fast and not expected to survive. Mrs. Magnay was in great distress, and a letter asks as a matter of urgency that she be appointed teacher "as she is competent and well liked by the children." She was also expecting to be confined with her third child. Times were hard for women, and I suppose that part of the thinking in appointing her would be to provide the family with a home in the school residence. He appears to have held the position until at least the end of 1866.

WARATAH PUBLIC SCHOOL

By 1872 the old school building was in such disrepair and so small that public meetings were held to protest. An extract from the Newcastle Chronicle of Saturday, March 30th, 1872 reports one of these meetings where the following comment was made:

"For be it remembered non-vested schools, in the eyes of the Board, are apparently an abomination. Therefore not classed so highly as public ones, nor receiving so much support and encouragement. The inhabitants have decided to erect new premises on a new site, and with the sanction of the Board, to form a public school instead of a non-vested one

By February, 1873, the Chronicle reported that "The School, so long now in existence at that place, (North Waratah) is now entirely closed until more suitable accommodation is provided and nearly 100 children are left to run about". Public meetings set about raising funds for a new building. By 1874 an application had been lodged for the establishment of a Public School at Waratah. The School Committee at the time comprised Messrs. Richard Bell, A. McNulty, Peter Norgard, Peter Crebert, Robert Ingall and J. Williams (Secretary). The J. Williams is believed to be Joseph Williams, an early pupil of the school, ~~whom the Board~~ a wine merchant and notable jockey, who became a prominent citizen, was and Alderman of Waratah Council for many years, and who was Mayor of Waratah in 1892.

THE NEW BUILDING 1874

In 1873 the Council obtained a site of .8 hectares for school use. This was part of a larger area of approximately 45 hectares, believed to have been Crebert's original Folly Park, set aside for Botanical Gardens. The Gardens area extended from Ingall, Creber and Bull Streets to the Port Waratah Railway Station. A new brick school and attached brick residence was built in 1874 by Mr. John Ash at a cost of \$1,458, about \$300 of which was raised by local subscription. The Newcastle Chronicle reported:

"The ceremony of laying the Foundation Stone took place on 24th July, in the presence of the leading residents of the district and others numbering in all about 600. The Lambton brass band was in attendance, and diffused some excellent and inspiring music throughout the day. The ground was gaily decorated with flags and the numbers of ladies present on foot and on horseback rendered the scene very picturesque and enlivening."

The first choice of person to unveil the foundation stone was Miss Tourle, but in the event it was laid by J. Hannell, who remarked that "It was surprising to him, when he looked round and saw the site chosen for the school, to think that, a few years ago, it was an almost impenetrable scrub." This foundation stone cannot be located. When the new school opened in 1875, the Headmaster was James Kilgour. There were 137 pupils on the roll, one of whom was Kilgour's own son Bob, who later was Mayor of the City of Newcastle for seven terms.

Mr. Wm. Broom was appointed in 1877 at a salary of \$216.00p.a., transferring from Wallsend. He applied for a young person to be ~~train~~ trained as a teacher, Known as a pupil teacher, these were only 14 or 15 years of age, and it was the task of the Principal to train them. The first pupil teacher appointed was Broom's brother Joseph Broom, and a second pupil teacher was appointed in 1878. For many years the staff comprised a head-teacher and two pupil teachers.

During Brooms tenure, letters were sent asking for a bigger classroom, as the small room opening off the schoolroom, ~~was~~ used for scripture and sewing was not big enough. The application was refused.

In November, 1878, Mr. J. Gillespie was appointed. He made many requests for repairs and extensions to the school residence. The building was, even at this stage, plagued by white ants, and constant treatment was necessary. The rooms

of the residence were Parlor 12' x 12'  
 Front B.R. 12' x 13'  
 Skillion rooms at back 12' x 8'  
 13' x 8'

By 1884 Mr. Gillespie had a family of ten and was desperate for more room. In this year, in May, a Mrs. Campbell was appointed as sewing teacher, suggesting that Mrs. Gillespie had died. By November 1884, Mr. Gillespie had remarried - a young girl from Newcastle whose family did not seem too keen on the marriage. However, as soon as she was installed as Mrs. Gillespie, Mrs. Campbell was dismissed and the new Mrs. Gillespie took over her duties.

During Mr. Gillespie's tenure, there were many pupil teachers at the school (two at a time), who nearly all failed their exams. Mr. Gillespie, asked to explain always wrote at length that he couldn't understand how it could have happened. It seemed ~~at~~ that after his remarriage the heart went out of Mr. Gillespie. Perhaps it was having to manage in such cramped accommodation. Perhaps it was the death of one of his children in December 1888 after scarlet fever.

At all events his inspection report for 1889 was poor. The desks were ink stained, the ventilation was unsatisfactory. The pupil teachers were being loaded with most of the pupils and were not receiving due attention and training - an explanation for all the failures. Mr. Gillespie was given a warning - improve or be sent to a "less important school".

In May, 1889 the unfortunate man was stricken with enteric fever. Problems with staff in 1890 did not help matters. A pupil teacher admitted improper behaviour with a pupil from fourth class down in the quarry at the back of the school. The teacher was instantly dismissed. Meanwhile extensions had at last been planned for the school - a brick classroom to accommodate 60 pupils was being built by Burg Bros at a cost of \$628.00.

Mr. Gillespie had not had an easy time. Although 1886 saw the establishment of the largest soapfactory in the southern hemisphere in Mayfield, giving employment to many families, there were still arrears in school fees. Also in 1887 the Newcastle Council formed the habit of dumping their nightsoil in the Botanic Reserve not 280 yards from the school, posing a tremendous health risk. Many letters on file complain of the smell, and also of the singing and joking of the men as they went about their work in the early hours, disturbing the neighbourhood. Eventually an unjunction was taken out to prevent the practice.

One can't help feeling sorry for Gillespie. The next year, 1891 saw another unsatisfactory report, and, true to his word, the Inspector transferred him to a "less important school" - Jerry's Plains!

On 18th January, 1892 a new teacher was in charge, Donald Robertson, who came from Muswellbrook. He started with an advantage, as the new schoolroom was ready for use in February of that year. This new room is still standing, and forms half of the present Assembly Hall (stage end). Originally it had galleries running N-S.. Mr. Robertson also found the residence unsatisfactory. He complained that it was always damp, badly affected by white ants, and that the front entry was always wet as it was shaded by the school room. By May 1893 Robertson was applying for an Assistant Teacher. In that year also (June) he applied for a wash house and bathroom for the residence. It was a separate building at the back of the house in line with the separate kitchen.

The area (and residence) must have been rather unhealthy. Robertson had complained that his family were always ill, and by 1899 he was himself ill. However, he stayed on until the end of 1917 - 25 years - the longest time for any head of the school. At some stage between 1902 and 1907 another classroom was added (other half of Assembly Hall) and it is believed that at the same time another two small rooms were added to the residence. These two rooms have now been made into one to form the "island" room used for multicultural purposes.

By 1907 space was needed for the Infants classes, and a further room was added. Originally designed to accommodate 98 pupils, it is now used as the Library.

At the beginning of the 1918 school year Mr. F. Wigg was in charge. At that time there were 520 pupils. The Broken Hill Proprietary Co. had started operations in Mayfield in 1912 and this meant an increase in pupils. The old building and amenities were not adequate. The school was built on a sandstone ridge which made drainage difficult and this constituted a problem right up to fairly recent times when new toilets were built. In 1918 there were insufficient toilets for both pupils and staff. Classroom accommodation was also a problem with increasing numbers and plans were drawn up for a new building.