

One of the early settlers of the Mayfield area was Peter Crebert, after whom Crebert Street is named. He purchased land in 1853 in an area known locally as the "Folly". There are a number of versions of how this name originated, but the most accepted one appears to refer to the 'folly' of the original settler, John Platt, in trying to grow wheat in the area.<sup>1</sup> Crebert planted vines from which the first Newcastle wine was made, and created gardens known as "Folly Park" which were a weekend attraction.<sup>2</sup> The surroundings were given over to orchards, vineyards and dairy farms.<sup>3</sup> The district only became known as Waratah after the Great Northern Railway was opened in 1857, when the station was named after Waratah House, the only substantial building in the area.<sup>4</sup> It appears, however, that the old name of the Folly persisted locally and for many years was applied to this school, although never officially.

An increasing population after 1851 meant a need for educational facilities.<sup>5</sup> In 1848 the Board of National Education had been established, together with a Denominational Board representing religious interests, to bring education under government control.

#### APPLICATION TO BOARD OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

On 5th May, 1858 an application was made to have an existing school at Waratah brought under the direction of the National Board as a non-vested school, that is a school which in origin or ownership was other than National. The aid to such schools was limited to salary and books, and the Commissioners had to be satisfied that the case was deserving and that the school would be run efficiently, in an acceptable building, with an average daily attendance of at least thirty children.

The application was made by Rev. William Chaucer, Thomas Gray, John Robertson and Peter Crebert, who became the local Patrons. The existing school was conducted by a 20 year old Scottish lass, Miss Maria Christie, the first documented teacher. Departmental records state that the school had been "a short time in operation" and Miss Christie's salary was backdated to 1st July, 1858. It is from this date that the school is recognised as a government school.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the application an inspection was made of both the school buildings and Miss Christie. The school is thought to have been facing the river,<sup>7</sup> near where the road bridge crosses Platt's Channel to Kooragang Island, according to one local authority in 1981.<sup>8</sup> Made of rough bush slab with shingled roof and slab floor, the main room, 26' x 13' had a glazed window and was "sufficient to accommodate 50 pupils." The Rev. Chaucer held

church there every second Sunday. The other two rooms, 13' x 12' and 13' x 10', proposed as the teacher's residence, were found to be "unfit for occupation until plastered and ceiled". Fortunately Miss Christie preferred to board. At the time 34 pupils were enrolled, 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 teachers of the day were untrained and inexperienced. Miss Christie was examined and it was found that she could read and write fairly well, her needlework was good, but her knowledge of grammar and geography was poor. It was proposed that she attend the Model School at Fort Street, Sydney for one month of training.<sup>9</sup> The Rev. Chaucer was to provide the desks, blackboard, book press and maps required.<sup>10</sup> These conditions being met, it was recommended that the application be accepted, there being no other school nearer than Newcastle, a distance of 4 miles.

In the Board of National Education Report of 1859 on Waratah, the school had 47 pupils, with an average attendance of 26.<sup>11</sup> One of the first pupils was Joseph Williams, who became Mayor of Newcastle in 1892.<sup>12</sup> According to the Patrons the attendance was affected by "the nature of the locality, rainy days, and the prevalence of epidemics".<sup>13</sup> Enteric and dengue fevers, among others, were common. In 1860 Miss Christie left to help her brother when he opened the school at the Newcastle Glebe.<sup>14</sup>

She was replaced in June 1860 by Miss M. Kent, who made "decided improvements" and lifted the "moral tone".<sup>15</sup> She left at the end of 1861 to "keep a previous commitment that she had long put off" because she was so happy at Waratah.<sup>16</sup> Miss Kent was replaced by Mr. A. Magnay in 1862. Unfortunately Mr. Magnay suffered a very serious illness in November, 1862, was sinking fast and not expected to recover. A letter of November 3rd, 1862 asks as a matter of urgency that Mrs. Magnay be appointed to carry on for a time "as she is competent and much liked by the children." She was also expecting to be confined shortly with her third child.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless she seems to have occupied the position until at least the end of 1866.

In that year the Public Schools Act saw the replacement of the old local Boards by the Council of Education, which rented the existing school premises for some years.

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, not 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 is reporting that "The School, so long now in existence at that place, (North Waratah) is now entirely closed, as the Council of Education refused to appoint or assist in any way to pay a schoolmaster until more suitable accommodation is provided, and nearly 100 children are left to run about."<sup>18</sup>. 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 John Williams (Secretary).<sup>19</sup>.

THE NEW BUILDING 1874.

In 1873 the Council obtained a site of 2 acres for school use.<sup>20</sup>. This was part of a larger area of 98 acres, believed to have been Crebert's original Folly Park, set aside for Botanical Gardens. The area extended from Ingall, Crebert and Bull Streets to the Port Waratah Railway Station. A new brick school and attached residence was built in 1874 by Mr. John Ash at a cost of £729. 0. 0., about £150. 0.0. of which was raised by local subscriptions.<sup>21</sup>.

The Foundation Stone was laid by Mr. 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, and at that time was called Neill Smith's Folly."<sup>22</sup>. This foundation stone cannot be located.

When the new school opened with great celebrations in January 1875, the Headmaster was James Kilgour. There were 137 pupils on the roll and the average attendance for that year was 81.2.<sup>23</sup>. One of the pupils was Kilgour's son, Bob, who later was Mayor of the City of Newcastle for seven terms.<sup>24</sup>.

Mr. Wm. Broom was appointed in 1877 at a salary of £108 p.a., transferring from Wallsend.<sup>25</sup>. The first pupil teacher appointed was his brother Joseph Broom.<sup>26</sup>. A second pupil teacher was

appointed in 1878,<sup>27</sup> and for many years the staff was made up of a headteacher and two pupil teachers.

In November, 1878, Mr. J. Gillespie was appointed teacher.<sup>28</sup> His time at the school was punctuated by requests for repairs, a succession of pupil teachers, most of whom failed their exams and by requests to repair and enlarge the teacher's residence. This consisted of a parlor 12' x 12', a front bedroom 12' x 13' and two skillion rooms 12' x 8' and 13' x 8', and Mr. Gillespie complained in 1884 that it was too small for his family of ten. The Department felt the fault lay not in the smallness of the residence, but in the "unusually large size" of Mr. Gillespie's family, and very little was done beyond a few repairs.

#### PUBLIC INSTRUCTION ACT 1880

In 1880 the Public Instruction Act set up a Department of Public Instruction under a Minister. Under the Act, State assistance was withdrawn from Denomination Schools, School Boards were abolished and education became compulsory. School buildings were maintained and teachers' salaries paid by the Department. Parents' fees now went direct to the Department, and explanation had to be made to them if fees were in arrears. Many letters appear in the files pleading inability to pay due to unemployment, irregular employment and sickness.<sup>29</sup>

In both 1881 and 1884 the school was used for concerts, the proceeds of which went to the new Waratah School of Arts.<sup>30</sup> In October, 1884 the sum of £40.0.0 was approved to remove 45 tree stumps from the playground and level the area. Trees were to be sent free of charge to be planted for beautification. In 1886 also, a very large soap factory was opened in the area which provided additional employment.

At this time there was a great deal of confusion regarding the name of the school. The Hanbury School was also being designated 'Waratah' and this confusion was to continue to 1912, when the names were eventually changed.

In 1891 a new brick classroom was added to the existing structure to accommodate 60 pupils. Built by Burg Bros., it cost £314.0.0.<sup>31</sup> It was ready for use at the beginning of 1892, when Donald Robertson took charge of the school. He also complained because the dampness of the residence was causing sickness in his family. The front entry was always wet as it was shaded by the schoolroom. The building was also infested with white ants.<sup>32</sup>

ADDITION OF INFANTS' ROOM

By June, 1906 the school consisted of the old schoolroom to which the teacher's residence was attached, and two modern classrooms added as the school grew. In 1907 the enrolment was 245 pupils, and a report recommended that the question of adding to the building should be at once taken into consideration. The Infants' room was added, designed to accommodate 98 children. This is the room now used as the library.<sup>33</sup>

A NEW RESIDENCE

By 1909 the state of the residence was such that after a shower of rain one bedroom was saturated and the house was so damp that everything was covered with mildew. The present house was built by Southon Bros. at a cost of £779.0.0, the lowest tender. In the meantime it was suggested that Mr. Robertson rent a house at the scheduled rate "in view of the present drain on available funds".<sup>34</sup> The old residence was condemned in 1914<sup>35</sup> by Public Works, but was still standing and having to be used as classrooms as late as 1922.<sup>36</sup>

CHANGE OF NAME

In 1912 the confusion over two schools with the same name was finally resolved. In March of that year the names of Hanbury and Waratah Public Schools were changed to Waratah and Mayfield respectively.<sup>37</sup>

NEED FOR A NEW SCHOOL BUILDING

When the Broken Hill Proprietary Company commenced their works at Mayfield in 1912, it meant an enormous increase in the local population. Enrolments at the nearby Mayfield School rose by 75% causing tremendous problems of overcrowding in the classrooms.<sup>38</sup> So bad was the situation that one class of 40 had to use the weathershed continuously as a classroom.<sup>39</sup> In 1915 the Department completed the purchase of 1½ acres of additional land from B.H.P., who acted very generously in the matter by accepting the nominal sum of £60.0.0.<sup>40</sup> By 1917 plans were prepared for a new building. Tenders were called for and that of Mr. George Grace of Newcastle, for £5,939.0.0 was accepted.<sup>41</sup> The new building was opened in August, 1920, with accommodation for 480 pupils and an enrolment of 739 children. There were two departments, Primary occupying the new building and Infants in the old building. The Headmaster was Mr. T. Pincombe, with seven assistants, and the Infants' Mistress was Miss R. Ling with five assistants.<sup>42</sup>

THE 1920's

Even before the new building opened there had been a further unexpected influx of pupils because of Lysaght's

operations. They brought families out from England to work for them and this resulted in an immediate estimated extra 90 children. In 1921 the school was again crowded to capacity and beyond. No class was below 50 pupils, and one was 76! This last class was in a temporary room and pupils were crowded 8 or 9 to a desk.<sup>43</sup> So bad was the situation that an appeal was made to the Minister for Education who inspected the school and reported that it was the worst case he had seen in two years.<sup>44</sup>

In 1921 the first electric lighting was installed in the Infants' room used by the P. & C., who had to bear the cost of the installation.<sup>44</sup>

In 1922 an application was made by the P. & C. Association to have the school made a Superior Public School, as there was a class of 40 ready to proceed to Grade 7. This would have meant that pupils could receive higher education without travelling to another school. The application was refused on the grounds that the needs of the district were already well met by existing schools.<sup>45</sup>

In October, 1922 application was made for the school to be made into separate departments for boys and girls, and at the commencement of the 1923 school year the school opened with 357 Infants, 294 boys and 300 girls. The Boys' Department was downstairs and the Girls' Department upstairs.<sup>46</sup>

#### ANOTHER CHANGE OF NAME

In an effort to relieve accommodation pressures, the Department opened a new school at Mayfield West. Following this, on 9th August, 1923, the name of this school was changed to the present one of Mayfield East.<sup>47</sup> The Post Town for the school for very many years was Tirrikiba. During the '20's the story of the school is one of continuous repairs to the old building and upgrading of facilities such as weathersheds and drinking fountains. There was always a problem of drainage because of the ridge of sandstone on which the school is built.

In 1929 the verandah of the residence was totally enclosed as it is today.

#### THE NEW INFANTS' BUILDING

The real story of the 20's however, lies in the plight of the Infants' Department, housed in the old building, and in the ever increasing number of pupils. During 1929 five portable rooms were erected as additional accommodation, and the old building badly needed extensive repairs and renovations.<sup>48</sup> The P. & C. had been agitating since 1927, but talk of a new Infants' building had stayed their hand. When in 1931 another of their applications was refused "due to lack of funds", they wrote that the porch "has the appearance of a disused shed, where occasionally

a swagman may camp". They pointed out that even if a separate Infants' Department was eventually built, the old building was needed for primary classes.<sup>49</sup> By 1936 only children who had already turned 6 years could be enrolled, and there were 43 on a waiting list.<sup>50</sup>

Meantime the Department was trying to meet the need, and had selected a site for the Infants' Department on the corners of Havelock, Crebert and Fawcett Streets.<sup>51</sup> Much time was lost when this purchase could not go ahead, and it was not until July 1935 that the site of the present Infants' Department was purchased from Mrs. Woodcock for £2500.0.0.<sup>52</sup> On the site stood the family home of a well known timber merchant. According to the Public Works report, the timber in the house was "out of date and not now milled, although it is similar to that used in school buildings 30 to 40 years ago".<sup>53</sup> Accordingly when the house was demolished the timber went into stock to match existing work in repairs and renovations.

The contract for the new building was let to Mr. W. Stronach at a cost of £8,450.0.0. The two storied brick building of seven ordinary classrooms and a kindergarten room, filled a very real need. It was opened on 26th June, 1937.<sup>54</sup> The opening also relieved pressure on primary accommodation, enabled the removal of most of the portable rooms and left the school architecturally very much as it is today.

#### RECENT HISTORY

By 1966 the school was used in an experimental programme for ungraded classes, an approach that was modified in later years and is not now used. A growing number of migrant families were settling in the area and by 1979 this trend was reflected in the school population. In 1974 a submission for funds through the Disadvantaged Schools Programme gained approval. This meant an enormous injection of much needed money which enabled the school to be improved. The employment of additional staff provided for special programmes of English as a Second Language (ESL), Remedial Reading and After School Care. Classroom equipment, including audio-visual aids, were purchased. Buildings were altered, renovated and carpeted. The playground was developed to include facilities for tennis, cricket, small games and a Personal Achievement Track. The school is still being allocated funds under this scheme.

With declining numbers of pupils and adequate equipment, many of the problems of past years no longer apply. The school's greatest asset over the years has been the dedication of many of the teachers and this is evidenced in the respect which the school commands in the community. Mayfield East has always had a "good name". Words written 125 years ago are still applicable.

"We..... most respectfully record our approval of the mode in which our children are taught by Miss Christie: as also our satisfaction with the progress which our children are making in Education." 56.

1. From a Radio broadcast series 'Salute to Mayfield'  
October, 1980. Station
2. Druhan E., Newcastle Morning Herald, 5th Oct., 1974.  
"Mayfield Park was lost to industry".
3. Mayfield's 1900-1950 Jubilee Celebrations P.4. *by Sub-Committee.*
4. Ibid. P.4.
5. E.T. Braggett. "The Development of State Aided Education  
in Newcastle 1858-1880 in Journal of Royal  
Australian Historical Society". Sept. 1968.
6. Report of the Board of National Education for 1858. p.19.
7. Extract Newcastle Morning Herald, 3rd August, 1892.
8. Mr. Jim Wall, Mayfield.
9. Report of Inspector to Board of National Ed. 27th May, 1858.  
N.S.W. State Archies 1/400, p.477-478.
10. Letter from Inspector to Chaucer, 1/400, p. 483.
11. Report of Board of National Ed. 1/417.
12. Extract. Newcastle Morning Herald 3/8/1892.
13. Local Patrons report on non-vested school at Waratah 1/404.
14. Application from Miss Christie 1/407, p. 314.
15. Report of Inspector 1860, 1/417.
16. Letter from Mary Kent, 11/1/1862, 4/416, p.34.
17. Letter from Patrons 3/11/1862, 1/419, p.260.
18. Ibid. 18/2/1873. p.3.
19. From Speech by Minister for Education at School opening  
25/6/1937.
20. Approval of appropriation of Crown land for School use.  
1/5/1876, 5/18019.
21. Letter from Department, 26/8/1920.
22. Newcastle Chronicle, 15/7/1874. p. 4.
23. Letter from Department 26/8/1920.
24. Mayfield's 1900-1950 Jubilee Celebration.
25. Appointment notice 8/1/1877, 5/18019
26. Application for appointment of pupil teacher 6/3/1877, 5/18019
27. Confirmation of appointment of pupil teacher 28/1/1878, 5/18019
28. Application for appointment, 21/11/1878, 5/18019
29. Letters from parents to Department, 1883, 5/18019.
30. Applications of 31/10/1881 and 19/11/1884, 5/18019
31. Tender, 17/1/1891, 5/18019.
32. Contract, 17/6/1892, 5/18019B.
33. Letter to Chief Inspector, 16/6/1906, 5/18019B.
34. State archies 5/18019B.
35. Report from Department Public Works, 14/8/1914, 5/16798B.
36. Report of Inspection by Minister of Education, Hon. T.D. Mutch  
4/3/1922, 5/16798B.
37. Letter from Department to N.Duncan, 19/4/1982.
38. Letter from P. & C. to Minister of Education, 5/16798B.
39. Plan of classrooms, 5/16798A.
40. Ibid.
41. Letter from Department 26/8/1920.
42. Ibid.
43. Letter from Minister of Education, 6/3/1922. 5/16798C.

44. Staffing report, 1921, 5/16798B.
45. Application for electric lighting in classroom. 30/7/21.  
5/16798C.
46. Application by P. & C. for Superior Public School, Jan. 1922.  
Reply from Department of Education 14/3/1922. 5/16798C.
47. Application, 7/10/1922. 5/16798C.
48. Notification of name change, 9/8/1923. 5/16798C.
49. Plan showing placement of portables, 1929, 5/16799B.
50. Letter from P. & C. 4/3/1931, 5/16799B.
51. Application for additional teacher Sept., 1936. 5/16800C.
52. Letter to Department of Education 26/6/1934, 5/16800C.
53. Contract 31/5/1934, 5/16800C.
54. Report by Public Works, 5/16800C.
55. Speech by Minister at school opening 18/6/1937.
56. Petition from Parents, 23/3/1860, 1/407, p. 249.