

## A SHORT HISTORY OF MAYFIELD EAST PUBLIC SCHOOL

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### EARLY SETTLEMENT

One of the earliest 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. Crebert, an experienced vine dresser from Germany, had more success when he planted vines from which the first Newcastle wine was made. 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 <sup>to buy</sup> fruit and wine.

The biggest building in the area was Waratah House, built by Charles Simpson in 1848. So named because of the Waratahs growing around, it later gave 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

The first school was conducted by Miss Maria Christie, a 20 year old Scottish lass. The building was of rough bush slab with a shingled roof and slab floor. The main room was 8m. x 4m., had 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 a board set up against a wall. There were "few books and no maps". The school is thought to have faced the river near the present road bridge to Kooragang Island, according to one local authority.

### 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 children or more started by the local people in an acceptable building. The Board

paid the teacher's salary 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".

As a result, 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 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 Training School at Fort Street, 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." Miss Christie's salary was paid from 1st July, 1858 and it is from this date that the school is recognised as a government school.

In a Report of the Board of National Education of 1859 the Waratah School had 47 pupils, 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.

#### EARLY TEACHERS

In 1860 Miss Christie left to help her brother when he opened the school at the Newcastle Glebe. She was replaced in June 1860 by Miss Mary Kent who made "decided improvements" and lifted the "moral tone", she also 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. Mrs. Magnay was appointed to carry on for a time "as she is competent and much liked by the children". 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, 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, 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". 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). This J. Williams is believed to be Joseph Williams, an early pupil of the school, who became a prominent citizen, was an 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 area extended from Ingall, Crebert 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 \$1458.00, about \$300.00 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 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". This foundation stone cannot be located.

When the new school opened in January, 1875, the Headmaster was James Kilgour. There were 137 pupils on the roll, one of whom was Kilgour's 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 \$216.00 p.a. transferring from Wallsend. He applied for a young person to be trained as a teacher, known as a pupil teacher. The first appointed was his 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.

In November 1878, Mr. J. Gillespie was appointed teacher. During his time at the school there was a succession of pupil teachers, most of whom failed their exams, many requests to repair the school and requests to repair and enlarge the residence. This consisted of a parlor 3600m x 3600m., a front bedroom 3600m. x 3900m and two skillion rooms 3600m x 2400m and 3900m. x 2400m, 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.

#### PUBLIC INSTRUCTION ACT 1880

In 1880 the Public Instruction Act set up a Department of Public Instruction under a Minister. Under the Act, School Boards were abolished and education became compulsory. School buildings were maintained and teachers' salaries paid by the Department. Parents' fees went direct to the Department, and explanation had to be made to the Inspector if fees were in arrears. Many letters appear in the files pleading inability to pay due to unemployment, irregular employment and sickness.

In both 1881 and 1884 the school was used for concerts, the proceeds of which went to the new Waratah School of Arts. In 1884 the playground was levelled and 45 tree stumps were removed. Trees were sent free of charge to be planted for beautification. A very large soap factory was opened in the area in 1886 and this provided additional employment.

#### ADDITIONS.

In 1891 a new brick classroom was added to the existing structure to accommodate 60 pupils. Built by Burg Bros., it cost \$628.00 and was ready for use at the beginning of 1892, when Donald Robertson took charge of the school. He complained because the dampness of the residence caused sickness in his family. The front entry was always wet as it was shaded by the schoolroom, and the building was infested with white ants.

In 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 further extensions. The Infants' room was added, designed to accommodate 98 pupils. This is the room now used as the Library.

#### THE FIRST CHANGE OF NAME

From the time the other school in Waratah, the Hanbury School opened in the 1860's, there was constant confusion over the names. Both schools were designated 'Waratah' until 1912. In March of that year, the confusion was resolved by changing the names of Waratah and Hanbury Public Schools to Mayfield and Waratah respectively.

#### THE 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 \$1558.00, 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". The old residence was condemned in 1914 by Public Works, but was still standing and being used as classrooms as late as 1922.

#### 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 Mayfield School rose by 75% causing tremendous problems of overcrowding in the classrooms. So bad was the situation that one class of 40 had to use the weathershed continuously as a classroom. In 1915 the Department completed the purchase of 17 hectares of additional land from B.H.P., for a nominal sum of \$120.00. By 1917 plans were prepared for a new building. Tenders were called, and that of Mr. George Grace of Newcastle, for \$11,878.00 was accepted. The new building was opened in August 1920, with accommodation for 480 pupils. There were two departments, Primary occupying the new building and Infants the old building. The Headmaster was Mr. T. Pincombe, with seven assistants, and the Infants' Mistress was Miss R. Ling with five assistants.

#### 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, together with the general growth of industry in the area, resulted in many more pupils enrolling. The new building accommodated 480 pupils, but the enrolment when it opened was 739. By 1921 the school was again crowded to capacity. No class was below 50 pupils, and one

was 76! This last class was in a temporary room and pupils were seated eight or nine to a large desk. Every available space had to be used, including the old residence, and pupils were crammed into badly ventilated, dark, damp rooms.

An appeal was made to the Minister for Education, who inspected the school and reported that it was the worst case of disrepair he had seen in two years. The school was given top priority for renovations to the old building and these were carried out in 1922.

In 1921 the first electric lighting was installed in the Infants' room, used by the Parents' and Citizens' Association, which had to pay for the cost of installation.

In October, 1922, an application was made for the school to be made into separate departments for boys and girls. At the commencement of the 1923 school year the school opened with 357 pupils in the Infants' Department, 294 boys downstairs in the Boys' Department and 300 girls upstairs in the Girls' Department.

By 1923 the school was being referred to as a Superior Public School, a Primary School with some secondary classes. This was a little premature because, although a request was made to have these extra classes, the application was refused on the grounds that the needs of the district were already well met by existing schools.

During the '20's the story of the school was 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 was built.

#### ANOTHER CHANGE OF NAME

The Department was concerned to relieve accommodation pressures. This, and the situation of the school on the boundary of the area it served which necessitated a long walk for many children, prompted the establishment of 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 to distinguish the two. The Post Town for the school for very many years was Tirrikiba.

#### THE NEW INFANTS' BUILDING

The real problem of the time was the plight of the Infants' Department, housed in the old building with an ever increasing number of pupils. During 1929 five portable rooms were erected as additional accommodation, and the old building required extensive repairs and renovations. The P. & C. Association agitated from 1927 but talk of a new Infants' building had stayed their hand. When in the Great Depression year of 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. By 1936 only children who had already turned six years could be enrolled, and there were 43 on a waiting list.

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. Much time was lost when this purchase could not proceed, and it was not until July 1935 that the site of the present Infants' Department was purchased from Mrs. Woodcock for \$5000.00. 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". 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 \$16,900.00. The two storeyed brick building of seven ordinary classrooms and a kindergarten room, filled a very real need. It was opened on 26th June, 1937. The opening 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 later modified and is no longer used. A growing number of migrant families settled in the area and by 1969 this trend was reflected in the school population. In 1977 a permanent ethnic display centre was opened in the only room of the old residence still standing.

In 1974 a submission for funds through the Disadvantaged Schools Programme gained approval. This meant a strong 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, was 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, 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."

The following sources are acknowledged:

Records of the N.S.W. Department of Education, N.S.W. State Archives  
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