

# CHAPTER X

## Education

### Early Education

Margaret Eldridge

The first reference to a school in Tarooma is in 1839, when Mrs Bird advertised a school for girls at the "Retreat", formerly a tea garden. She charged thirty five guineas per annum, with music, dancing and drawing extra. It does not appear that this school flourished.

In 1905 there was a junior school at "Bellevue", the farm at the top of Churchill Road. This was run by Miss Eliza Hinchcliffe for the children at the farm and others.

By 1908 Miss Gertrude Lindley was postmistress and teacher at Tarooma. Classes were held in the former Tarooma Tea House, now 162 Channel Highway.

Another teacher and postmistress, Mrs McKay operated from the house she shared with the Fitzpatricks, now 235 Channel Highway.

In 1915 the Education Department agreed to subsidise a school to the extent of £6 per child who attended regularly. The subsidy depended on an enrolment of twelve, regular attendance and the recommendation of the school inspector that satisfactory work was being done.

The Old Public Hall was the venue for the school. It had one main room and a smaller, internal room where the school was held.

Some children travelled to school in horsedrawn carts. The Education Department paid a subsidy "for the conveyance of children by boat, vehicle or trains, up to one shilling per day" if their homes were more than three miles from school. Later a bus which ran on kerosene was used. It had a rail around the top and the children climbed an outside ladder and sat back to back on top if there was no room inside.

Since there was no school residence some teachers had transport problems. A Miss White caught the tram from her home in New Town to the "Beach House" in Lower Sandy Bay and then cycled to Tarooma. When it rained she became very wet. One pupil remembers her stripping off her wet clothes, leaving them to dry by the fire, and teaching in her underwear, to the giggles of the children.

In 1919 the school moved from subsidised status to being completely funded by the Education Department. Enrolment increased from 19 pupils to 43 in 1922, but then numbers dropped to 15 in 1927.

Miss Joyce James' father was on the board of governors and she remembers him talking of concern about subsidies and the difficulties of getting and retaining teachers. Parent contributions were sent to school in an envelope on Fridays.

The school had no light, only tank water, a smoky wood fire and a leaking roof. On wet days drips of water would smudge the copy books. When it rained heavily and the buckets and bowls failed to contain the deluge, the class moved into the main hall. Gumboots were worn to school and children changed into slippers indoors. Monitors were responsible for keeping the fires alight, as well as filling the inkwells and keeping the school clean and tidy.

Miss Grace Dixon remembers getting the cane which was administered to girls and boys alike. Miss McMahon left the older children to attend to the younger ones. One boy was asked to read while the teacher was occupied. Miss Dixon slammed his book shut. Out came the cane. Detentions and writing lines were other forms of punishment.

Inspectors' visits were dreaded by all. Teachers knew that their jobs depended on a satisfactory report, and children were petrified of having to answer questions and being found lacking.

Highlights of the school year were Arbour Day, when the children planted trees, the Kingston show, where pupils' work and handcrafts were displayed and judged, and the Christmas concert and picnic at the beach. Some teachers, such as Miss Latham, were better than others at organising the concerts, and parents and younger brothers and sisters were involved.

Miss Grace Dixon also remembers a gift of two handkerchiefs for each child at Christmas, given at "Tarooma House" by Mr B.J. Watkins from his shop in Hobart. In later years the postman, Mr Les Bower, was Father Christmas for the children. He was very popular because he organised a lolly scramble as the children

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came out of school on Friday. He brought the lollies from the family shop in Hobart and would visit his aunt who had a holiday cottage in Tarooma.

Miss Dixon recollects that the children spent their lunch times building cubby houses in the bush on the hill above the school. Since she went home to her parents' farm "The Retreat" for lunch, she could not help to build them, so she was not allowed to use the cubbies. She tells of the nearby creek where the children caught tadpoles and frogs, and fell in with great regularity. This creek and another nearby, continued to provide entertainment for years. A popular game was "Hares and Hounds", and much time was spent at the beach.

When the school numbers dropped in October 1926 the school closed for over a year. The remaining children went elsewhere and none returned when it re-opened in 1929, a subsidised school again.

The school health sisters visited the school and the pupils were referred to the dentist in Hobart when necessary. When headlice were noticed children were sent home to wash their



*The six pupils who were attending the school when it closed in October 1926.*

*Back: Teacher Miss Cole. Third Row, L to R: Grace Dixon, Kilty Roberts. Second Row, L to R: Coral McKay, Jean Roberts, Iris McKay. Front Row, George McKay.* PHOTO GRACE DIXON.

hair with kerosene, and not allowed to return until clear of lice. Impetago, or school sores, spread like wildfire and were treated with a homemade mixture which contained bicarbonate of soda.

Every Friday the children had to get out polish and rags, and polish their desks and sweep the rooms. On Friday afternoons the boys gardened and the girls sewed.

The depression brought the retrenchment of teachers and Education Department personnel. The school medical and dental service was temporarily suspended and there was a reduction of twenty per cent in all Education Department salaries over £60 per annum. All junior teachers and college students had their allowances cut and parent contributions counted for a higher percentage of the salaries of subsidised teachers.

The winter of 1934 brought indications that a number of children were under-nourished and ill-clad. In 1935 school milk was introduced to help counteract this problem. The school dental service re-opened but had arrears to make up.

In 1936 a school was built on the corner of Coolamon Road and the Channel Highway. This initially consisted of one room and a cloakroom. It was built by Mr Neil Jensen, who also built several houses in the neighbourhood. Grades one to seven were in the same room. The opening of this building was reported in the *Mercury* of Monday the 4th May.

### TAROONA SCHOOL New Building opened Educational Policy

The policy of the State Government in endeavouring to provide equal opportunities of educational advancement for all sections of the community, was stressed by the Premier (Mr. A.G. Ogilvie, K.C.), in opening the new State school building at Tarooma on Saturday. Previously, children in the locality have been taught in the public hall, an old building which lacks many features desirable in premises used for educating the young. A large gathering of residents was present.

Mr. J.V. Gibson, on behalf of the Parents and Friends' Association, welcomed the Premier, and expressed appreciation of the expeditious way in which the Government had met the representations of residents in regard to the provision of a school. The building fulfilled a long-felt want. The place in which the children

had previously been taught had been a perfect disgrace to the district. —————

The Warden of Kingborough (Mr. W.D. Maddock), proposing a vote of thanks to the Premier, said that there were 15 schools in the Kingborough municipality, and most of them had had attention since the present Government came into office.

The children, under the direction of their teacher (Miss E. Burnley) gave a number of items. Edith Vince and Beatrice Williams gave recitations, and Anthony Gibson and George Debnam took the principal parts in a playlet, "The Hare and the Tortoise". The children's choir sang three songs.

Bouquets were presented by the children to Miss Pat Ogilvie, who accompanied the Premier, and to the teacher.

A committee of women arranged afternoon tea, which was served in the public hall.

Miss Joyce James remembers Miss Kingston as a popular teacher who was particularly keen on gardening. She helped the children develop the school garden, planting hyacinths and tulips from her brother's flower farm. A scarlet gum, hakea and lambertiana were planted on Arbour Day in 1936. In the same year the government proposed to move for the abolition of examinations and establishment

of an accreditation system. Even more sinister was the polio epidemic which reached Tasmania in October 1936. All schools closed early, no examinations were held and reopening was delayed. Special hospital classes were established for paralysed children.

In 1941 Mrs Bonnie Tilley, nee Robertson, was evacuated from New Guinea with her mother and three sisters. They lived with their grandmother at her farm on Bonnet Hill. Bonnie remembers the Coolamon building well. The boys from Hobart State High School came to dig trenches in the grounds and the children regularly took part in air-raid practices. Around their necks they wore a string with a rubber attached. They put the rubber between their teeth, as it was supposed to stop them biting their tongues in the event of a bomb blast. During air-raid practices they dived under their desks or into the trenches. These were often wet and muddy since there was no way for the rain water to drain away.

Bonnie remembers deliberately missing the Webster Rometch bus home to Bonnet Hill so that she could raid the orchards which bordered the Channel Highway. The James' Estate cherry plums and apples seem to have



*The State School, as built in 1936, on the corner of Coolamon Road and the Channel Highway. Taken in c 1946. Note the bus shelter on the left, q.v.*

PHOTO GRACE DIXON



*State School Cricket Team, 1938.*

*Back row, L to R: Tony Gibson, Alan Sargisson, Reg Escott.  
Middle row, L to R: Ken Debnam, Richard Gibson, Carlyle James, Ken Escott, Mervyn George.  
Front: George Debnam.*

PHOTO REG ESCOTT.



*State School pupils 1938 or 1939.*

*Back Row, L to R: Dare Robertson, Ken Debnam, Miriam James, Carlyle James, Jean George,  
Mervyn George, Beverly Hinsby, G. King, Noel James, Merle King.  
Front Row, L to R: Joan Bonnitcho, \_\_\_\_\_, Barbara Debnam, P. Clarke, Lillian Charlton,  
Trevor Williams, Pat Bonnitcho.*

JOAN CRIPPS.

been very popular with generations of school children.

The end of the second world war saw the compulsory school age extended to sixteen years and a growth in the Tarooma community. Robyn Boyden, nee Geeves, remembers the excitement of going to the "big school" in 1952. Previously she had attended a pre-school in the old Presbyterian church in Tarooma Crescent, run by Miss Tanner. The headmistress at the Coolamon Road School was Mrs Kenna and she had a difficult task as the whole school was housed in one room. This single room built in 1936 was extended by one room in 1952, the younger children moved into the larger new room and Mr and Mrs Smith became headmaster and infant teacher. Mr John Morgan followed, a jovial man who "always came to school with a smile on his face". A third room was added in 1956-57.

Playground equipment consisted of monkey bars and a rubber tyre swing. Popular spots

were "the big tree", a huge pine where fantasies were acted out, and the shelter sheds — one for boys and one for girls. Lunch was eaten there before children were allowed to play.

Fridays were popular. Mrs Harris came to teach knitting and sewing to the girls, while the boys went outside for woodwork and football. The Anzac sports at Kingston provided competition for children in the Channel area. There was a school performance of *Toad of Toad Hall* put on in the Old Public Hall for parents and friends. A less pleasant memory was the large jar of goitre tablets which were distributed to supplement iodine supplies before the advent of iodised salt and bread.

Eventually this school catered only for children to grade four. They then moved on to Princes Street State Primary School or Waimea Heights State Primary School, until the present State Primary School was built



The Coolamon Road State School showing the one-room extension added in 1952 between the 1956-57 extension on the left, and the original building on the right.

PHOTO GRACE DIXON.

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on portion of the land set aside for the State High School.

When this happened the Coolamon Road building became the pre-school and another generation of children built cubby houses in the pine tree, filled tricycles at the old petrol pump, sailed the seas in a retired rowing boat and piled into the pre-used telephone box.

The burning of this building, supposedly by

an arsonist on the 1st September 1974, brought to an end this phase of education in Tarooma.

### Acknowledgements

Mrs Robyn Boyden, nee Geeves

Miss Grace Dixon

Miss Joyce James

Mrs Bonnie Tilley

Mr D. Wieronga, Education Department



*Another view of the School showing the old driveway into St. Luke's Church, 1957.*

PHOTO GRACE DIXON.



*The site of the School in the middle foreground, under snow, 25th July 1986.*

PHOTO ANDREW LORD.



*Home Units now occupy the School site. Their foundations were poured in October 1986.*

PHOTO ANDREW LORD.