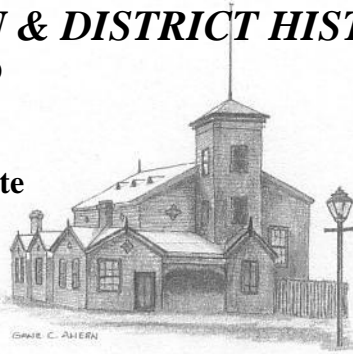


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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

The opening of our new premises at the Yarra Glen Memorial Hall was marked by an afternoon tea and brief ceremony on Saturday 2 November. Committee members were delighted to see so many members and supporters of the Society, particularly members of other Historical Societies with whom Eric Tetlow has built up such good connections. It was also great to see Society members who travelled considerable distances for this special occasion. A nice gesture was made by Cr Jeanette McRae who officially opened the premises. She invited Nicholas Gibson, the youngest guest, to assist her in cutting the ribbon. Nicholas is the grandson of one of our newest members, Jim Wilson, who spent his early years in Yarra Glen and attended the primary school.

Talking of schools, the topic for this issue is the history of schools in the area. I have made 1900 the cut off point to fit the length of the Newsletter. A fully researched history of education in the district from 1850 to the 21st century would form a very interesting book as there are many individual stories as well as the political and social themes to look at – any takers?

Helen

DISTRICT SCHOOLS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the first years of European settlement in the Yarra Valley the stations of the early squatters were far apart. Children were taught at home, usually by their mother. In the 1840s James and Penelope Selby lived in a rude slab hut at the junction of the Brushy Creek and Yarra River. Penelope taught her two sons reading, writing and arithmetic. Further north John and Alice Dickson were living at Gulf Station. The eldest of their five children was born in 1844. When Andrew Ross visited in 1852 he found Mrs Dickson was holding her “usual lessons for the children and it was pleasing to see that they had made fair progress under her tuition, although they were young.”

1850s

The colony of Port Phillip was under the government of New South Wales until 1851. A NSW Act of 1848 established the National School Board and a system of education based on one in Ireland. Schools established by local residents were built with government funding but their operations were to be supported by grants and fees similar to those of the denominational schools.

In the late 1840s various members of the Bell family had joined other Scottish Presbyterians at Kangaroo Ground. Education and religion were very important to these people. Once settled the community arranged for Samuel Furphy to erect a slab building to serve as a school and church. Furphy had formerly worked for the Ryries at Yering. Andrew Ross, who had been in charge of the Scots School in Collins Street, was employed as the teacher and clergyman at Kangaroo Ground. The school that he established was the first in the County of Evelyn and only the 27th to be established in the colony. It opened in April 1851 with 22 pupils. Ross was a man of vision and energy. He sought boarding students from the city to boost enrolments and in 1857 (after a false start in 1854) set up an industrial agricultural school to provide the students with farming skills to enhance their chances of employment.

The gold rush in Victoria saw a rapid growth in population. The resulting increase in demand for schools was beyond the means of the churches and private sponsors who hitherto had been the main providers of education. After separation from NSW in 1851 the Victorian Government replaced the 1848 Act with its own 1853 *Act to incorporate the Board of Commissioners for National Education*. This Board had similar powers to the one established under NSW law.

A dual system operated for the next ten years with schools still being established by the churches which were coordinated by a Denominational School Board. There was concern that children would not receive religious instruction in the government schools. Eltham's first school (which later became school No. 371) operated under the auspices of the Church of England. It was officially opened in August 1853 with 26 pupils and John Hughes as head master. This school closed in 1872 when government aid was withdrawn. At Diamond Creek a slab hut was erected in 1855. It also served as the Wesleyan Church. It had an enrolment of 23 pupils in 1856 and a new improved building was erected in 1857. This school was numbered 209 and was a precursor to the current Eltham Primary School. The earliest reports of a school at Queenstown are of one located in a tent at the Caledonia diggings in 1858. Robert Harris was head teacher from 1864 to 1874. He ran the school in his own home. In 1867 the locality took the name of Queenstown. Yet another name change occurred in 1954 when it became St Andrews.

1860s

The National School system proved inadequate — in 1861 three quarters of the colony's school children were still attending denominational schools. In the early 1860s Richard Heales (after whom Healesville is named) introduced a bill in Parliament that became the *Act for the better maintenance and*

establishment of Common Schools in Victoria, 1862. Heales was committed to social and moral improvement of the working classes and education for all children. The Act established the Board of Education for Common Schools. It also dissolved the Denominational Board and the National Board, aiming to coordinate all the schools under one board of management. The existing land and school buildings of the denominational schools remained vested in the trustees who were empowered to transfer them to the Board of Education or sell them and apply the proceeds to purposes of education. The emphasis was on secular education. The Board had five laymen as Commissioners but no two were to belong to the same religious denomination. Committees comprising local citizens were appointed in defined districts to oversee the operation of the school and appointment of teachers, and were responsible to the Board of Education. Half the cost of the buildings and furnishing was to be supplied by the local community.

In 1863 the Board of Education compiled a register of schools. The existing schools were listed alphabetically and then numbered in sequence rather than by date of establishment. Some numbering therefore seems illogical at a later date when the name of the school has changed. For example Anderson Creek, established in 1862, was numbered 12 but later became Warrandyte. Another example is the current school of St Andrews which was numbered 128 when it was known as Caledonia. Schools established after 1863 are in the order of their founding date, the earliest being No.701.

Grant's Land Act of 1865 opened Crown Land for selection in Christmas Hills, Steels Creek and Burgoyne. The resulting smaller properties brought more families to the area creating a demand for more schools.

By the late 1850s the Bell and Armstrong families of Kangaroo Ground had extended their farming interests to the Yarra Flats. In 1860 William Bell married Mary Ann Little and they made their home at Gulf Station. The first of their eight children was born in 1861. Other settlers at Yarra Flats including William Herbert, Edward Evans and John Williamson also had young families of a similar age. As Kangaroo Ground was the closest church and school at that time they turned their thoughts to providing their own facilities at Yarra Flats.

A committee was formed and a building erected by the end of 1866 (see *YGDHS Newsletter* No.15, p. 2). Much uncertainty prevails about the site and purpose of the building. The early records of the Presbyterian Church indicate that a school room was intended. In November 1866 Mr W. Watkins wrote to the Board of Education saying that the Local Committee had built a school.

Bell family lore held that Mary Ann Bell had the Gulf Station school house built. Moreover there had been no mention in the family of the building having been relocated (see Watters). It is quite probable that Mary Ann strongly advocated that a school was needed. With her young family she certainly had a vested interest. It does not, however, preclude that the building at Gulf Station — which is called the 'school house' — was not previously located close to the Woods Point Road as mentioned in a letter to the Board of Education in October 1868 (see Blackburn p.7). In fact the National Trust investigated this conundrum in the early 1990s (see Watters). Evidence was found that the present building could indeed be the original one albeit reconstructed and relocated despite contemporary descriptions of a bigger building and differences seen in an early photograph. In a series of 1860s letters the building was described as 36 feet by 18 feet with a fireplace, weatherboard walls, a shingle roof, pine floor and lining boards. It was set in grounds of half an acre. (see Blackburn pp. 6-7). The original

photo shows four verandah posts whereas there are now only three.



Yarra Flats Common School building – the chimney is at the right hand side

The investigation by the National Trust on the current building found that the slabs on three of the walls are numbered with roman numerals (possibly done with a chisel) which indicates that the building had been moved at some stage. The Gulf Station building is smaller and does not have a chimney but the wall where the chimney would have been does not bear the roman numerals. This indicates that the chimney was not re-erected as part of the relocation and a new wall put in place. [Is it possible that there may have been a fire in the original building and the end containing the chimney was burnt? This could also be a reason for the relocated building being smaller]. There is evidence in the verandah beam that a fourth verandah post once existed, and slots in the beam holding the top of the vertical slabs indicate that the door was in a different position. Underneath the tin roof of the Gulf Station building are shingles. The investigators also observed that the 'school house' does not have the integrity of the other buildings erected on site at Gulf Station: only one adzed corner post survives and a sawn floor is a later addition thus showing no evidence of a partition wall in the larger building. The researchers think that the description as 'weatherboard' may have just been human error. There is one other indication that the first school building was not at Gulf Station. A list of the children attending in 1868 states that Agnes and William Bell lived half a mile distant from the school. The school was therefore not in their own backyard.

Other Common Schools were also been built in the area in 1866. Healesville Common School No. 849 opened on 1 October 1866 in a building on what is now Badger Creek Rd. The teacher was William Sullivan. The Lillydale Common School No. 876 was also opened in 1866. Although the Yarra Flats school was said to be operating in 1866 the Yarra Flats Common School No. 965 was not officially opened until 1 April 1868.

Yering school No. 1034 opened in October 1869. It was a small building with two attached skillion rooms for the teacher and his family. The land, donated by David Watt and W. de Pury, was situated on the north side of the present Cambus Road. There were many difficulties with the site which was 300 yards from the main road and the children had to negotiate low lying areas in the winter.

1870s

In 1873 Victoria was the first Australian colony to introduce a centralised primary school system with free, compulsory and secular education. The *Education Act* of 1872 abolished school fees and attendances increased by approximately fifty per cent. The Board of Education was replaced by a Department of

Education under a Minister of Public Instruction. Church authorities were able to retain their existing schools under an independent system but government aid for them ceased in January 1874. Schools now became known as State Schools. The local committees were replaced with Boards of Advice for each district. They were able to select teachers for appointment subject to Department approval, were responsible for the maintenance of buildings and furnishings, and could grant holidays.

On 30 January 1873 Benjamin Smith of Christmas Hills wrote to the new Education Department on behalf of his community asking for support for a school. Thomas Young offered a room in his Post Office residence and Albert Hunt offered his whole 'house' (a single room 12 x 10 feet with earth floor, slab walls, bark roof, and only an opening for a window (therefore not weatherproof) which was located six kilometres to the west on Watsons Creek. The Education Department decided to use both. They were opened as branches of the one school in September 1874. Robert Harris transferred from Queenstown and spent his mornings at one school and afternoons at the other. The Watson Creek building was very inadequate and the school closed in 1875 as pupil numbers dropped. This increased the numbers at the Post Office and Thomas Young removed a wall to provide a larger room.

During the next few years there was considerable controversy over an appropriate site for a purpose-built school but eventually the site of the current school was settled upon. At one point in the dispute children were withdrawn from the school and a 'Grammar School' was set up in the home of Mrs James Charlton. The new school building was erected by Joseph Stevenson and included a teacher's residence. It opened in 1880 with 40 pupils.

Another school opened at Tarrawarra on 9 April 1875. School No. 1505 was in a rented building, a bark hut on the corner of Long Gully Road and the Yarra Track. John Reed was the first teacher from 1875 to 1879. In 1876 a portable wooden building was obtained which included a classroom plus two rooms for the teacher to reside in. Pupil numbers fluctuated and from 1886 to 1890 the teacher worked part time at a school in Gruyere — State School No. 1695. The Tarrawarra or Long Gully School closed in 1892. However, it re-opened in 1900 and the school was moved up the hill to a site on the corner of School Lane. The building, used primarily as a church, was owned by the Church of England which leased it to the Education Department for school purposes. A separate building was erected in 1923. The local newspaper reported that

The Tarrawarra State School was crowded on Friday evening when a concert and coffee social was held to celebrate the opening of the new school. The building which cost £500 is situated on the top of the hill above the Church of England where the school was previously conducted. The school is a great improvement both as to light and ventilation and is well worth the efforts of the school committee to induce the Education Department to supply a long felt want.

At one time the school had thirty-five pupils but by 1929 the numbers had dropped and the school closed.

The people of Dixons Creek petitioned for a school in March 1873 and again in June 1874. The Education Department bought one acre from Thomas Bell — part of Section 19A on the west side of the Main Rd in Burgoyne parish. It had originally been intended to build on the eastern side of the road on a site belonging to John Bell in Section 14 parish of Tarrawarra. A shingle-roofed wooden building 24 feet by 16 feet was opened on 12 June 1875. It was unlined and had no ceiling. Small living quarters were attached for the teacher. It was built on the side of a steep hill now known as Gulf Hill on

a site that was unfenced. Cattle grazed around the building. Attendances averaged 22 in the first year and included some children from Steels Creek. In March 1878 attendances dropped which the head teacher, Mr O'Meara, attributed to an outbreak of illnesses in the district. At the end of the same month the weather was so wet that attendances again fell because children could not get to school. This was followed by an outbreak of typhoid.

In some areas pupil numbers increased steadily and the old slab huts quickly proved inadequate. At Healesville a new school was built on the site of the present school and in 1891 a brick building was added. At Yering a new block of land was purchased from the Joske brothers at the site of the present school. The new school building opened in 1877.

A more suitable site was also sought for the Yarra Flats school and two acres on Symons Street were purchased from Thomas Armstrong. In 1878 a new school building measuring 24 feet by 16 feet was erected by John Nicholls. It consisted of three school rooms and living quarters for the teacher. The old school building on the Woods Point Road is said to have been used as a meeting room for men. The men posed in the photograph above appear to support this contention.

1880s & 1890s

A school which had a short life was opened at Yering West in 1880. It was numbered No. 2252. The McPherson children attended it from 1898 to 1905. (*see* Watson)

Steels Creek did not get a school building until 1886 although it is believed that school was conducted in a tent in the 1860s. Prior to the issue of any land titles a one acre site for the school had been reserved adjacent to a block taken up by William Hubbard. The first request for a school was made to the Department of Education in 1884 but refused on grounds that a family had left the district. Another request in September 1884 stated that there were 30 children in the district, a community of small farmers, orchardists, and timber workers. Some of these children were travelling long distances to schools at Yarra Flats and Dixons Creek. This time the request was granted and a portable building was erected late in 1885. The school house was opened on 25 June 1886 with Mr Edward Morris as head teacher. He remained at the school until his retirement in 1922 and became a key figure in the community. He operated the post office at the school, giving the daily mail that arrived from Yarra Glen to the children to take home. He also convened the first meeting of the Yarra Glen Horticultural and Fruit Growers Society which conducted the first Shows. He was the secretary of the Show Society for many years.

The regular visits of school inspectors from the Department of Education were guaranteed to raise apprehension in teacher and pupils alike. In November 1882 Mr C.A. Topp was making his rounds. At Dixons Creek he reported that

"The time table is good and has been carried out during my visit. The programme has been followed. The monitors are well trained... The lessons in reading and grammar given to the upper class by Mr. O'Meara were excellent. Analysis, parsing, and the reasons for the answers were insisted on. The lessons given by monitors were very fairly managed. Care was taken to prevent copying. Discipline [was] Satisfactory [and] Records [were] prepared to date."

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The following year he examined 47 children at Yarra Flats State School. “*Out of six children presented for certificates five passed, viz., Cuthbert Kiernan, Maud Nicholas, Catherine Schofield, Mary Ann Petty, and Dinah Bell.*” He also reported the “*Premises in good order; furniture and apparatus properly kept; classification correct; programme followed; instruction, all classes have passed a very creditable examination and good progress is shown; discipline satisfactory; records prepared to date. Head-teacher, Jas. Nicholas.*”

James Nicholas was the longest serving head teacher at Yarra Glen, from 1880-1897, but received some luke-warm reports from inspectors over the years. In 1880 Topp described him as a “*painstaking conscientious teacher but a lax disciplinarian and rather unskilful in class teaching.*” In 1884 Mr Stewart reported that he “*has his heart in his work, and the examinations show that the teaching is careful*” but in 1887 Mr Jackson was less complimentary: “*Did not strike me as being very energetic but can do fair work*”. Mr Gamble was even more critical in 1888: “*Self satisfied and apparently unwilling to carry out suggestions. Can always find a reason for not complying with recommendations. A poor school manager*”. In July 1890, Nicholas was “*censured for the serious defects in the management and instruction of his school; for his neglect to keep the Corporal Punishment register; and for persistent disregard of DIs suggestions. Cautioned that if a marked improvement is not apparent at next inspection it may be necessary to bring his case under the notice of Classifiers, or the V.S. Board, with a view to a reduction in the service or removal to a less desirable position*”. James Nicholas managed to hold his position and remained at the school until he retired on 31 May 1897 due to ill health. During his time the numbers of pupils increased to the extent that the school was overcrowded. In 1893 he was told to reduce the numbers of pupils. This is reflected in the school register of the Dixons Creek school which reveals an unusual number of children transferring from Yarra Glen at that time.

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Steels Creek Primary School No. 2725 1886 – 1986. 1986

Yarra Glen Roads & Streets

a series about their history

There have been several roads in the district with the name School Lane or School Road. No prizes for knowing the origin of the name.

School Lane (now Yarraview Road), Yarra Glen

The road that runs south from the Yarra Glen Primary School to King Street was known as the School Lane until the 1970s. From King Street south it was known as River Road.

The oldest establishment along the School Lane would be the slaughter yards, the remains of which still exist to the rear of the houses at 54 and 56 Yarraview Rd. The slaughter yards supplied the butcher shop of George Albert (1863-1933) which was located approximately where the Opp Shop now stands in Bell St. In the late 1920s George Albert's cousin Bert Scott (1883-1949) returned to Yarra Glen and built a new butcher shop — now occupied by the Ruby Cat fashion shop. The house that Bert built behind the shop was relocated to Forest Street in March 1986. In the early 1950s Norm Allen (1903-63), whose mother was a cousin of George Albert and Bert Scott, purchased the slaughter yard and he built the house at 54 Yarraview Rd. His daughter and son-in-law Nancy and Gordon Olney took over the butcher shop at about that time and used the slaughter yards.

Donald White (1889-1970) built the house opposite in the early 1920s. It was later purchased by the Walters family. Rupert Newman (1892-1960) built the house on the corner of King Street and School Lane. Gordon Hubbard built the house on the western corner of the School Lane and Symond Street in 1954 or 1955. About this time also a cottage was moved from Armstrong Grove and erected in School Lane for Bert Taylor (now 59 Yarraview Rd).

School Lane, Tarrawarra

This road runs between the old Yarra Glen-Healesville Rd and the Tarrawarra Road. It was formerly known as Bailey's Lane. Although a new school building was erected in 1923, by 1929 the pupil numbers at the school decreased and the school was closed. No buildings remain — the name of the road is one of the few reminders that the school ever existed. (*see Lawrence*).

School Lane, Christmas Hills

When the controversy was raging about the location of the Christmas Hills school building in the 1870s the community living at the ‘top end’ in the vicinity of Ridge Road asked the Eltham Council to make a road ‘for their convenience’ from the Main Road. But instead “of the school being located at the top-end of School Lane as they had hoped, their opponents had succeeded in having it located at the very bottom-end of it. Today of course the school has been cut off completely from School Lane because of a quite recent realignment of the Main Road...” (Mick Woiwod).