

Ayr State School

School History

By 1883 the European population of the area of Ayr was about 500, most of whom could be described as "Bush Bachelors" who had moved north with the grazing industry. A large number were of Scottish descent. A group of citizens asked Mr Fred Myles, the Police Magistrate, to investigate the procedure involved in having a school built. Myles had a young family so he wrote to the Department of Education.

The reply from the Department allowed the choice of two options. The first required the local people to lease or purchase a suitable building for a school. The Department would then equip this and provide a teacher. The second option required the local people to pay one-fifth of the construction of a school which the Department would then furnish and equip before appointing a teacher. The local people would elect a "Building Committee" which would liaise with the Education Department and raise the money.

Those appointed to this committee were:

R.W. Graham	- Airdmillan Estate
G.G. Kann	- Teamster and Saddler
F.W. Myles	- Police Magistrate
W.R. Mackenzie	- Seaforth Estate
H. Benjamin	- Shopkeeper
J.W. Bradburn	- Draper and Mercer

Accompanying The "Application for the Establishment of a School" was a list of names of potential pupils. It showed that 23 families had 64 children available but 17 were considered ineligible as they lived more than 3 miles from the proposed school. Some of these attended schools in Bowen, Townsville, Charters Towers, Cairns or Brisbane but most were "totally illiterate". Mr Bradburn stated in a letter, "Parents of children living long distances from school intend to send them by spring-carts while others intend to build houses in town". The Building Committee recommended that the site for the school be part of a reserve bounded by Dervish, Omar and Caliph Streets which were the original names of Munro, Graham and Railway Streets respectively. The area was five acres.

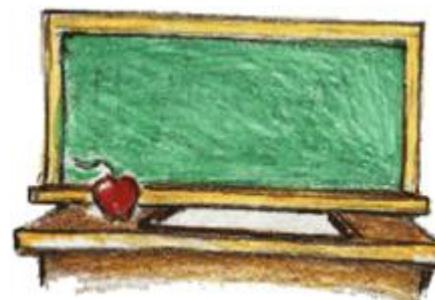
Because the Committee listed such a large enrolment, the Department proposed to construct a school to cost 900 pounds, of which the Committee would find 180 pounds. This caused an antagonistic response as members considered that the limit they could raise would be 100 pounds.

Alterations suggested were a reduction in floor area, omission of guttering and some proposed water tanks, the use of well-water and the omission of a boundary fence. The Department opted for a standard sized one-teacher school, 25 feet by 18 feet with two 7 foot verandahs, but refused to use well-water as "it may be polluted by cesspits". Tenders were called for its construction together with specified toilet facilities. The lowest tender was accepted but before work commenced the contractor was declared bankrupt as was the applicant with the second lowest tender. Eventually Michael White's tender of 650 pounds was accepted. He hired a schooner to transport the requisites from Bundaberg to Halifax Bay from where teams hauled them to the site. The building was positioned in the corner of the block - now the front lawn of the Principal's residence.

So, School Number 451, Ayr Mixed School, admitted its first pupils - nineteen in total - on its opening day, November 15, 1886. Mr James Dowie, the Head Teacher, penned this information to the Department that day.

By the summer holidays in December enrolment had reached 28, climbing to 42 in 1887. when the inspector visited in that year only 33 were present. His report referred to "noisy slates", "shuffling of feet", "finger snapping" and "monotonous reading", but did concede that "progress was being made".

Records show that in the first ten years the average pupil was absent for one day in every three. Helping at home, illness, distance from school, parents' priorities, all contributed. "Tailing the cows",



"planting misses" and "stripping" may have been puzzling expressions to the inexperienced teachers. Listed below are the early pupils whose descendants may still attend the school:

BOYS: Leopold Gielis, Jack Pilcher, Albert Kastner, Willie Ross, Henry Parker, Jack Ross, Peter Hoey, Frank Pilcher, Charlie Williams, Arthur Holmes, George Lock, Max Anderson, Fred Braby, Arthur Bishop, Alex Cameron, Donald Cameron, Robert Cameron, Henry Kastner, Stanley Parker, Wyllie Myles, Fred Myles, Willie Cole, Herbert Pilcher, Harry Braby, George Kann.

GIRLS: Nellie Hillier, Lottie Hillier, Tottie Myles, Tansy Reid, Edith Bishop, Sophie Cameron, Ada Braby, Jessie Bishop, Laura Mackenzie, Ada Mackenzie, Jane Mackenzie, Neenie Myles, Lily Kastner, Susan Hillier, _____ Anderson, Lily Pilcher.



James Dowie was replaced by Frederick Hacker in October, 1889, and Thomas McIntyre took over in January 1893, by which time the enrolment climbed to 100 pupils - but the school had not been enlarged.

During this period the School Committee built a large playshed, open sided, 18 feet square with a high corrugated iron roof. Seats were inbuilt around three sides. This and the open verandahs were used as teaching areas.

In 1897 the original building was duplicated by an exact replica of the first. A larger shed was constructed as a boys gymnasium in 1898. This played several roles in its useful

life of nearly seventy years. The 1902 drought saw the use of well water and by 1906 the Department agreed to pay repair costs on a windmill pump.

On March 27, the Ayr Tramways Board completed construction of a state gauge rail line to Ayr so "train" travel was introduced to Townsville. The line from Bowen north had been laid to Bobawaba, twenty miles south of Home Hill. The planned extension from Ayr was shown as continuing along Railway Street through the exact site of the original school. Mr G Kann, Secretary of the School Committee, acquainted the Department of this in 1920 and suggested that should the school be relocated it be expanded to cope with the influx of people from Charters Towers. Many mine workers in that city lost employment because major deep mines had flooded. Obviously the Railway Department revised their plans but in 1913 the school was relocated further down Graham Street. It was enlarged by two further rooms and the whole structure placed on seven feet blocks.

A further two rooms were added in 1919 and again in 1923 to cater for young families of returning soldiers and an influx of European migrants.

As early as January, 1913, requests were made to the Department of Public Instruction for the provision of High School courses but the 1914-18 war and a shortage of teachers deferred any action. Again in 1920 a Committee "to promote a separate High School for Ayr" was elected. The inaugural members were: W. Hull, H.B. Burstall, E.C. Hurworth, J. Leahy, C.R. Crofton, A.W.R. Brown and J McBean Walker.

These advised the Department that forty-two pupils would enrol in a sub-junior class if one were available; that twelve pupils attended secondary schools in other centres; that the Shire population was 6126 (in the slack season); that a ten acre site being Reserve 59, originally designated as a Showground was available; and that a deputation of members was willing to meet the Minister at a time and place of his choosing.

Many alternatives were offered, investigated and refused till in 1926 a visiting Inspector reported that "a High School could be "grafted" on to the present school with minimum expense". Four extra rooms were formed by excavating beneath an existing wing and two more were constructed. The downstairs rooms flooded in cyclonic weather while dust filtered through cracks on the floors above. Two of these rooms were used for domestic science - much to the chagrin of the teacher. Academic, Commercial, Domestic Science and Manual Training subjects were taught. The first High School classes were enrolled on July 9th, 1298.

During the Depression years this Committee promoting a separate High School continued to function till 1936. Tenders were called for construction of a High and Intermediate School on the site nominated on their original proposal. On March 1, 1937, some two hundred and seventy-one pupils marched through Queen Street on their way to occupy this new facility leaving 586 primary pupils still at Ayr State School.

In June 1937, Ayr State School celebrated its Golden Jubilee while in October 1938, Mr Charles notified his superiors that all pupils in his school had heard the first "Broadcast to Schools" - "Scott to the South Pole".

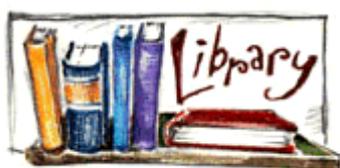
Then came the 1939-45 war years with the staff shortages, large classes, scarcity of writing and teaching materials, the invasion scare of 1943 when more than one-quarter of the pupils evacuated south, the various drills to educate pupils to occupy slit trenches during air raids, the rationing of foods, clothing and fuels. A mobile army kitchen was set up at railway end of the grounds to feed troops in transit, both Australian and allied.

In 1948 an infant wing was built parallel to Graham Street, but the original buildings with their warped floors - "toe-stubbers" - still were in daily use. There was fierce competition for building materials between private contractors and Government Departments. The Education Department built many primary and secondary schools as the public demanded "Higher Education" for their children.

By 1952 the school population again reached 800 but the opening of the East Ayr Primary in 1953 took over three hundred of these immediately.

In the sixties both wings of four small rooms were refurbished by converting each to three rooms with louvred walls admitting more natural light and ventilation, thus making the teaching areas more pleasurable in our tropical summers. Individual furniture made for greater flexibility of seating within each area.

During the seventies a teaching block of four "open area" classrooms was constructed and the original rooms demolished.



In 1975 a free standing library block was opened - a long awaited acquisition as the teaching focus had changed from factual content to development of research ability in most subjects. This has become possibly the most important room in the school.

For three decades after the war the State was blessed with full employment. Women filled more roles in the workforce so there mushroomed a variety of creches, child minding centres and kindergartens offering various activities for the "under fives". Once again public pressure forced the Education Department to accept responsibility for the four year old population by developing pre-schools run by specially trained teachers. Ayr State Schools Centre was opened in August 1974, and provides a very necessary service for our little people.

About twelve thousand pupils have passed through the Ayr State School during the century. Each has gone forward into the world of his era while the school changed slowly to mirror the society it served. Some accepted professional careers in different continents and became recognised for their contributions in specialised fields. Many became absorbed in vocations in other States but the majority are the Mr and Mrs Average Citizen in the next street, contributing to the Christian, social and sporting life of the locality. Generally they are guiding their children to accept their qualities of human interaction so that on their passing the "torch of Australian Life" may be handed on to future generations.