

Historical Happenings

Casterton Community Museum



Teaching the 3Rs in Casterton by Jim Kent continued...

The mills of the Minister of Education ground very slowly and despite numerous pleas from the head teacher and the school board warning of the dangers inherent to overcrowding class rooms, it was not until 1893 that some relief to this situation occurred. It was only a stop gap by way of bringing into the Casterton school site, the old Brimboal school room: hardly a satisfactory solution to the dilemma that the teachers, pupils and school board were putting up with. Of note was that a female teacher at this Casterton school desired to marry, and was advised by the authorities that should she marry she would be immediately dismissed from her teaching position!

Further problems were just over the horizon; with the onset of winter in the year of 1891, diphtheria claimed three of the female teaching staff and the local doctor advised the Education Department that this condition was brought about by the 'draughts' apparent in the school rooms.

In the matter of overcrowding further action by the Education Department saw this body lease the Casterton Mechanics Hall in 1900 and this action was accelerated by the local Shire of Glenelg Officer of Health, condemning the school in his 1898 report. By 1899 this school had an attendance of some three hundred and fifty pupils. For £1/5/- a week the Education Department leased the Mechanics Institute Hall which relieved, somewhat, the dangerous overcrowding at the Casterton State School No 2058, but agitation was again bubbling among the town's population in regard to the lack of proper and hygienic school rooms.

By 1910 an additional brick classroom had been built, but only slightly eliminated the gross overcrowding of class rooms. Classes were taught in the nearby Oddfellows Hall and in the Henty Street site of the Mechanics Institute Hall, not a very satisfactory solution to the shortage of school class room space. Around 1915 there was established next to the State School buildings new wooden class rooms which operated under the title of Casterton Higher Elementary School. It was in these class rooms that the level of learning went to sub intermediate, Intermediate and leaving.

My only recollection of this part of the school was the room where a teacher by the name of Cecil English taught the rudiments of carpentry. I recall making my mother a copper stick, this was a hexagon shaped tapered piece of pine which she used to transfer the pieces of clothing from the copper to the wash troughs. I also made her a pot stand which employed the mortise and tenon principle. And so education went on, teachers came and departed, staffing appeared to have been an ongoing problem for many years. Parents of the attending children did their best to improve conditions both within the school rooms and in the adjoining playing areas.



Wednesday, March 19th at VIC BBQ area at 6.30pm. Bring a plate to share, please, meat and some drinks provided.
PS: Bring your own chair for comfort.

We hope to have some guests from the Coleraine Historical Society and to learn about their organisation.

Glenelg Inn 1873



Sandford shop 1981





50th Anniversary: making a start with dedicated volunteers on clean-up at the Old Cemetery this week.



Younger and older volunteers, all enthusiastically setting to: Roly, Noel, Ann, Sandra, Joan and Ros were there this week.



Noel enjoying himself and Betty "Legs" Grable heading off for an appointment.

Casterton Historical Society 50th Anniversary, 2014

In 2014 CDHS will celebrate fifty years. Any members who have ideas and suggestions for ways to mark this occasion of the fiftieth anniversary are encouraged to do so. All suggestions / contributions gratefully received and discussed.



To give you some idea of how many pupils were enrolled in 1932, the State School recorded two hundred and ten and the Higher Elementary School had eighty two in attendance and by the 1968 enrolment had reached three hundred and six pupils. 1976 saw the old State School buildings deemed unsuitable and were demolished to make way for a modern type of building to accommodate the class rooms which then taught up to the State School standard. A very modern Secondary College had been built up at the western end of Casterton on the Mt. Gambier Road replacing the Higher Elementary School.

I will continue with a look at what is called the 'Church System'. As it is now, so also was it years ago, when followers of the various branches of Christianity sought to include in the education of their children the aspects of their own type of religion, so all over the land we see a separation from the 'State System', with schools built and supported by the numerous branches of Christianity. In the case of Casterton, we record that the very first attempt at education of the local children occurred through the efforts of the Church of England, who built on their land the very first school in our district.

Now the embryo township of Casterton contained people of the various Christian faiths and prominent among them were those who followed the teachings of the Church of Rome, namely Roman Catholics. And it was the desire of these inhabitants that the education of their children contain a solid emphasis on Christian principals, and so to achieve this end they built, staffed and maintained their own schools whilst still operating under the control and direction of the Education Department, the governmental body to oversee all aspects of education.

So we see the Roman Catholics make a plea to the Bishop of the Parish for some help and direction in the cause of establishing schools where this emphasis was part of the curriculum and the following was the result of this request. In 1901, the then Bishop located in Ballarat, which was then the headquarters of the Parish of Casterton, made a request to an Order of Catholic Nuns who specialised in teaching and nursing under the banner of the Sisters of Mercy, to come to Casterton and establish a school for the education of the Catholic inhabitants.

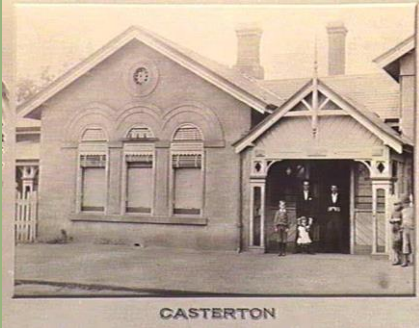
Four of these Nuns duly arrived in Casterton from Yarrowonga in 1902 and set up such a school in Robertson Street, now identified as No 18. At the time of their arrival the dwelling on this property was a large weatherboard house. In a very short space of time this house was filled to capacity with pupils, causing more houses in Robertson Street to be required. These further houses were close by and are known as No 29, 33 and 56, and so we have a rather scattered system of education and living quarters distributed over four separate houses in the one street.

To overcome this impossible situation a vacant block of land adjoining the Catholic Church on its southern side was bought by the Casterton Parish and on this block was erected a huge and magnificent building known as Our Lady of Mercy College. It opened with a great flourish and fanfare in the year 1907. Within this two storied brick building the Order of Catholic Nuns lived and taught, both boarders and day scholars, a system of education from the primary to the leaving class. Typical of the subjects taught, were home economics, music, languages, accountancy, religion, sport and of course the 3 R's. Attendance was not confined to those of the Catholic faith, but this college of education found favour with the parents of children who followed all the different branches of Christian beliefs.





Post office 1897



Did you know? –the magnificent air ambulance service available in our district uses these state-of-the-art Beechcroft King-Air aeroplanes, worth \$4M each.



CDHS is located at the **Casterton Visitor Information Centre**
e-mail: castertonhistorical@hotmail.com

PO Box 48, Casterton 3311
Phone: 5581 2070

To visit the Casterton Community Museum:
call David Coventry on **5581 2475** or email at davidcoventry@yahoo.com.au

To contribute to this newsletter, please contact Ros at the Visitor Information Centre on 5581 2070 or e-mail at roscov48@bigpond.com
H tel 5581 2875

Quite apart from this school of learning, there had been at the same time, a further Catholic Primary School in action in a huge brick hall which was the home of the Hibernian Society, a mutual benefit society, which looked after the members wants in the matter of health and distress. This hall was adjacent to the Catholic Church and had dividers in it, which gave it three rooms where classes 1 to 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 8 and Merit were taught. As time progressed it was considered to be unsuitable for the large number of pupils attending, so the parish bought three housing properties opposite in Robertson Street and built a very modern and commodious school.

Today we see this school under the title of the Sacred Heart Primary School and staffed by a secular group of teachers still teaching the 3 R's together with a distinct religious flavour. Not so with the Convent, built as it was on the brow of a hill which had a curvature roadway cut into it, this huge brick building was to become a victim of natural attrition. During the early 1930's to prevent collapse, huge flying buttresses had to be built on its western frontage and this tended to stabilise it from becoming a victim of the vibrations coming from the traffic using the roadway below it.

Despite this on the occasion of a severe storm in the 1960s the huge northern facing wall fell out of the building causing costly repair work to be done. Various other matters surfaced, such as the decline in boarders attending, the lack of vocations to the Nunnery and the huge cost of maintaining such a massive building. It was decided to close this place of learning and domicile the remaining elderly Nuns in a more domestic type of dwelling.

The boarding part of the Convent was closed in 1962 and by 1963 it was decided to close down as a teaching college, then came the heart rending decision to demolish this massive construction before it self-destructed. Where once stood this magnificent edifice of learning is the grassed playground of the Sacred Heart Primary School.

All around the township of Casterton, as large estates were broken up into smaller holdings, communities established a hall, a school and sometimes a store and post office to cater for the needs of the nearby settlers. I have read somewhere that in the early days of our country and as settlement took place that the Education Department endeavoured to establish schools in these outlying areas to service the children of these settlers.

The policy of these times was that no children should be more than four miles from a school. In my time of schooling, 1932-40, I recall pupils arriving per foot, riding ponies even to driving all manners of horse drawn vehicles. We saw dotted around the country side small, in some cases, one roomed schools some made out of timber, some of local stone, some with an attachment which catered for the living needs of the teacher. In some cases where there was a teacher shortage the schools would operate with one teacher two days a week at one school and three days a week at the next school.

Consolidation and motor bus altered all this and today we see pupils being bussed in from all outlying districts to the three very efficient schools of learning that we are fortunate to have in our township of Casterton.

CDHS WEBSITE: we are the Web, visit us
at <http://www.swvic.org/castertonhistoricalsociety.htm>