

“Joe” Millerd

Clarrie Neal

"Joe" Millerd was the headmaster at Riverstone Public School from the 1st December 1939 until he retired in December 1949.

Though he was a firm disciplinarian in the days of school when discipline was a strong tradition, he was a popular figure amongst his pupils and was highly regarded by most parents.

He was born in Melbourne in 1885. His full name was James Francis Millerd. His parents came from the Victorian town of Euroa. His grandparents were amongst the early settlers of that district.

For some unknown reason, Riverstone was the only town where he was known as "Joe", and to most of us children at school it was 'old Joe'. In all other districts he was referred to as Jim. Perhaps it was because at that time every kid in Riverstone had a nickname, so why not the headmaster.

As a young man Joe had become a teacher in the Victorian Education system. To further his education Joe came to Sydney in early 1900's to attend the Sydney Teachers' College, and also commenced attending the Sydney University of an evening to gain his degree in Economics.

It was while attending the Teachers College that he met his wife to be, Evelyn Adele Smith. They became engaged as World War 1 broke out but decided not to marry until Joe returned home from the war. During the war Evelyn became a teacher at schools as far west as Forbes and Bourke, which must have been quite an experience in those days.

Joe enlisted in the Motor Transport section of the A.I.F. 5th Division; because motors were in their infancy he often remarked how self reliant they had to be. The 5th Division went to France in 1916 and because of the policy that those who went early were the first to come home, Joe did not return home to Australia until 1919.

Joe and Evelyn married shortly after his return and their only child Adele was born in 1921. Joe continued to teach in Sydney until he received his first appointment as a headmaster at Tocumwal in 1926. He followed this appointment with four years at Bellingen and seven years at East Cessnock. He was appointed headmaster at Riverstone School on the 1st December 1939 and he held this position until he retired in December 1949.

While in Riverstone they lived in one of the four meatworks houses in Garfield Road, opposite Creek street. The family was fortunate that during their ten years in Riverstone there were no major floods, though Adele recalled that one flood did come up to their back door.

Adele recalled during the evacuation of Dunkirk in the 2nd World War her father sat up all night listening to radio reports of the events. Because he had been there and really understood the circumstances, he was fearful they would not be able to save all the troops.

Jim Russell was the Deputy Headmaster from 1944 to 1948 and had the following comments to make in the 1983 *Riverstone Public School Centenary* booklet:-

"The Principal was James Francis Millerd, one of the kindest, most humane men I have ever met, and with whom I formed a friendship until his death many years later. Riverstone was his final posting and his dedication to that school was contagious.

He was quite a character - he referred to World War 1 as 'the last disturbance'. Father Coffey, the priest who gave Scripture lessons once a week, once asked him with a very straight face if he was referring to the Crimean War! Like all school principals, James was plagued by the loss of keys. In desperation he arrived one morning with the Staff toilet key attached to almost half a railway sleeper on which was written "Lose this if you can".

With many teachers absent during the War in the Services we saw the first of the "retreads" - retired teachers who came back to help out. At the beginning of one school year a young girl fresh out of teachers college arrived, on the same day as a very old "retread".

"We've got 'em from the cradle to the grave, lad" quipped Joe Millerd.

Meryl Fleming, the young ex-student, played the piano very well and after school hours, while awaiting the late train from Riverstone, we would while away some hours with piano and flute. James always referred to these sessions as piano-banging- flutin'- tootin' shows.

Meryl, shortly after arrival at Riverstone, married Bob Bromley, then teaching at Adjungbilly. From that day on Joe always referred to her by the name of that remote school. Joe referred to most other females as "Lasses" or "Goldilocks".

Joe was an ardent tree lover - on Arbor Day 1944 we held a tree planting in Riverstone Park and the then Director of Education, Mr. J.G. McKenzie attended."

David Brown, later to become a School Principal, was a pupil from 1943 to 1948. He had this to say in the *Centenary Booklet*.

"Mr. Millerd was the 6th class teacher as well as being the school principal. One always spoke to Mr. Millerd with awe, though he was a kindly, sincere man. The epitomy of childhood endeavour was to earn a crown rubber stamp off Mr. Millerd for good work."

Being headmaster at a school in those days was an additional duty because you still had a class to teach, at Riverstone Joe always taught the 6th class.

Judith Lewis remembers Joe as a very compassionate man who loved to talk on his experiences of the 1st World War, and asking such questions as "where did the saying 'Go west young man' come from"? Sometimes a correct answer would be rewarded with a penny from Joe's pocket. He often referred to his pupils by their pet or nickname and always referred to Judith as 'Goldilocks'.

Bobby Parkes remembers Joe as a very reasonable man and a good teacher who used to walk to and from the school every day. Like all other pupils he remembers Joe walking around the class with a piece of chalk in his left hand, ready to be thrown at any pupil who was not paying attention. More often than not, he would say nothing, - pupils realising a piece of chalk meant 'sit up and take notice' as he continued on with the lesson.

Joe retired at the end of 1949; though after a few years he returned to part-time teaching at the Correspondence Teaching School at Blackfriars School in Sydney. Joe Millerd passed away in 1968 aged 83 years.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information supplied by Joe Millerd's daughter Adele, Judy Lewis and Bob Parkes, February 2000.