

# Riverstone Public School

*Judith Lewis*

*Riverstone Public School* opened in January 1883. Prior to this time, children in Riverstone could either attend one of two private schools known to exist or travel by train to Windsor Public School, which had been opened in 1869. The two closest public schools were at Windsor Road (presumably Rouse Hill Public which opened in 1875) or Rooty Hill, both some 4 miles distant from Riverstone. Other schools already existing in the neighbourhood were Vineyard Provisional (1872) and Nelson Roman Catholic, which also became a Public School in 1883.

Little is known of one of the private schools. It was run by *Mr Clem Daley* in the *Temperance Hall*, adjacent to the present day *Police Station*. The second private school (well documented in State Archival material relating to *Riverstone Public School*) was conducted by a German, *Daniel Tideman*, 38 years of age, in *Mr George Myers'* farmhouse. This building still stands, unoccupied, in Garfield Road, on the sweeping bend to Marsden Park, opposite the Shields' family properties.

On 28 January 1878 residents, represented by *George Myers, Charles Maddocks and John Schofield Jnr.*, applied for funding for this school to become a Provisional School. This application was declined by the Council of Education on 11 February 1878, on the recommendations of the Inspector, *Mr Johnson*. His reasons were – that an average attendance of not more than 11 children could be maintained, – that the schoolroom was of *an objectionable kind*, – that the older children could conveniently attend schools that already existed in *the neighbourhood*.

On 21 August 1879 the residents of Riverstone again applied to the Council of Education, this time for the establishment of a Public School, under the provisions of the Public Schools Act. The local committee acting on behalf of the residents was *Joseph Parrington, Publican and Storekeeper, Thomas Cuneen, Farmer, and John Schofield Jnr., Farmer*.

The population of the school district was now given as *about 100*. Sixteen families undertook that their children would attend the school. Of the 47 children listed on the application form 19 were boys, 28 girls, and their ages ranged from four to fourteen. Families were: *Parrington, Curry, Greig, Daniels, Curran, Easson, Williams, Cuneen, Myers, Baker, Vinauer, Schofield, Smith, Stubbs, Drayton, Ryan and Hyland*.

The Inspector described the residents as *chiefly employed in wood-cutting. There are Meat-Works and a Saw Mill established in the locality which afford employment to a number of people. A few farms are also to be found on the outskirts of the town*. He described Riverstone as *a rising township. Several buildings have been erected in the neighbourhood and a substantial addition to its population has been added within the past eighteen months*.

Mr A.H. McCulloch of 335 George Street, Sydney donated land to the Council of Education with the proviso that a school be erected without delay. This land was one acre bounded by Market Street and Windsor (now Garfield) Road. The Inspector originally chose a site closer to the railway line on the corner of Pitt Street and Windsor Road. He then rejected both sites in favour of land between Castlereagh and Elizabeth Streets on the north eastern side of Oxford Street because the land was higher and was sufficiently removed from the Abattoirs and Public House.

*Inspector Murray and Chief Inspector McCredie* spent much of 1880-81 “passing the buck”. Original plans and specifications were lost between the two inspectors and on 6 July 1881 the Architect for Public Schools was asked to prepare fresh plans. On 19 August Joseph Parrington and John Schofield Jnr. wrote to the Minister of Education asking for the long promised school for the children to be erected *as parents are greatly distressed to see them growing up without any means of instruction.*

On 5 December 1881 a letter to Mr Bowman MLA accompanied by a list of 50 children’s names stated that 27 children were travelling to school at Windsor, leaving at 10:35 a.m. and returning at 2:30 p.m., *a most unsatisfactory arrangement.*

The land offered by McCulloch was accepted. Plans and specifications drawn up by Government Architect Kemp were for *a schoolroom accommodation for 30 pupils in one department with a teacher’s residence of two rooms and a kitchen attached.* Tenders were invited through the Windsor papers in January 1882. It was recommended that the buildings be constructed of weatherboard, with the estimated cost, including out offices, water supply, fencing and furniture, being £500. Five tenders were received and Mr Johnson’s tender, for a brick building, was accepted in March 1882.

William Langton, who was teaching at the Catholic School in Windsor, was appointed the school’s teacher. William and Mary Langton had six children. On 11 December 1882 William wrote requesting that a temporary wash house and kitchen be added to the two roomed residence *as of course I cannot have all six children in one little room.* William claimed he could *get them put up in a few days* at a cost of £10.

Kemp, the Architect, advised *that permanent addition be made for two rooms with store closet, and extension of the verandah at a cost of £247* as the residence was *too small for any teacher with a family.* This recommendation was accepted but *in the meantime the teacher has been authorised to erect a temporary kitchen and wash house at a cost of £10.*

The school opened in January 1883 in a schoolroom measuring 20 feet by 17 feet (6.1 x 5.2 metres). It was intended to accommodate 42 pupils, the Inspector had estimated the average attendance would be 23, in the first fortnight it was 41.2. On 29 June the enrolment was 75. A weathershed built on to the

schoolroom, that could serve for teaching purposes, was erected by mid 1884. It cost £57. The weathershed became the classroom for the two Junior Classes which were taught by *Mary Langton*.

*Mary Langton* received no salary other than the usual needlework allowance paid to the teacher's wife. On the needlework afternoon Mary's daughter took the class whilst Mary taught needlework. William's salary was £14 per month. When he retired in *September 1886* he received an annual pension of £109/7/6. By this time the average pupil attendance was 90. In the *Back to Riverstone* articles in the *Hawkesbury Gazette* of 29 June 1934 it was noted *The late Doctors Frederick and William Langton were sons of Riverstone's first schoolmaster.*

*Bernard Carroll* replaced William Langton and by *July 1892* there was an application from residents for removal of the school to a more suitable site. On *15 September 1908*, with an enrolment of over 200, and a staff of four teachers, the urgency of this telegram from Headmaster *Michael Myers* to the Chief Inspector was understandable: *Three assistants absent, two sick, one visiting dying mother, SEND SOME ONE!*

*Michael Myers* was to serve the school until his death, during his long service leave, in 1913. *Henry Anstey* was headmaster during the war years and was the subject of many complaints and a lengthy enquiry. In supporting Anstey *Senior Inspector Blumer* commented, *I know of no less desirable location for a decent teacher, than amidst the slaughtermen of Riverstone. Miss Stella Brown*, a later teacher wrote, *Twelve months in such a place is long enough for any girl .... The people are a coarse lot who work at the local meatworks.*

Land for a new school was purchased on *22 May 1925* from the Estate of the Late *Ellen Schofield* for £150. On *11 September 1926* approval was given for a new school to be erected on this site. The contractor was *S.W. & R.C. Potter*, the contracted price was £7272, the final cost was £7358/12/8. The new school opened in 1929 and was described by Minister for Education *Mr R.D.H. Drummond* as *the finest in the land*. Land for a headmaster's residence was also purchased from the Schofield Estate at a cost of £30.

More favourable comments than those of Inspector Blumer were made by *Inspector E. Lewis* in his *June 1939* report: *This is one of the few model schools in the district. The fine gardens, the excellent wall decorations and other 'environmentals' create a good impression which is fully confirmed by closer contact with the actual school routine and instruction.*

In 1940 the enrolment was 320 and accommodation was described as *inadequate*. The headmaster from 1939 – 1949 was *James Millerd*, "Old Joe", as he was affectionately known. *Jim Russell*, First Assistant (now it would be called Deputy Principal), recalled James Millerd as *one of the kindest, most humane men, ....quite a character, ....Riverstone was his final posting and his dedication to that*

*school was contagious ....accommodation was one of our prime troubles and I remember teaching some time in a weathershed half covered in a roller awning .... After some agitation, which did not endear us to head office, we received an old army hut.*

In 1948 an *Infants' Department* was formed and in 1949 six acres of land in Elizabeth Street was resumed as a site for new buildings, originally intended to be an Infants' Department. Tenders were called in 1951 but work did not commence until 1954. The successful tenders, A.Q. Schubert & Sons Pty. Ltd., quoted a price of £55,555/5/-. Construction was completed in 1957 and the Elizabeth Street site became the *Primary Department*.

Prior to 1962, when Riverstone High School opened, most children had to travel to Richmond for their secondary schooling. Other secondary schools to cater for Riverstone children were at Parramatta, Homebush, Strathfield and later Blacktown. With the opening of a Pre-School in 1977 Riverstone was finally able to offer public education for all the schooling years. In 1999 students wishing to complete the last two years of high school must travel to *Nirimba* Senior High School at Quakers Hill.

Plans have been approved to consolidate *Riverstone Public School* on the one site, in Elizabeth Street where new buildings will cater for Pre-School to Year 6. When this eventuates, it will mean that, after over 115 years, there will then no longer be a Riverstone Public School in Garfield Road. Jim Russell's *old army hut* will be the only building moved to the Elizabeth Street site where it will fittingly become *The Community Room*.

The following teachers have been in charge of Riverstone Public School from 1883 to 1999.

William LANGTON	1 Jan 1883	James MILLERD	1 Feb 1939
Bernard CARROLL	12 Sep 1886	James GORMLEY	3 Jan 1950
Michael MYERS	30 Sep 1893	Keith HINGSTON	2 Feb 1954
Henry ANSTEY	8 Jan 1913	Francis DONOHUE	1 Feb 1955
George CHAPMAN	14 May 1919	Walter ALDRIDGE	2 Feb 1960
Thomas GILMORE	17 Jan 1920	Leslie BURNETT	1 Feb 1966
Arthur PASSMORE	17 Jun 1926	Nathaniel JAGGERS	28 Jan 1969
John YATES	15 Mar 1928	Ronald HILL	28 Apr 1972
William ROUSE	29 Nov 1932	Stanley FULKER	28 Jan 1978
John McILLWRAITH	3 Dec 1936	Allan REYNOLDS	28 Jan 1986
Graham DALEY	15 Feb 1937	Brian GILES-BROWN	13 Oct 1997