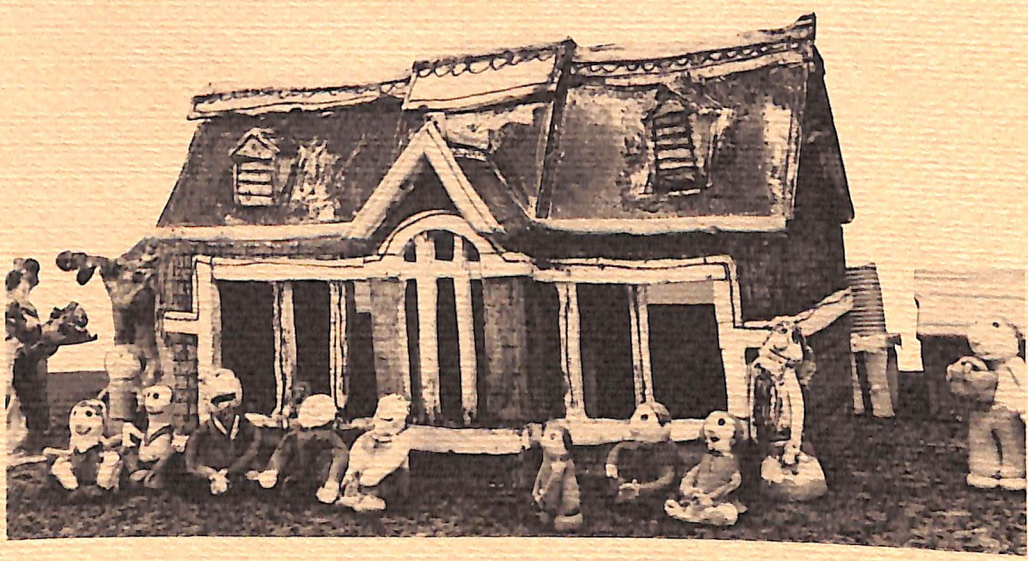


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Queuing for Cocoa

A History of
Mitcham Primary School
1888-1988



Published to celebrate the
School Centenary by the
Mitcham Primary School Council

Rob Wein

410

Queuing for Cocoa

A History of
Mitcham Primary School
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Mitcham Primary School Council

Joint Authors:

Andrew Hillier
Anita Larkins
Jenny Rogers
Lynne Ford
Shirl Larkin
Alan Cole

Foreword

This history was compiled to mark the Centenary of Mitcham Primary School and to permanently record in print some of the major events which show the development of the school.

Mitcham Primary's true 100th. birthday took place on the 24th. September 1988. The occasion was a very quiet affair indeed- it happened to fall on a Saturday during the September school vacation- and on Grand Final day what's more! ..a further consequence of the new four term year.

I paid a visit to the school around mid-day. The buildings, of course, were deserted and the playground was nearly so. On the basketball court a teenager was shooting goals while a young family of bike-riders, helmets on, rode leisurely through the yard. None of them seemed to realise the significance of the day.

Yes! the 100th. Birthday Committee has planned birthday celebrations for November 19th. and we that know that large numbers of pupils from the past will then join with the school's present day students in a big 'Back to' Celebration. But it won't be quite the same- birthdays, especially Centenaries, are meant to be held on the day.

In contrast, the site of the original school nearly a kilometre away was indeed a hive of activity. Shopping trolleys had been laden with weekend groceries and nearby parking spots were difficult to find. As I watched, I was convinced that here, too, no-one in the refurbished supermarket was aware of the events which took place on that two acre site exactly a century before. Much of the old school ground was actually inaccessible- the wire fence surrounding the building project enclosing much of the original school area. On a newly painted wall was a graffiti message for all of Mitcham to see..*SAM LOVES LISA*. Unfortunately though there was no plaque to remind the local folk that this was the site of that township's original place of learning.

I didn't stay long. All sense of the school's past had long disappeared. I felt glad that we had decided to permanently record some of it in this book.

The history of Mitcham School needed to be written for it relates to the experiences of more than nine thousand pupils whose names have been entered in the official school Register. It is also about their teachers and the members of the school community who worked so hard to improve on the basics which had been provided by the State for the education of Mitcham's young people.

The illustration on the front cover is part of a ceramic model depicting pupils assembled in front of the original Mitcham Primary School (cf page 18).

It was constructed during 1988 by children from all grades as part of a project funded by the the Arts in Education Program of the Nunawading City Council. Potter Michael Cantor was the Artist in Residence.

There appears to be some re-occurring themes which have marked the story of the school. These are:

- (i) the willingness of school community members to become involved in the school's development in an endeavour to make it a better place for their children
- (ii) the on-going and frequent requests made to the authorities from head teachers and the school committee to try to have works undertaken so that the buildings would be maintained in a reasonable state of repair
- (iii) the need for additional accommodation to adequately serve the ever-increasing numbers of pupils attending the school
- (iv) the scattered and divided location of the buildings providing accommodation for the children and staff
- (v) the sense that Mitcham School has always been the large school of the district and one where there is thus a certain feeling of stability

Unfortunately, many of the early documents and records are no longer to be found in the school. To help record our history, a keen band of researchers were however, able to locate much interesting material in the Education Department's files, in the local Municipal Library or from 'old' pupils themselves. Many of the notes gathered by a former Principal, Mr. Aubrey Richards for inclusion in the Education Department's history - 'Vision and Realisation' some twenty years ago, have also proven to be a wonderful resource.

Without the volunteer writers, 'Queuing for Cocoa' would never have brought to light such a wealth of interesting detail about the school's past. Those responsible for this work must be heartily thanked for their tenacity, resourcefulness and their ability to summarise and organise large quantities of source material. I wish to acknowledge the sterling efforts of the following members of the research and writing team:

Andrew Hillier, Anita Larkins, Jenny Rogers, Lynne Ford and Shirl Larkin.

I must also thank those members of the Mitcham community who have freely loaned us their own precious photographic and other records or who have provided us with so many interesting anecdotes relating to the school's history. I do hope there are memories here for each and every reader.

Alan Cole
Principal
Mitcham Primary School
September 1988

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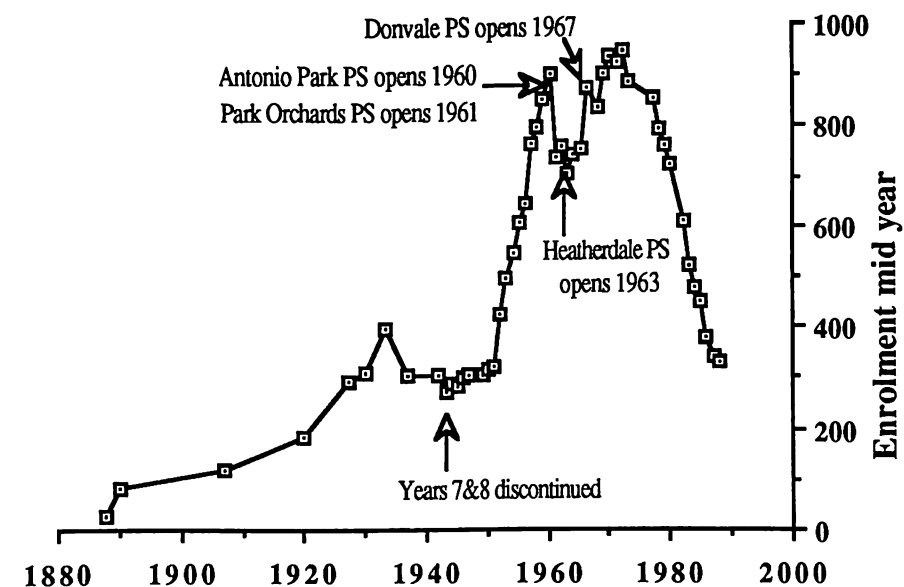
Head Teachers/Principals- Mitcham S.S. No.2904

John Edgoose	24/ 9/88	to	4/ 5/91
Henry Judkins	5/ 5/91	to	10/ 3/92
Peter Dial	11/ 3/92	to	28/10/92
Thomas Robinson	29/10/92	to	31/ 1/00
Frederick Mellor	1/ 4/00	to	10/ 9/11
Robert Burns	11/ 9/11	to	31/12/12
Peter Hotton	1/ 1/13	to	26/ 6/13
William Webster	21/ 9/13	to	20/ 9/14
Nathan Spielvogel	21/ 9/14	to	31/12/18
William Webster	1/ 1/19	to	26/ 1/20
Thomas Lee	27/ 1/20	to	2/ 8/27
Horace Fenton	1/ 1/28	to	6/ 6/31
Henry Lanyon	7/ 6/31	to	30/ 5/36
Rupert Hobbs	31/ 5/36	to	5/ 9/44
Edward Voce	5/ 9/44	to	28/ 5/51
Baden Chadwick (Acting)	29/ 5/51	to	31/12/51
Herbert Cadwallader	1/ 1/52	to	31/12/56
Arthur Tinney	1/ 1/57	to	31/12/58
William Baxter	1/ 1/59	to	31/12/65
E. Jenkins (Acting)	1/ 2/66	to	31/12/66
Aubrey Richards	1/ 1/67	to	17/ 2/74
Percy Anthony	1/ 1/74	to	31/12/76
Alexander Enterkin	1/ 1/77	to	31/12/81
Dulcie Stock	1/ 1/82	to	1/ 9/86
Alan Cole	1/ 1/87	to	present day

◉ In the Beginning ◉

Mitcham has always been a large school as primary schools go. During its first 70 years the nearest State schools were situated at Vermont, Nunawading, Ringwood, Blackburn and Doncaster. When Melbourne's suburbs expanded to engulf the Nunawading area thirty years ago, Mitcham State began to 'burst at the seams'. New district schools to relieve this pressure were not constructed until the early 1960's. Today, however, there are nine State Primary schools within a three kilometre radius.

Up until twenty years ago the total enrolment at the school had tended to mirror the trend in the population of the nation as a whole. The graph below shows the net enrolment at July for years where that figure is known. The outstanding feature is the obvious sharp rise in pupil numbers of the the 'Baby Boom' and high immigration years following the Second World War.



Mitcham Primary School Enrolments 1888-1988

Mitcham township was named after a town in Surrey in England and has had, until very recently, the character of a rural village. Amongst the very early families who settled in the Mitcham area were the Schwerkolts, Cooks, Aingers, Mc.Glones and Mc Lellands. The early settlers made a living by clearing their heavily forested land and selling the timber. Their farms were then used for orchards, market gardens, berry farms, vineyards, dairy herds and for poultry .

Mitcham and surrounding district developed rapidly after the building of Whitehorse Road in 1880 and the extension of the railway line from Hawthorn to Lilydale in 1882.

The red and white seams in the clay soil rendered the area largely unsuitable for agriculture. With abundant raw materials however, brick and tile makers and potteries were established. In 1886 the Australasian Tessellated Tile Company opened beside the Mitcham railway station (see map on page 3). This company grew to be one of the largest of its type in the world making agricultural pipes, paving tiles and drain pipes. With such an opportunity for employment, the population of the area increased rapidly.

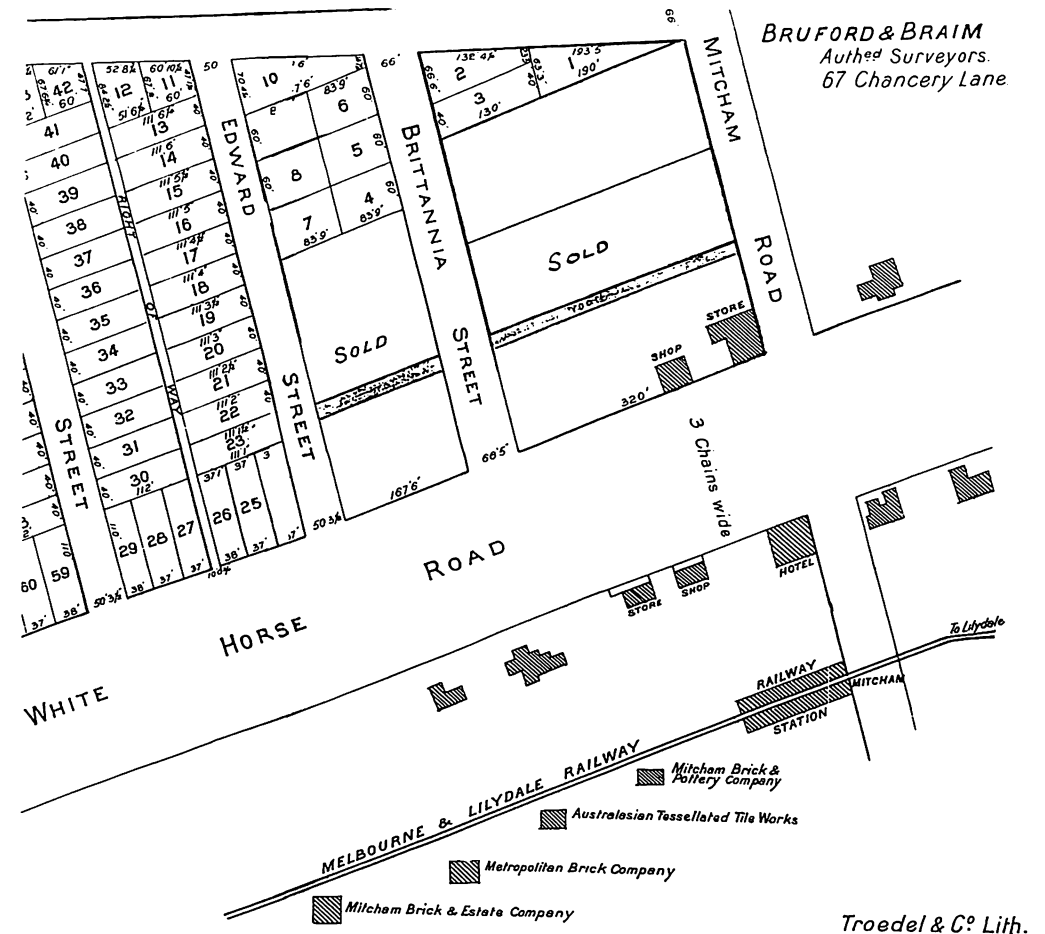
State primary education in Mitcham commenced in the same year that George Eastman invented the Kodak camera. This was however, well before the times of common-place items such as aeroplanes, zippers, gasoline, parking meters, television, computers and twelve years before Britain's colonies had federated to form Australia. Government schools had, sixteen years earlier, come under the State's Education Department and schooling was free, secular and compulsory for all children.

The first school in the Mitcham area was privately run and was supported by local residents. It catered for only 27 pupils. When this proved inadequate, a Mr. Titus of Mitcham wrote to the Education Department in February 1887 requesting a state school be provided for the district.

In the following year two acres of land near the corner of Whitehorse and Mitcham Roads was purchased from Messrs. Alfred Rawlings and Frederick Purches for £297. Mitcham State School opened on 24th September 1888, but until June 1890 all classes were conducted in the nearby Holy Trinity Church of England building, leased for this purpose until a permanent school was erected.

The temporary school-house was described by an Inspector of Works in 1888 as follows:-

This is a new wooden Church building, erected some 9 months ago. The glass of windows is perfect. Everything is in good order with the exception of the back door which overlaps and does not work freely. One knob is missing from the lock at the front door. The ground is not fenced in.



An Early Map of part of Mitcham Township

The rental for the school room was to be £30 per annum. On the day after opening the school the new Head Master wrote to the Education Department:-

Sir,
I have the honour to inform you that I have this day opened Mitcham State School No. 2904 but I am much put about for the want of maps, Slates, Books & Wall cards. I am also afraid I shall be much put about by the Church Authorities interfering with my School arrangements and leaving the place very dirty which was actually the case this morning the Odd-fellow's (sic) used the room last night and left it as above; and I have, heard of no arrangement being made by the church people for putting all right after Sunday service. I shall feel obliged if you will be good enough to correspond with the Rev. Mr. Maxwell on the subject.

I have the honour to be
Sir,
Your most Obedient Servant
John J. Edgoose

It wasn't long before the Church also had a reason for complaint. The Education Department was apparently quite tardy in paying its dues. The parson wrote the following note to the Department on 5th December, 1888:-

Sir,
I beg to make application for the payment of 3 months rent of Schoolroom at Mitcham October, November and December. The latter is scarcely due, but it will save time and trouble if it be included with the other two, which are overdue.

I have the honour to be
your obedient servant.
A. Maxwell

The initial teaching staff of the school turned out to be quite a family affair. Fifty-seven year old John J. Edgoose was the first Head Teacher at a salary which averaged about £4/4/0 per week. His daughter Alice was the 'Pupil Teacher' and his wife Sarah Edgoose acted as assistant and 'Sewing Mistress' until a more properly qualified person was appointed to the role in December 1890. In seeking Alice Edgoose's employment, John Edgoose wrote to the Education Department's Acting Secretary in November 1888:-

Sir,

I have the honour to make application for the appointment of my daughter Alice Bessie to the Pupil Teachership of the above school. She is the only one on the Rolls who has passed fully in the 5th and 6th Classes and therefore is the only one eligible for the position, indeed she has been assisting me ever since I opened the School and shows sufficient aptitude in the art of teaching to warrant her appointment. She is of moral character and sound constitution, and I doubt not, will make a good teacher. She was 15 years of age last August.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant.
John J. Edgoose.

The overcrowded conditions together with the lack of necessary school equipment encouraged Mr. Edgoose to pressure the Education Department into action to provide a suitable permanent building.

In January 1890 a contract was let for construction of a one room brick schoolhouse (including an 'infant gallery' which was not actually built until 1915) on the Whitehorse Road site. The 50' x 20' building was soon ready for occupation by the local students, whose numbers had soon grown to 60.

Mitcham State was to be classified as a 'fifth class' School. This classification was in line with Education Department standards of the day. When the school first opened it was given a 'fourth class' classification, but inspectors reported that Mr. Edgoose was 'inefficient and incompetent' and this caused the school being downgraded. John Edgoose, in his defence, claimed the children at Mitcham were simply 'backward' or had come poorly educated from other schools.

For many years the school building suffered from problems of dampness of the west wall- effectively only a 9" thick internal brick wall. As the letter on the following page illustrates, the Mitcham pupils continually suffered from frequent colds and sore throats during the winter months.

State School No. 2904
Witcham
July 17th 1891

Sir
I have the honor to inform you that work was resumed at the above school to day, the children having been dismissed on Tuesday morning on account of the dampness of the walls.

I might add that the west wall is still extremely damp, though large fires have been kept burning all the week.

I have the honor to be,

Sir
Your most obedient servant
Jane Clanchy

The Secretary
Education Department
Melbourne.

The consequences of the damp building

Following the retirement of Mr. Edgoose early in 1891 an inventory of property revealed the school possessed the following items:-

1 Teachers desk and stool	1 Chart Mechanical Powers	2 chairs
12 desks	Barnard Smith's Ariths	26 Copy Books (new)
Maps	12 Table Books	9 Slates (large)
1 World	Needlework and Cutting Out	25 Slates (medium)
1 Australasia	2 Longman's Geogs	4 Slates (small)
1 Victoria	Infantry Drill	18 Slates (unframed)
1 Europe	Drill Manual	3 Tanks
1 Asia	Empire History	Inspector's Register
1 Africa	Royal Readers	School Register
1 America	3 V	Punishment Register
47 Ink Wells	3 IV	Hackwood's Morals
3 Board of Health Sheets	4 III (very much worn)	1 table
1 Alphabet Card	6 II	4 easels
Parke's Health	12 I	1 cupboard
6 Reading Tablets		5 blackboards



The class of 1894 - the earliest photographic record of the school

⊗ The New Century ⊗

The village of Mitcham was surrounded by the dangers of 'the bush' as this 'Reporter' article of 1900 warns:-

'WARE SNAKES AT MITCHAM

Those take their walks abroad in the vicinity of the bush as the weather becomes warmer, are cautioned to keep their weather eye open for snakes. We are moved to make that remark because already several reptiles have been spotted in various parts of the district. On Saturday last a large snake of the Diamond Brand was on view at Mr. N. Chugg's, Mitcham. It was five feet in length and was very vicious when first discovered and fought fiercely, until a sturdy bushman jumped on it with both feet and smothered its life out. We don't care to mention the owner of the feet. Luckily when the tussle was in progress, there were no ladies about, otherwise a fainting match might have been added to the horrors of the situation.

Following the turn of the century Mitcham State School's population began to grow quite rapidly. By 1907 student numbers had increased to 120 and local parents were petitioning the Education Department for increased accommodation.

A pupil of the year 1905 on returning after an absence of 63 years wrote:

The Sugar gums and Oaks are still standing, the ones we planted on Arbor Day 1905, they were very small then. I can remember the senior boys digging the holes for the planting the day before Arbor Day and as the ground was very dry Mr. Mellor told them to fill the holes with water to soak before planting.

Head Teacher Frederick Mellor's efforts to associate the school with the wider Mitcham community was widely welcomed. In the Recreation Hall he organised concerts and other 'first -class entertainments' which were well supported by Mitcham residents. So successful were these musical endeavours that Mr. Mellor was able to undertake the formation of a small orchestra in the district.

The 'Reporter' of Friday September 7th 1900 describes one such event:-

SCHOOL ENTERTAINMENT AT MITCHAM

The exhibition and entertainment by the Mitcham State School children, held in the Mitcham hall last Friday, was a great success, over £15 being realised.

The children's work at the exhibition was greatly admired especially that done by the boys who exhibited fancy flower tins, scoops, net bags, macrame brackets, photo easels and also several novelties, such as a stamp table, newspaper or music stand (the latter being made from 3 slate frames, the master's cane, 4 cotton reels and rings all skillfully worked with macrame twine in delicate shades). The stalls were ably presided over by Misses Wheeler and Horner, and Mr. Mellor, who worked indefatigably to ensure success.

The entertainment under the direction of Mr. Fred Mellor in the evening passed off successfully, the several items being enthusiastically received. The programme included physical drill (boys), dumb bells (girls), action songs by the infant classes, (the numbers were especially well done and received great applause). The entertainment concluded with the popular cantata, "Whittington and his Cat". The principal characters were sustained by Frank and Ethel Mellor, W. Antonio, B. Mynott and E. Lee. The various choruses throughout the cantata were well rendered, and the principals also deserve a word of praise for the manner in which they acted. The accompaniments were supplied by an orchestra under Mr. Mellor's direction, which also opened the concert with an overture, "Crown Diamonds", rendered in an efficient manner.

Such involvement resulted in even greater community support for the school. At the annual 1905 Christmas entertainment, £5 was raised for the purchase of a bookcase and the first school 'library' was thus established.

In 1907 a twelve year old pupil of Mitcham State School died of gastric influenza. Her name was Ivy Campbell and the school community joined forces to raise money for her burial. The Australasian Tessellated Tile Company in Mitcham, where her father worked as an engineer, provided glazed tiling for her grave, which today can still be seen at the Box Hill Cemetery. The inscription on her tombstone reads:-

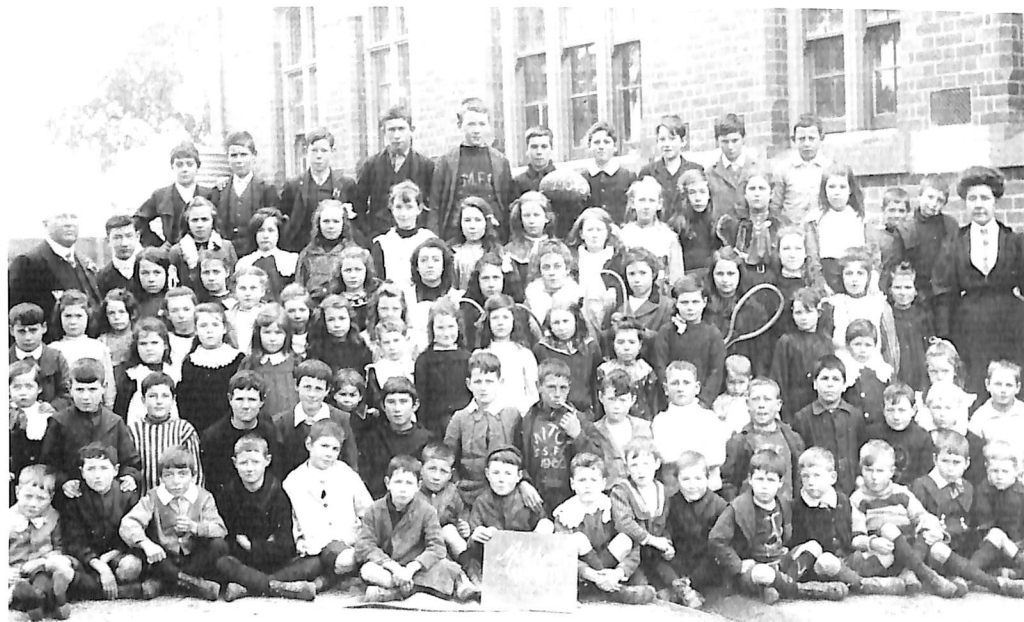
In Memory of Ivy Campbell from her school mates
State School Mitcham 25.03.1907.

A most unfortunate fatal accident happened during 1908. Some children were playing outside the school grounds on waste land on the other side of Mitcham Rd. A steam driven traction approached at 4 m.p.h. drawing:

..a kind of lorry containing a steam plough, a wagon with a load of fire wood, a travelling house (a single room) on wheels and a dray with a 400 gallon tank of water..

Stanley Johnson, along with some others, ran alongside to grab a ride. As he was sitting on the pole which attached the travelling house to the firewood a sudden jerk threw Stanley off. The boy tried to scramble out on all fours but he was crushed by the wheels of the travelling house.

Everyone was extremely distraught after the incident and on the Inspector's recommendation, Mr. Mellor dismissed the school for the afternoon.



Head Teacher Mellor and Miss Cowderoy with the 1909 pupils

◎ Some Memories of the Early Days ◎

Robert Burns was appointed Headmaster in 1912 and immediately sought to improve conditions in the school. At this time one large classroom housed over 90 children in eight grades, with three hardy teachers doing their best to instruct the pupils! The Education Department's solution was to relocate the infant classes in the local Church of England Hall (leased for ten shillings per week), to provide more desks for the school and to erect a partition to divide the classroom more effectively.



An early photograph looking north from the vicinity of the railway station

A new teacher arriving at Mitcham in 1912 wrote of the school and its surrounding district to a distant colleague as follows:-

I am teaching in a school where conditions are hard. There is only one room in which there are ninety children under three teachers. The room is poorly lighted (sic.) and it has very bad sounding qualities.

With so many classes and children in one room, there is far too much to distract the attention. The blackboards are terribly scratched .

The children, unlike your people, are not very nicely mannered so I shall have the unpleasant duty of teaching some of them what they should learn at home, namely politeness.

Mitcham is situated on the Warburton and Lilydale line and has a regular suburban train service with Melbourne. The place is only a small country township but it has extremely picturesque surroundings. Away to the North, one can see the mountains round Warburton, Healesville and Ferntree Gully.

Today, these are dimmed with mist so much of the beauty is taken away. Away to the NW one can see the Plenty Ranges with the most prominent peak, Mount Sugarloaf standing out clearly. The soil round Mitcham is chiefly composed of clay extremely useful in the making of bricks and tiles. The latter are made from the finer clay and some very pretty paintings are made on it. The factory is rather a large one as about 180 men are employed. The township itself is well surrounded with eucalyptus scrub which renders the places rather healthy. There is no large timber as I suppose that is has all been cut down for firewood.

We are not having any celebrations here for Empire Day but I believe that a full supply of energy is to be stored up to make Arbor Day really a grand day.

The new Infant Gallery was finally added to the existing structure in 1915, temporarily easing the overcrowding which had eventually resulted in 50 children being taught in what was termed 'an old shed'.

A lack of space was not the only problem to beset Mitcham State School in the years just preceding the First World War. Due to the poor conditions the school building was declared 'unsanitary' in 1902 and again in 1911. Lavatory accommodation was very primitive. Leaking windows and roofs were also frequently remarked upon. The damp patches in walls continued to cause much consternation, along with the absenteeism of pupils in winter.

Mr Arthur Sewart of Doncaster remembers that the games played by the school children included: thro'-the-trees, marbles, cherry bobs (boiled until clean), saddle-my-nag, building houses on the pine needles, cigarette card collecting, quoits, boxing with gloves and,of course,football.



The corner Mitcham and Whitehorse Rd just south of the school site

In the classrooms, children sat at long bench seats with ten pupils per desk, working on slates and writing with pen and ink in their copy books.

Some of the memoirs of the late Mrs Hilda Boxhall written 25 years ago provide a fascinating first hand picture of her 1913 Mitcham school-days

I can still remember my start at the Mitcham school. It was a very hot morning in the middle of March. I was in the third grade. The Headmaster, a Mr. Webster, introduced me to my Teacher Miss Giles (later Mrs Livermore of Vermont) and left me to my fate. As it was so hot, Miss Giles, who taught both third and fourth grades together had her class, outside on the south side of the school in the shade. They were learning to recite "The Miller of the Dee". She was most particular about little things and it annoyed her very much to hear them say, "The Miller of The Dee" instead of first "The Miller of The Dee".

The whole school fascinated me. There were two brick rooms with slate roofs, a door to the north with a porch over it and one to the west also with a porch over it.

Towards the southern end of the school; there were windows facing Mitcham Road - too high for the pupils to watch the passing show - and a huge window in the south wall. Inside the larger room was where the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th grades were taught, and through a doorway, at which a tent flap was hung as a curtain, the little ones were being taught. The staff consisted of Mr. Webster who with his son Bruce drove from Surrey Hills in a Rubber-tyred jinker each morning. Miss Cowderoy was the infant mistress with Miss Freda Giles as assistant.

Within a very few weeks the Education Department were convinced that we were overcrowded so the infants were sent to the Hall - now the Scout Hall; and the third and fourth grades shifted into what had been their room.

In those days the Head blew a whistle for us to fall into line each morning. We had ten minutes deep breathing exercises and then marched into school singing whatever tune Florrie Hatt liked to play on the piano. Inside we would bow and say "Good Morning" to our teacher, do the same to the child on either side of us, then Florrie would play a well known children's Hymn usually "All things Bright and Beautiful". After singing this we would be ready for the days work. At the close of lessons Florrie would again play for us to bow to our neighbours and sing:-

The Hours of School are over, and we are going Home
Goodbye-e-e, Goodbye-e-e for we are going Home
We then marched out two by two.

The school ground was not as big as it is today and there was hardly a picket or paling in the fence. Gates were non-existent, (sic.) cows, dogs, horses and strayed children came and went at will. The smaller room was used every Tuesday and Friday by all the girls for their sewing lesson. Miss Cowderoy being the sewing mistress. On this day some of the boys went to Box Hill for sloyd work, others did clay modelling, whilst others did gardening. Most liked Tuesday afternoons. Mitcham School (Primary), had lots of interesting things I had never seen before. Water tanks with wrigglers in. Unusual toilets, marble tablets in memory of dead pupils- One of these told of some boy, Johnson who was killed by a traction engine on Mitcham Road in front of the school, pictures showing the battle of Trafalgar and long desks at which at least six pupils sat; Also blackboards on easels for the teacher to set-out work.

◎ The Great War ◎

The 1914-1918 War saw many ex-pupils of the school serving in the Armed Forces and some of them made the Supreme Sacrifice. The School Honour Roll shows that the following men enlisted:

George Allen	Albert Bedson	James Bruce
Robert Bruce	Cyril Campbell	Raymond Campbell
Leslie Campbell	Jack Davey*	Arthur Hogan*
Geoffrey Jones*	Rolf Jones*	Charles McGhee
Albert Mynott	James Mynott	William Mynott
Edward Mynott *	George Mynott	Alexander McLeod
Leslie McLeod	Arthur Newman	Alexander Steens
Henry Walker*	Frank Williams	

*Denotes killed in Action

In September 1914, barely a month after the Declaration of World War I, Nathan Spielvogel became Head Teacher, when William Webster was transferred. Mr. Spielvogel (Austrian by birth) later confessed to some fear of encountering anti-German sentiment because of his German-sounding name. The only reaction however was a letter written to the local newspaper "The Blackburn and Mitcham Reporter" complaining ...

that the programmes for the Mitcham School Concert 1915, were printed in German colours - red and black on white ...!

Under Mr. Spielvogel's guidance and patriotic instructions from the Education Department, the school's curricular activities were dominated by the world conflict. In the four years duration of the war, the girls' needlework classes made more than two hundred pairs of socks, as well as countless handkerchiefs, scarves, mittens and kit bags for the A.I.F. The senior boys made 'hundreds' of splints in their sloyd (carpentry) classes. They also collected and sold thousands of empty tobacco and boot-polish tins.

Head Teacher Spielvogel was a writer of some repute. On passing their Merit Certificate (i.e. year 8) pupils were presented with a small book of his own verse entitled 'Our Gum Trees'. On the following page is a reproduction of the title and preface pages of this book.

Our Gum Trees

and Other Verses

BY
NATHAN F. SPIELVOGEL

Author of
"A Gumsucker on the Tramp,"
etc.



1913
D. W. PATERSON CO. PTY. LTD.
COLLINS ST., MELBOURNE

PREFACE.

MUCH of this little Book of Verse was prompted by the desire that Young Australia should have metrical recitations on subjects that would appeal to their love of their homeland.

Too long have our School Books contained verses on subjects alien to Australian life and surroundings. It has been my ambition to break through this. May the publication of these verses in book form further this object.

I have included other verses, which are simply the expressions of the moods a solitary man has passed through, from the passive pessimism of a young man of twenty ("The Fatalist") to the fighting optimism of middle age ("Ego").

I wish to thank the various publications, in the columns of which these verses have appeared, for the unasked for permission to use these verses again in my little book.

NATHAN F. SPIELVOGEL.

"Shulome,"
Longwood.

The O.O's (*out offices*) might be more tidily kept; the children should be trained to keep the lids down. The drainage in both O.O's is bad. The girls O.O. needs a bricked floor...

The H.T. holds an exam monthly and the grade captain is appointed as a result of these exams. Position in the class is also determined by these exams...

Free-arm Drawing -In the drawing lesson good work was done by the children in their books and on the B.B. Some of the children were supposed to be doing free-arm drawing on millboards but as the millboards lay flat on the desk before the children it was not free-arm drawing at all...

Amid all the frenzied activity of the war years the small village of Mitcham remained almost unchanged. Writing for the 'Reporter' twenty years later Nathan Spielvogel described the Mitcham he left in 1918:

A small country Village, an hours drive from Melbourne with two wooden shanty pubs, kept by O'Donell and O'Callaghan, two stores - Hughes and The Red Store, Morris the Baker, and Homeman the Butcher, a lolly shop of Tufty Miles, a shed-of-a-post-office, a small Catholic School with some tombstones in the yard, two little churches and the school.

Each Arbor Day the school's 120 children marched out into Whitehorse Road and planted trees in memory of Mitcham boys who had died on active service. In the school grounds groves of wattles were planted in honour of every Mitcham soldier who had served at the front.

Every Friday the children sent gifts of fruit, flowers and eggs from local farms to Caulfield Military Hospital. In addition to all these war time activities, a concert was held once a month in aid of the Education Department's Patriotic Fund. In all, the school raised £250 and the pupils bought hundreds of pounds worth of War Savings Certificates.

The following comments reproduced from the Inspector's Report Book of 1917 which make interesting reading today:

⊙ More Room Please! ⊙

William Webster returned to the school as Head Teacher for the 1919 school year. During that year the school was raised from 5th to 3rd class by the Education Department as the average enrolments had reached 150.

School life was severely disrupted on Tuesday afternoon the 21st February 1921, when fire broke out in Barelli's Bakery, and flames quickly engulfed the other wooden shops in front of the school facing Whitehorse Road. The hot day hampered the Fire Brigade which was called from Box Hill and little could be done to save the shopping centre. The school remained closed for two days as the ruins smouldered. Despite being a financial disaster for the community and the shopkeepers, the fire was a source of great excitement to the children and a welcome relief from lessons. Only the senior boys who were attending woodwork classes at Box Hill and could see the smoke from Middleborough Road, remained truly disappointed.



Mitcham State School and children - a 1920's photo-

Throughout the 1920's growing school numbers and deteriorating physical conditions meant frequent changes and re-organisation of the school environs. Serious overcrowding in 1922 saw at one time, 88 pupils in a 20' x 27' room, 63 pupils in another room measuring 20' x 20', and a further 80 children in a bigger classroom measuring 32' x 24'. Cracks appearing in walls, plaster falling away and poor drainage problems all posed difficulties for the staff and students in the years before the present Mitcham Road site was developed. The Britannia St. Scout Hall and the Methodist Church were leased as classrooms when necessary.

The Department's Inspector had commented-

Work is carried on under difficulties in the middle and junior departments which are over-crowded. When three pupils sit in one desk it is more difficult to manage them...

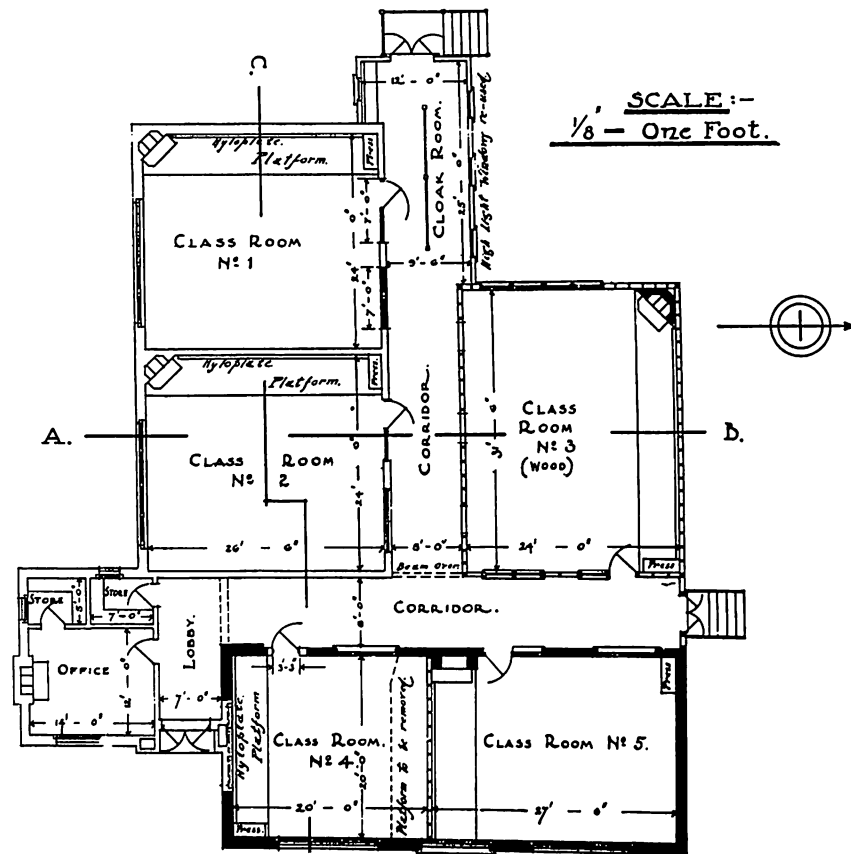
The Infant Mistress manages her department carefully and on good lines. I think the strap could easily be dispensed with. A slap such as I saw administered seems likely to do more harm than good; it certainly was not a dignified punishment.

During the period from 1922-26 additional land to complete the entire block right up to Victoria St. was acquired from landholders A. Miles, T. Hughes, G. Garrett, I. Porritt and the Shire of Blackburn and Mitcham.

The school's class 3 status meant a greater allocation of funds by the Education Department along with the building of urgently needed accommodation. Despite numerous deputations and letters by successive Head Teachers, the only alterations to the 1888 building had been the erection of an infant gallery in 1915. In 1922 a further deputation was made to the Education Department resulted in

- (a) the building of an additional of two classrooms and an office and
- (b) the purchase in 1928 (for £1,200) of part of Edward Sampson's orchard and Catherine Lardner's land half a mile north of the school.

Designs for a new single storey brick building of four class rooms, a staff room and Head Master's office at the cost of about £5,500 were adopted by the Department as early as 1924.



A plan of the original buildings at the 'Little School'

The majority of students came from the small family-run orchards which surrounded the township or were children of parents who were employed at the extensive works of the Australasian Tessellated Tile Company. Neither orcharding nor the limited employment opportunities existing at the Tile Company required higher educational standards than those offered by the basic but compulsory curriculum of State Education. As many of the children either joined their families in the orchards or worked alongside their parents at the Tile Works, further education was not considered a great necessity.

The alternatives open to boys and girls at Mitcham whose parents sought a broader education were the Higher Elementary Schools (High Schools) at Box Hill and at Camberwell or the gaining of a scholarship to one of the private schools. Either option meant facing the problems involved with considerable daily travel from Mitcham or with becoming a boarder. This situation remained until well into the 1950's when Mitcham High School was at last built, adjacent to the present primary school.

The tradition of Fredrick Mellor's annual school concert continued through the 1920's and 1930's. The recently demolished Mitcham Memorial Hall (built in the early 1920's) became the venue for these end-of-year concerts and the following 1926 effort was typical of the songs the children performed:

A Farm in Fairyland

Chorus:

Yes I've got a farm by Fairyland,
Up in the mountains high.
Far from the world we'll go hand in hand,
Sail along you and I.
I'll be your merry Fairy Queen
Bound with a golden band,
We will always be true
In our nest built for two
On a Farm in Fairy Land.

The 1926-8 Mitcham State School Football Team included:
R. Pratt, J. Alderton, A. Bedson, B. Bullen, R. Carter, W. Weist,
K. Charles, E. Williams, D. Miller, A. Grundy, W. Grundy, C. Owen,
C. Evans, J. Forbes, W. Taylor, E. Gilchrist, H. Waugh, C. Bates,
P. Bedford and N. Evans.

A District school competition was played against teams from Blackburn, Ringwood, Croydon, Boronia, Doncaster, Warrandyte. The Captain of this team, Robert (Bob) Pratt, later became a champion V.F.L. footballer with South Melbourne (the Swans) in its most successful years during the 1930's.

Despite a steadily increasing population in the area throughout the 1920's, limited opportunity existed for the children of Mitcham School to go on to further education after year 8.

Hot Cocoa in the Depression Years

The Foundation Stone of the new school was laid by the then local member Mr. E. W. Greenwood M.L.A. in November 1929. The building was duly occupied by the upper grades of the school on the 10th May 1930, and officially opened by the Minister for Public Instruction, Hon. Mr. J. Lemmon, on 16th May 1930.

The District Inspector in 1930 commented on the school's buildings and the curriculum :

The old building is clean, and the new modern building for the upper grades is in excellent order. It is regretted that the two schools are so far apart. Windows, walls and floors receive regular attention. The play pavilions are tidy and clean, and the O.O.s are kept in a sanitary condition..... the tops of the desks have been treated with walnut varnish stain. This is commended.

During the two days of the visit much very good teaching was seen. At times, though the new ideas were clearly presented, they were not always in the minds of the pupils. Further, the work at times was too easy, and insufficient ground was covered, especially in mathematics. Mental Arithmetic Lists are set daily in all grades. Rightly, these are often closely related to the written work of pupils. Thus principles and methods are revised. Practical Arithmetic is not neglected. The practice of pupils working the examples on the B.B. is commended..... Reading is fluent in most grades and all teachers, some more so than others, watch closely the speech of pupils. What can be more important than clear speech? To attain this among pupils should be an important part of the work of all teachers.

In place of plasticine, raffia and stencilling are suggested as suitable and interesting occupations. Needlework is well advanced. Singing is tuneful and expression is now being aimed at. A lullaby is essential in all grades for the development of sweet singing.

During this era a typical week at Mitcham State School followed a fairly rigid time-table as suggested by the Education Department:

- Monday: Pupils assembled around the flagpole in the morning to salute the flag and sing the National Anthem.
- Tuesday: (Morning) Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.
(Afternoon) Boys from the senior classes (Grades 6, 7, & 8) travelled by train or walked to Box Hill Boys' High School where woodwork classes were held. The senior girls remained for sewing, needlework and domestic science classes.
- Wednesday (Morning) Religious Instruction from local church members.
(Afternoon) Sporting activities - football, tennis, rounders, athletics, cricket, swimming (at Surrey Hills and later Ringwood), marching drill, basketball, crossball, tunnelball.

The work during the remainder of the week concentrated on the staple academic subjects of Writing, Reading and Arithmetic, whilst organised sports practice was encouraged after school.

In 1935 the combined school choir was asked to sing at the opening of the new Box Hill Town Hall- an event which was broadcast over radio station 3UZ.

For some years the school had had a very successful precision marching team which managed performances consistent enough to gain either first or second place in District Competition. The school's band made up of drum, fifes, symbols, flute and piccolo would beat time as the marchers practised in the junior school's quadrangle after classes.

In recalling school days, teachers and Headmasters are often remembered for particular traits, sayings or physical characteristics. Towards the end of the twenties the following piece of early graffiti from one of the school's shed testifies:

In Mitcham Road, Mitcham,
There is a school
And in the school there is a stool
And on that stool there sits a fool
And that is -----

No doubt somebody received the strap for this erstwhile composition.

Like so many places around Australia, Mitcham was severely effected by the Great Economic Depression of the 1930's. Although the Tessellated Tile Company survived the Depression, it was forced to lay off many of its employees, due to a dramatic slump in the demand for such materials. Families with one or more breadwinner retrenched from the works either moved from the area with all their belongings and/or withdrew their older children from school in order to compete for the few jobs available. These positions were actually often given to juniors because their wages were much lower than adults.

Families which worked orchard properties were a little better off. Despite the reduced income resulting from the slump in fruit prices on world markets, the crop was still able to support several families in food.

Despite the optimism expressed in the statement by both the Assistant Minister of Education (Hon. R. M. Cuthbertson) and Mr. Greenwood at the laying of the foundation stone in November 1929:

the erection of the whole school on the new site, and
the establishment of a junior technical school in the
present building

the Economic Depression had really put paid to grand plans for Mitcham State School within the next two years .

Mitcham School's local educational rival had always been St. John's Catholic School in Whitehorse Road (also 100 years old this year). As the only Catholic School for many miles around it took in children from as far afield as Ringwood, Croydon and Box Hill, as well as locals.

St. Johns, then located almost opposite Doncaster East Road, also became a victim of the Great Depression and for a short time St. Johns was forced to close. By 1931 the plummeting attendances which affected both schools were complicated at St. John's when the school's only teacher developed glaucoma and was forced to resign. The Parish was unable to find sufficient funds for a replacement and so the school remained closed until 1936 when economic circumstances had improved sufficiently to employ a new teacher. In the meantime St. John's students were sent to nearby Mitcham State School, temporarily boosting this school's low enrolments .

Despite the obvious and severe effects of the depression which tainted most of the decade, Mitcham State School continued with its involvement in the local community, throughout the 1930's.

Even the Mothers' Club did not escape the effects of the depression. Founded in 1926, when enrolments stood at about 270, the club provided a much needed parental link between the school administration and students. From the beginning, the Mothers' Club had succeeded in numerous fund-raising efforts to provide classroom equipment, teaching aids, students' welfare and in contributing to general aesthetic improvements to school grounds and buildings. However by 1931, dwindling enrolments, a drop in general attendance rates and a pre-occupation with economic survival saw only a handful of mothers available to give their time to the school and the club was forced to disband.

It was able to reform again the following year when twenty mothers attended a meeting on the 1st May, 1932. There was an election and the Treasurer reported that there was £4.17.6 in the bank. These were Depression times and a main consideration was to provide a hot cocoa drink to the children who stayed at school over the lunch-time. The new Headmaster, Henry Lanyon, even suggested that school attendances had increased due solely to the cocoa supplied by the Mothers' Club. Hot cocoa went on for many years in the colder months of the year and it has been mentioned as late as 1948. (In the 1950's cocoa was replaced by the one third of a pint bottles of Free Milk.) Three local dairies gave donations of milk for the cocoa, firewood was supplied, and a roster was set up by the mothers. Equipment consisted of boilers, basin, wash-up dish, wooden spoon and a wood-burning copper - all prepared in the school-yard where the children lined up with their enamel mugs.

To raise funds initially, the Mothers' Club asked the Rev. J. J. Brown to give a lecture entitled "Heads and Faces" and charged a 6d. admission fee. So started the long tradition of money raising activities which stretches right through to the present day. Throughout the Thirties mothers held 'Australian Teas' (an afternoon tea with an 'opportunity' table). Sometimes a speaker attended these Teas to speak on subjects such as 'Immunisation against Diphtheria'.

Christmas treats for the children were always arranged and functions like a 'Children's Ball', a 'Frolic' or a concert were held as a means of raising money to finance these. Three to four hundred children attended- we know this by the number of 'Dixies' (ice-creams) which were bought.



The Fife and Drum Band 1939

A glance through the Minute Books of Mothers' Club Meetings during the 1930's further indicates the types of fund raising activities undertaken on behalf of the school:

- 10th May, 1932 Provide newspaper for sanitary paper for the toilets
- 25th May, 1933 Decision to buy piano - cost £30. Mothers' Club donation £5/7/2. Balance to be raised by School Committee
- 27th April, 1934 Children's Ball,- 275 Tickets sold £13/15/9 profit.
- 11th June, 1935 Portrait of the King bought for £1/7/6.
- 11th June, 1936 Mr. Lanyon's Farewell.

In December 1937 the children from senior school asked that money normally spent on their Christmas treat (a sum of £2/2/0) be sent instead to 'After-care of Infantile Paralysis'. In fact several Mitcham children died in the polio. epidemic and youngsters were prevented from starting school at the

height of this epidemic in 1936-7. Many beginners turned six years old before they were able to commence their formal education.

A popular event in the school calendar between the wars was the annual excursion to Williamstown Beach. Again the Mothers' Club came to the fore, arranging the hire of a special express train from Mitcham station, cutting picnic lunches and donating free merry-go-round rides. The Mothers' Club is remembered with great affection for its many and varied fund raising activities becoming an integral part of the on-going history of Mitcham State School.

School yard games of the thirties included marbles, top spinning, hopscotch, skippy, knuckles, card swaps, and rounders. Organised sports such as football, basketball and cricket were played against other schools in the district, but the children had to walk to Vermont, Ringwood and Tunstall (Nunawading). Swimming was held at the unheated open-air Ringwood Pool in Ringwood Street (no longer there), and was followed by a cold shower- such were the 'good old days'!

Icy poles cost 1d. at the milk bar in Mitcham Road across from the 'big' school. This was the "tuck shop" from where lunch could be ordered and meat pies were as popular then as they are now.

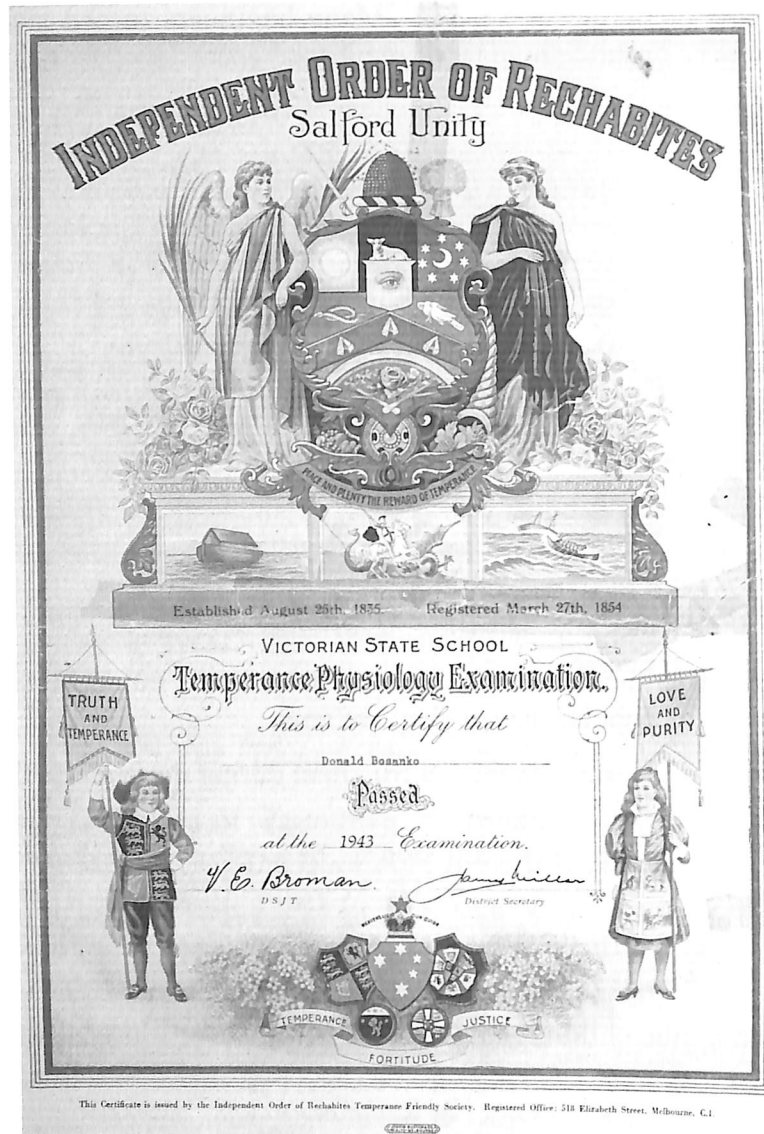
Mr. Fred Watson who attended at Mitcham during the mid-1930's recalled:

At the Junior school I remember Miss Delahunty who would say to us, "If you don't behave yourself you will stand in the fire place with your head up the chimney".

The late Mr Hobbs was our head master. Could he lay on the cuts. The girls would cop it sometimes too.

During this time children could sit for certificates (illustrated on the next page) gained at Temperance Physiology exams organised through the local branch of The Independent Order of Rachabites

These highly decorative certificates were designed to encourage children to be more aware of and to respect their own bodies. Other certificates children would collect included those bought from the Gould League of Bird Lovers for the nominal fee of one shilling.



Empire Day (24th May) was also a public holiday which had been celebrated throughout the British Empire in honour of Queen Victoria's Birthday since the 1870's. It continued as a symbol of Imperial Britain long after the death of the old Queen. Victorian State Schools celebrated with flag-raising ceremonies and pageants and the children dressed in various costumes of the Empire such as kilts or saris. Empire Day medals were struck by the Education Department and presented to each child attending a state school in Victoria.

Each Arbor Day tree planting ceremonies took place at most state schools throughout Victoria and in the mid 1930's Mitcham State School embarked on an ambitious program of planting pine trees at an Endowment Plantation in Quarry Road, a short distance east of the senior school. Every Wednesday afternoon children would tend the trees, watering and nurturing them. The Mothers' Club had raised the money to buy the young trees. On maturing, these pines were sold to provide money for the school.

In the disastrous bush-fires which swept the State in January 1939, the plantation was partially destroyed although it was replaced immediately. (A second bush-fire in 1962 took all the trees in its wake, but due to rising costs for replacement trees, it was decided not to continue with the plantation.)

The three biggest days of the school year (apart from break up day) were Anzac Day, Empire Day and Arbor Day. The Great War and the contribution of Mitcham students remained fresh in the minds of those who attended the school in the 1920's and 1930's, with memorial services being held each Anzac Day. The presence of returned servicemen, many of whom had moved on to soldier-settlement blocks in the district after the War, heightened the awareness of the on-going sacrifices of war.

◉ Golden Jubilee ◉

By far the biggest event in the history of Mitcham and the State School which served it, was the school's Golden Jubilee in 1938.

The culmination of months of careful preparation involving the Mothers' Club, The Parents and Teachers' Association and the community at large saw nearly a week of celebrations from September 24th - 29th, 1938.

The week's activities were reported in glowing terms on the front page of The Blackburn & Mitcham Reporter, the day after the festivities had ended:

Mitcham, gaily beflagged and bathed in glorious sunshine gave warm welcome to hundreds of visitors, who with the citizens, took part in the school Jubilee Celebrations ..."

The inauguration of the festivities took place at the junior school on Saturday afternoon ... The Fire Brigades' Band gave selections throughout the afternoon and the proceedings were broadcast over 3UZ...

.. The school grounds were a hive of activity. Free rides on the merry-go-round, and the Ocean Wave and a free Punch and Judy show kept the youngsters in a ferment of competition. Then came the grand parade of fancy dressed scooters, trucks, bicycles, and prams lining up to be judged ...

That same evening at 8 pm. a huge bonfire, prepared weeks before, was lit in the grounds of the new school:

attracting an estimated crowd of almost 2000 .. it lasted for several hours and was visible from places miles distant ...

... Concurrently, an 'old time night' was held in one of the school rooms. Mrs.A.P. Bedson and Mr.S.Bedson, with piano and accordion, supplied 'real' music, but the dancers were too numerous to allow of much dancing ...

The carnival spirit had infected everyone however and nobody minded a bit of pushing or a few bruised toes.

A song for the occasion entitled 'Come Back to Mitcham' was even penned by a local resident, Mrs. J. Penfold:

"Come back to Mitcham, ye Parents and children,
Come back again to the land of your birth
Join in the revels, the dancing and singing,
Come to the jubilee for fun and for mirth.
Come back to Mitcham and meet all your school mates
Bridge o'er the years that have passed since you met
Welcome awaits you and pleasures a-plenty
Come to the jubilee and trills you will get.
Come then in hundreds and come ye in thousands
Come here where peace, joy and happiness rule,
Drown all your sorrows and think not of morrows
Come to the Jubilee of Mitcham State School."

The students of the school were not forgotten in the reunion celebrations and were involved in the official dedication of Halliday Park as a public reserve- an event which was designed to coincide with the Jubilee. The children planted the ring of Oak trees (which are still flourishing near the Mitcham Rd. Memorial) in memory of ex-students of the school who had served in the Great War and name plaques were placed on each tree. Mrs. Halliday, widow of the Cr. Robert Ramsay Halliday, after whom the park was named, made a donation of £60 for playground equipment.

The Mothers' Club organised a Social Evening in the Memorial Hall on the Monday night. A cake was cut by the oldest scholar, Miss Edgoose. She was then presented with a bouquet by the youngest pupil, Billy Morgan, and all joined hands in singing Auld Lange Syne.

While thanking the Artists and Musicians, Mr. Walker (chairman of the Jubilee Committee) also expressed the gratitude of the Celebrations Committee to the Mothers' Club for its splendid assistance in raising funds for the festivities...

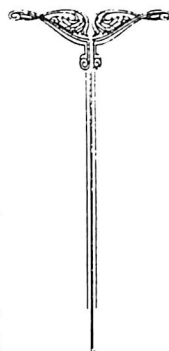
Credit also had to be given to Mr. Rupert Hobbs, his staff and the scholars who had decorated the school for the rejoicings on the previous night. Bowing gracefully and clasping a posy to his bosom (sic!) Mr.Hobbs made a general response...

Tuesday night was set aside for a 'picture night', and the highlight of Wednesday and Thursday was a Jubilee Ball and a Jubilee Concert in the Memorial Hall.

MITCHAM STATE SCHOOL JUBILEE
1888-1938

...PROGRAMME...

TO BE OFFICIALLY OPENED AT 3 P.M. BY MRS. I. L. WEBER, M.L.A.



SATURDAY, 24th SEPTEMBER.

3 p.m.—OFFICIAL OPENING by Mrs. I. L. WEBER, M.L.A. Back to School, Novelties, etc. Fire Brigades' Band. Merry-Go-Round, Ocean Wave, Punch and Judy.

8 p.m.—Bonfire. Old-Time Night in New School.

SUNDAY, 25th SEPTEMBER.

Dedication of New Playground (Halliday Reserve), Mitcham Road, at 3.30 p.m. by Cr. Edward Campbell (Lord Mayor of Melbourne), Cr. F. E. PAICE (President of the Shire), Sir James Barrett. Lilydale Band.

MONDAY, 26th SEPTEMBER.

8 p.m.—Social Evening arranged by Mothers' Club in Memorial Hall, when Birthday Cake will be cut by Oldest Scholar.

TUESDAY, 27th SEPTEMBER.

Picture Night, Memorial Hall, 8 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, 28th SEPTEMBER.

Jubilee Ball, Memorial Hall, 8 till 2.

THURSDAY, 29th SEPTEMBER.

Jubilee Concert, Memorial Hall, 8 p.m., by Old and Present Scholars.

THE FIRE BRIGADES BAND WILL PLAY ON THE RESERVES FROM 2.30 to 3 p.m.

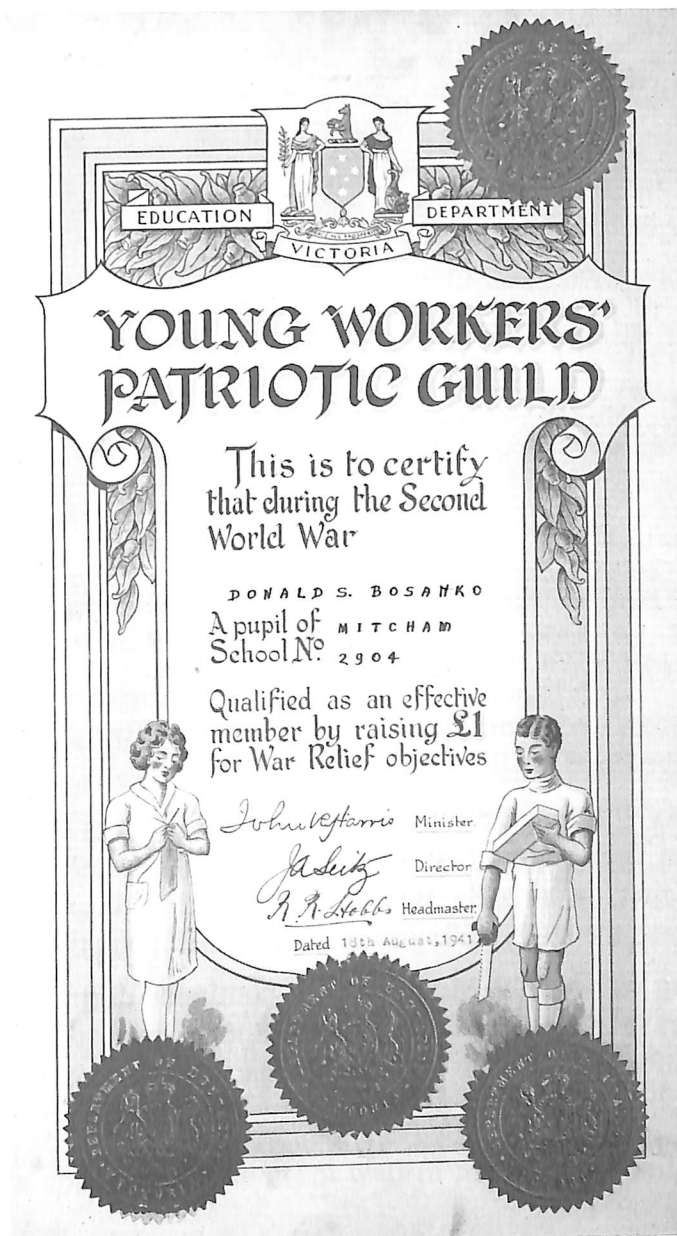
Nathan Spielvogel, Head Teacher at Mitcham during the Great War, was among those who returned (he from his position as Chief Librarian at Ballarat Public Library) to join the merrymaking at the school. Writing in the October 7th edition of the 'Reporter', Mr. Spielvogel summed up the feelings of the many who had attended the successful reunion:

I made my way to the old school ground where we had played our games. Soon I had gathered around me a large group of men and women, my own boys and girls ... and we talked, how we talked ... There was much laughter and a few tears ... It was a delightful afternoon to meet them all again and to feel that I had meant much in the development of these men and women and the making them into the fine folk they are today. I chatted with the energetic Head Teacher Mr. Hobbs and with my little friend Miss Lee, with Mr. George Walker, who is carrying on the good work done by his father as chairman of the School Committee.

Finally I got into my car and went off after one of the happiest experiences of my long varied and chequered career ...

● The Baby Boom ●

During World War 2 trenches 3 feet deep and 20 feet long were dug in the school grounds by parents. Children were kept away from them but they did practise air-raid training with gas masks and incendiary bombs in the Whitehorse Rd. air raid shelter.



Fund raising was a feature of the War years. The children took part in a variety of functions designed to raise money for the war effort. Ornate 'Young Workers' Patriotic Guild' Certificates such as the one shown on the previous page were issued by the Education Department to those pupils who had collected £1 or more.

The children's delight in end of year concerts was only partly dented by war shortages- instead of ice cream for each child, a small gift had to suffice. By 1944 there was no Christmas treat at all but during the following year ice-cream was again available. The Rationing Committee was approached so that the school could continue to provide hot cocoa to the pupils.

Headmaster Hobbs gained a formidable reputation as a strict disciplinarian- once a week the older boys were "requested" to clean his gas producing Dodge car.

The Inspector made the following report in the school's record:

In Social Service very commendable work is being done. £9/0/0 has been forwarded to charitable bodies, War Savings work receives good attention; girls are making comforts and all pupils are busy workers in collecting waste matter (1940)

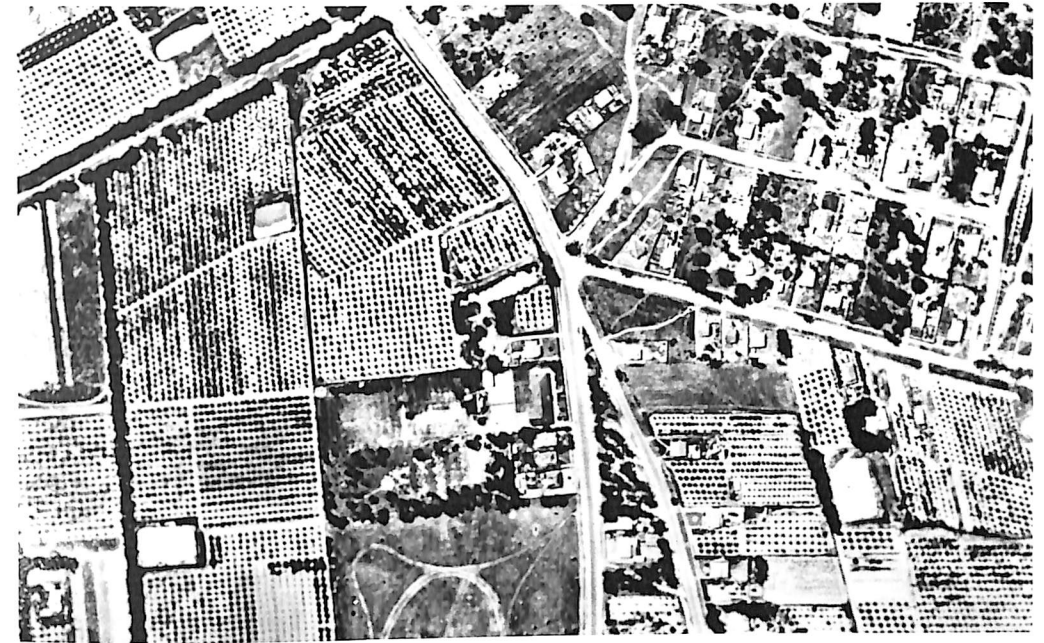
To date the school has raised £426/9/10 for the Departmental War Relief Fund, and £792/1/6 for the War Savings Certificate movement... The film projector which was on loan to the Defence Authorities has now been returned to the school. This is now (1944) used in conjunction with educational broadcasts.

After the War, toys were made for the children of Britain and parcels were made up for the Food for Britain Appeal.

Inter-school sports were held at Walker Park. Weeks of preparation and practice went into running, cross ball, tunnel ball, relay and skipping. Marching teams, in smartly turned out uniforms, also competed while mothers manned the stalls selling sweets and refreshments.

The stirring work of the Mothers' Club continued during the 1950's, with pupil numbers increasing steadily to reach approximately 600 in 1957. The need for additional schools in the newer areas of settlement became apparent as the after post-War 'Baby Boomers' joined the school system. Antonio Park, Park Orchards, Donvale and Heatherdale Primary Schools were built to

ease the pressure on Mitcham. The Mothers' Club gave donations, raised mainly at home functions, to the Mothers' Club of these newly built school's.



The area surrounding the Senior School- a 1946 aerial view

The report of the District Inspector in 1950 mentioned that:-

Community interest is well developed, and it assumes very practical forms especially in raising money for school purposes. The Mothers' Club held a very successful function recently, the parents showed much interest in the celebration of Education Week; in this activity also the Shire Council was very helpful by providing and showing educational films.

The space available in the senior school building in Mitcham Road soon became inadequate for the rapidly rising enrolment. The population explosion of the post-war years necessitated urgent expansion. The 'Little School' near Whitehorse Road, despite being enlarged, had outgrown its site. When a structural crack appeared in the north wall of the original building, repairs

were going to be very costly. C. J. Coles Pty. Ltd. were quick and willing to make an offer for such a valuable piece of land.

The 1950's saw the construction of much needed extra (wooden) classrooms. But these additions provided little relief for the junior grades. An Inspector highlighted the problem in 1957:

With the present enrolment, maximum use is being made of available accommodation and a Church Hall has been leased to provide for the July intake of 5 year olds. Unless the proposed new Primary School at Westwood (?Ringwood West) is available by February 1958 it seems inevitable that age restrictions must be applied to new enrolments in the new year.



The 1954 Marching Team-with drums

The School Committee found it necessary to take its own initiatives. The Minutes of the August 1957 meeting records the following resolution:

Mr. Dale moved and Mrs. Smythe seconded that a letter be sent to the Secretary of the Education Department asking the present position regarding the new school buildings and that the letter should refer to previous correspondence from the Department and state that it will be necessary to make application in the very near future for hiring halls for next year if the new buildings are not to be provided as promised.

In April 1959 the Education Department began discussions with the Ireland and Sampson families who owned the land to the west and to the north of the Senior School. Negotiations were not completed until June 1964 when adequate compensation was finally agreed upon. The purchase was made on 24 March 1965. Plans for the newly acquired land also included the building of Mitcham High School.

Other changes occurred in the 1950's and 1960's, both to the school's structure and within its own community. 1958 heralded the beginning of greater expenditure of energy on the part of parents to raise funds for improvements to school amenities. A Co-Operative Society, one of the first of its kind in Victoria, was established whereby individual parents were requested to make contributions towards a fund intended for use as security for loans. Several large projects requiring much capital were planned. Donations in a weekly envelope were also received from those families able to contribute.

It was decided that the initial project was to be a swimming pool and a 'Mitcham State School Swimming Baths Committee' was formed. David Gawler, a member of the local community, took the role of honorary consulting architect. Planning began in mid 1959 and the Memorial Pool was opened in November 1961. It was dedicated to ex-pupils who served in World War I.

In 1961 the District Inspector reported:

The pool, costing £4,800 complete with filtration, was subsidised to the extent of £2,300 and was officially opened by the Minister of Education on November 11th last. The parents who supported this truly magnificent project deserve much praise for their splendid co-operation.

The initial success of the pool project led to further improvements being made to the school. These always required the assistance of dedication and generous parents. David Gawler, acting as Chairman of the School Committee, provided architectural direction. The Art room was opened on 13th August 1966, by the Hon. John Bloomfield, Minister of Education. The next year saw the opening of the new canteen, co-inciding with the move of the junior grades to their new classrooms. Tireless members of the Mothers' Club were pleased to see the last of their makeshift canteen which had been set up in the corridor of the senior school's wooden building.

The Chairman wrote to the school community in the February 1967 Newsletter :

The School Committee is elected from the parent body to assist the Headmaster in the administration of the school, and to improve on the basic provisions made by the Education Department.

While some claim that the Department should supply every need, the enormous expansion of our education system in recent years has made this unattainable.

We have a choice- help ourselves to improve on the system- or wait for many years until the shortage of schools is overcome, and the frills can be added.

We pay, one way or another, for the improvements, so self help is the quickest way to give our children the needed facilities for greater benefit from, and enjoyment of their schooling.

Since 1961 we have added (with the solid backing of the Mother's Club), the swimming pool, central library, basketball courts, cricket nets, and the Art and Craft Room, as well as a steady stream of sporting and educational equipment, tape recorder etc. Many new projects are being planned.

Please make it your business to be interested in, to contribute towards, and work for, the better education of your own children and those who follow.

This was the 'Golden Age' of the Mothers' Club when most of the school's major building projects were planned, worked for and brought to completion. The School Committee and Mothers' Club co-operated and worked very enthusiastically together. Fetes, coffee mornings, visits to various venues, cake stalls, a book stall, Mothers' Day stalls all came into their own as a means of raising money for the Pool, Art/Craft Room, Canteen, Library and out-door areas attached to the School. An annual Car

Trial and a Dinner Dance at Park Orchards Chalet were held for a number of years. In the 25 year period up to 1983, Mitcham Primary Mother's Club raised \$38,175.40 for the school.

The local community was encouraged to participate in the school's fund raising activities. Fetes, election day stalls and street stalls were popular. Mitcham businesses and factories generously donated goods for raffles or to sell at fetes. A fine co-operative effort involving the Mothers' Club, School Committee, the staff, parents and pupils resulted in the 1963 fete raising about £600. This was used to purchase books for the Library. The organiser of the fete's afternoon teas later reported:

We served tea and biscuits from 10 am. to 4:30 pm., commencing by giving the Official Party morning Tea.

We charged 9d. for tea and three biscuits, and 3d. per refill. Many people remarked on the modest cost.

We took £3/17/6 but after deducting £1/3/6 for a tin of biscuits it left us with a profit of £2/14/0. The biscuits were our only expense as the Model Dairy donated a crate of milk (20 bottles), tea was sent to the school and Mrs. Arrowsmith donated the sugar.

In the warm weather, after school swimming classes were conducted in the new pool as part of the Herald-Learn-to-Swim program. A roster of parents maintained and supervised the pool over the summer holidays when it was kept open for local community use. Mitcham children flocked to the pool in warm weather, happy to pay the small entry fee.

The rather involved set of instructions for supervisors is reproduced here:-

1. Parent in charge to collect keys from Mrs. Hunter at the milk bar opposite the park at 1.45 pm. to open the Pool by 2 pm. After everything is locked up at 4 pm.- entrance money, keys and any lost property must be returned to Mrs. Hunter.
2. Open double gates into school-ground from driveway between school and Bowling Club.
3. Open small swimming pool gate.
4. Open BOYS and GIRLS toilets.
5. Open medical chest. Collect whistle from chest.
NOTE: same key opens 2, 3, & 5.
6. Open door on left of medical chest. This gives access to kickboards which children may use.
7. There is a beach umbrella in the room at the back of the Pool, but you must keep this room locked.

8. Fill the footbath (just outside door to kickboards) with water and add a few drops of footbath chemical from medical chest.
9. As children arrive:-
 - Sight tickets and collect 5 cents each
 - Make sure that each child under 3rd grade in 1971 is accompanied by a responsible adult - otherwise they cannot be admitted.
 - Suggest that the children leave any other money or valuables with an adult on duty
 - Tell them both toilets are open, to use the footbath and NO DIVING
10. When closing up reverse all actions listed under 1 to 8 above but particularly:
 - make sure all kickboards are returned
 - make sure the beach umbrella is returned
 - check dressing sheds for any lost property (hand in with keys)
 - call out before locking toilets in case any child may be in there.

In July 1967 the school population had reached 895 and the Methodist and Anglican Church Halls were once again being used as emergency classrooms. On 25th August of that year the old junior school was vacated. Preps, grades one and two occupied the new cream brick building of ten rooms, while the teachers were no doubt relieved at last to have all of Mitcham State School situated within the same grounds. Total enrolment for 1968 was 851 pupils despite nearby Donvale Primary School being opened the previous year. Class sizes remained large at this time, with sometimes more than 35 children in one room. Thus the school entered a new phase of a fairly adequate number of classrooms and a play-ground of quite spacious dimensions.

Never-the-less, a most perceptive comment written by the District Inspector in 1967 highlights some of the potential problems which have had an effect on the school right up until the present day:

The problem of overcrowding has been temporarily solved by establishment of the new Donvale school and erection of a 10 classroom infant block with necessary ancillary rooms. As, however, this block has been located, quite unjustifiably, as remote as possible on the site from the main school, most of the problems of the divided school remain. The artificial division, unnecessarily created, militates against the interests of school unity and spirit, administration, staff unity and economic use of equipment.

◉ Further Expansion ◉

The spreading eastern suburbs and the booming housing development in the district around Mitcham from the late 1960's, brought a corresponding increase in the traffic flow on roads near to the school. Road safety assumed a very great importance. In the days before regular crossing supervisors and adequate push button lights (even at the busy Mitcham and Doncaster East Road intersection!) it was the teachers who voluntarily manned the crossings before and after school. Parents were requested not to set down or pick up children in Mitcham Road at the front of the senior school and had to be advised not to call to their children to run across the road to their cars.

The message seemed to be effective. however, for Mitcham tied with Laburnum in the Nunawading Council schools' road safety competition in 1970. The chairman of the school's safety committee wrote to the staff in July of that year:

Dear Teachers,

We are very proud that our school won the road safety competition as conducted by Nunawading Council.

Of course the credit must go to all the teachers who daily supervise the crossings and who instruct the children in safety.

We congratulate you in winning the Competition and wish to thank you on behalf of the school committee and all the parents. We do appreciate the time you have devoted to this operation over the years.

Yours sincerely

C. Cocking

Safety Committee Convenor

The pressures of a rising population affected all schools in the district. An agreement was reached between Mitcham Primary and St. John's Catholic School to combat over-crowding at the latter. Mitcham took all the Prep year enrolments of St. John's pupils who then transferred back to St. Johns for their post-Prep education. This situation continued through to 1973 when a drop in enrolments in the area began to occur. In some of the peak years the total Prep numbers at Mitcham had exceeded 120.

Changes to the school buildings and environment continued throughout the 1970's. The school library was completed in 1973 and with the net pupil

enrolment consistently over 800 the new building and its facilities were much needed and well utilised. Right through to the present day Mitcham children have benefitted from their well-equipped library. Monies raised by parents and groups within the school community originally furnished and equipped the library. Along with Government funds, local contributions have continued to assist with its maintenance and improvement.

Official School Committees became subject to increased regulation in the 1960's. Mitcham joined the East Suburban District Association of School Committees- a branch of the Victorian Council of School Organisations. The co-ordination of school governing bodies marked the beginning of eventual changes in the roles of School Committees- a process which continued into the 1970's and 80's.

The extensive adventure playground areas in both the junior and senior schools were developed in the 1970's. Planning and erecting the sturdy and challenging play equipment required, yet again, the co-operation of both school and parents. The result has been much appreciated by succeeding groups of Mitcham students.

In 1975 an extensive building program in the senior school resulted in some new administrative accommodation. The sick bay was a disappointment however. Measuring just 2.25m. x 3.45m.- its size was totally inadequate.

Some of the memories of a former Mitcham student of the early 70's relate to us the life and times of Mitcham Primary School just on twenty years ago.

The year I started was the first full year of operation of the 'new' junior school, built during the previous year. Classes were fairly big, (around the thirty mark), and the school then had about 900 pupils.

Until the library was built in 1973, it was housed in the end room of the wooden building nearest the Mitcham Rd. building. When the new building went up it replaced a rather antiquated shelter shed. The new library was built with an outdoor reading area, but strangely enough I never remember the area being open for use.

The swimming pool was very popular and remained in constant use. Although not very deep (3'6" I think), it was built several miles from the municipal pool, and only had two temperatures regardless of the weather- cold and freezing. It remained open over the long summer holidays and with the small fee charged was always full. The changing sheds at the northern end were archaic, with their cold concrete floors and lack

of space to leave belongings. Although protected by the new wing these changing rooms seemed to attract howling gales and driving rain at any time of the year.

The playground area was covered with only a light layer of sand and became one big puddle at the first sign of rain. Out-of-bounds areas included the High School, the Bike Sheds during school hours and the front garden area on Mitcham Road.

The school sports carnival, held towards the end of the year, provoked bitter rivalry between friends. It involved the whole school from the top athletes to the most hopelessly co-ordinated kids, who usually ended up in their house cheer squads, barracking to the point of hoarseness.

A highlight of each month for me was to read the latest edition of The School Paper. The A.B.C's broadcasts of the Anzac Day service were still solemn ceremonies even fifty or sixty years after the event, but the musical sessions 'Let's Join In', was guaranteed to send many kids to sleep as the sickly sweet voice of the Soprano/Narrator warbled out a chorus of "The Toreador Song" or "How Much is that Doggie in the Window".

Intra-school House sports were an important feature of the school year, particularly when student numbers had reached 800 or more. School Houses were at that time named after famous explorers: Batman (red), Fawkner (blue), Flinders (green) and Henty (yellow)

The upgrading of amenities was accompanied by changes and additions to school curriculum. In 1975, specialist teachers gave migrant classes for the first time. Remedial reading programs were introduced. The special requirements of gifted and exceptional children were also recognised.

A music group was formed in 1977, and the following year over \$2,000 was invested in musical instruments. At that time 30 children were taking violin lessons. Enrolments remained high and with such large numbers of children it was possible to maintain both a school 'orchestra' and a choir.

In 1984, the football team won the Nunawading and District competition and went on to gain fourth place in the State's All Primary Schools' final.

◉ The Last 10 Years ◉

During the 1970's the school community saw the beginning of changes to the role of School Committee. School facilities, buildings and grounds had previously been the main area of concern and involvement for this body. The School Council's Act of 1975 extended the Council's powers to include more responsibility for the financial operation of the school. It gave it the ability to enter into contracts for projects and it also paved the way for Councils to have involvement with the development of the school's educational program.

In 1977 the Mitcham Primary School Committee was replaced with the first 'School Council'. Mr. Peter Tregloan was the initial Council President. Under the new constitution the Council could comprise up to 12 members elected by parents, 5 members elected by teaching staff, two representatives of Mother's Club and, if necessary, three other co-opted members. This body, together with the Principal (Alex Enterkin in 1977) now had a very wide range of responsibilities for running the school.

By 1980 the School Council was involved in the development of school policy and the production of a document 'that will establish guidelines for the efficient and effective management of the schools resources as it relates to both the learning function and council function'. The nature and implementation of the school's curriculum was also part of the agenda of School Council in 1984. This area of involvement has continued through to the present. Along with the teaching staff, the Council's Education Sub-Committee is chiefly concerned with reviewing and outlining the many aspects of school policy and its curriculum activities.

Falling school numbers by 1981 enabled the conversion of the rooms fronting Mitcham Rd. in the old senior school into a General Purpose room and a gymnasium. The acquisition of equipment for the latter facility has continued apace with Mothers' Club making regular donations.

The eventual fate of Mitcham Primary's Memorial Pool was not a happy one. In 1968 a swimming pool service company informed the school:

The water in the pool seems to disappear through construction joints in the walls. However, it is impossible to determine with certainty through which joints the water disappears. There are a few joins

which look very suspicious and we suggest you repair them.

Over the following decade various attempts were made to renovate and repair it, including an outlay of \$5,000 in 1978/79. But the final blow came in 1983 when quotes given for the pool's rejuvenation far exceeded the school's resources. Last year plans were drawn up and set in motion for the swimming pool and surrounds revival - the pool was to be filled in and covered, the grounds landscaped and the feature reborn as a raised stage/outdoor performance area.

1985 was the year of the "Gum Nut Fete" - many months of preparation and hard work resulted in an extra-ordinary success, with more than \$10,000 being raised for the school.



Mitcham Primary School -1988

Due to lower birth rates since the early 1970's schools in the Nunawading area have been faced with rather steeply falling enrolments. In 1984 concerned school community members from the Mitcham High, Mitcham Technical and Mitcham Primary Schools could see that some sort of integrated

future was necessary in order to avoid the deteriorating outlook for the schools' curricula. There was the real probability of an Education Ministry decision to re-organise and/or close one of the Secondary schools.

A sub-committee of the Councils of the three Mitcham Schools was established with parent, teacher and student representatives to consider ways the cluster of schools could co-operate to improve the educational opportunities for students.

The Educational Aim simply stated in the September 1985 report from the Cluster Sub-committee was:

... provision ought to be made for a sequential educational programme, without rigid divisions, enabling students to have the widest range of educational options whilst retaining the specialised features of member schools

There soon followed a request from Donvale High School to join the Cluster and all School Councils soon committed themselves to work towards the formation of a single Multi-Campus Prep. to year 12 College.

In the three years which have followed, an unbelievable amount of voluntary planning work by teaching staff and parents alike have failed to have the Prep-12 College brought into being. This is despite the unanimous agreement between all school communities and the endorsement of the Minister of Education and the Eastern Regional Board of Education. The major barrier at present is the achievement of a State-wide Agreement to cover the working conditions of staff within schools under re-organisation.

1989 should see Mullauna Secondary College functioning as a multi-campus Year 7-12 institution on the the three post-primary sites but the community of Mitcham Primary School will need to be patient and await the Ministry's and the Teacher Union's arrival at the negotiating table. Such are the frustrations of being some-what ahead of our time.

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Mitcham Primary School

Autographs and Other Memories

