

THE LAST DAYS OF BALLARAT TEACHERS' COLLEGE

By Frank Nolan

I was on the Gillies Street campus of Ballarat Teachers' College on the day that it officially ceased to exist. I wish I could say that the old college was sent off with lots of celebration, shedding of tears, and an altogether grand farewell. In fact, as I remember it, nothing of the kind happened. Noel Boag and John Leach have similar recollections. None of us could remember the actual date, but I have a letter stating that I resigned from the Education Department on 14th October 1973 and was employed by the State College of Victoria on 15th October 1973. So, I guess that 14th October 1973 was the fateful day.

There were no noticeable differences on campus. Classes went on as before with the same students and staff and in the same buildings. I rather suspect that most students were unaware that anything had happened at all. While some staff had agonized for years over the coming of the dreaded "autonomy", when it finally came, the process turned out to be quite painless.

In the months which followed, changes did occur. The B.T.C. sign disappeared from the front of the building. New stationery was issued. The telephonist learned to take a deep breath and say, "State College of Victoria at Ballarat" and to expect a puzzled caller to ask, "Pardon?" Of course,

more fundamental changes gradually took effect and over the next few years there were more name changes, a move to a new building at Mount Helen, and the old college became but a distant memory. Many of us who lived through these changes accepted them as regrettable but inevitable. Whether we liked it or not, the old state teachers' colleges were gone.

In 1946 there had been only seven state teachers' colleges in the whole of Australia. As a result of the huge population increase and the consequent demand for primary teachers following world War 2, the number of state colleges had increased to 28 by 1962. The original Ballarat Teachers' College had closed down in 1931, and so the college as we knew it could be regarded as one of these "new" colleges.

The Federal government undertook increasing responsibility for teacher education during the 1960s and 1970s and there were massive change in policies affecting higher education. In 1974 the state teachers' colleges in all states became independent from the authority of the state departments of education and subject to the surveillance of a higher education authority. In Victoria, the colleges became members of the State College of Victoria.

Subsequently, S.C.V. (Ballarat) was to become the School of Education in the Ballarat College of Advanced Education based on the Mount Helen Campus. Teacher education is now offered at the University of Ballarat.

The small "family" nature of B.T.C., as we remember it in the early 1950s, changed over the next two decades for all sorts of reasons and was gone by 1973. Hopefully the old college will be judged to have done its job well. I think that most of us who were part of it consider ourselves lucky.