

# Merriwa Central School

*Celebrating 150 Years  
of Public Education in Merriwa*

*1850 – 2000*



Researched and Compiled by Elaine Sparrow

and The Editing Sub-Committee of Merriwa Central School Sesquicentenary Committee;  
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Front Cover;  
Mr Vesey Hines and pupils in front of the old school building in 1895.

*Merriwa Celebrates 150 Years  
of Public Education*

1850 - 2000



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**MERRIWA CENTRAL SCHOOL**

*"Educating better by putting children first"*



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## FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

It is indeed a privilege that I write these few words as we celebrate 150 years of Public Education in Merriwa. To be within one of the first schools in the state to begin operation and still be delivering quality education to the boys and girls of Merriwa and district is truly a great achievement.

From slate to chalkboard to whiteboard, from chalk to inkwells and quills to biros, from abacus to slide rule to calculators to computers. So much has changed but yet the basic purpose and vision of our school remains the same - to teach our children, to give them the tools to meet the demands of society. Yes the 3Rs, now called Literacy and Numeracy are still alive and well at Merriwa Central School and much much more as well.

Our school provides an education second to none from Kindergarten to Year 12. Our children enjoy the "extras" that go with school - sporting opportunities, debating challenges, educational excursions, and much more. More than this, however is the safe, happy and friendly big family atmosphere that allows our children to relax and learn.

I know that many ex-students and teachers reading this booklet look back fondly on their time at Merriwa Central School and I am confident that many of us who work and study here today will look back in the future fondly on what will continue to be a fine school delivering quality public education to the Merriwa Community.

Grahame Jackson  
Principal  
January 2000



## **CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE**

For 150 years Merriwa Central School has been educating the young people of the district. It has met the challenges of a changing society and has evolved with them. The school has always been an integral part of this small rural community and has shared with it the good and challenging times.

Merriwa Central School has always provided quality and meaningful education with the aim of producing socially responsible individuals with skills and values that they might pass onto others. It has gained a reputation of being a caring learning environment where students are encouraged to reach their full potential.

Merriwa Central's motto of "Play the Game" is reflected in its teaching of fair play, teamwork and the recognition of giving one's best, whether it be academic, cultural, sporting or community service. Over the decades, Merriwa Central School has made many achievements and is a "home" to us all. Our memories often go flooding back to the days of the old school yard. It is a school to be proud of.

As we enter a new millennium, I wish the school all the best for the future and I am sure that I am speaking on behalf of all previous students and staff when I say that the school has built a great foundation to nurture our children for hopefully another 150 years.

Mr Peter Davidson  
January, 2000  
Chairman Sesquicentenary Committee

## **SESQUICENTENARY COMMITTEE**

Peter Davidson (Chairman)  
Grahame Jackson (Principal)  
Elaine Sparrow  
Lyn Moroney  
Del Leggett  
Jill Inder  
Lynda Marshall  
Gayle Wilson  
Vivian Murray  
Pam Kemp  
Cheryl Wood  
Matthew Gardner (SRC Rep)  
Teressa Jones (SRC Rep)

## **1999 P&C PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Formal education anywhere relies on parental and community support in order to operate and Merriwa Central School is no exception. Throughout the 150 years of our school's existence, a community based support group, in one form or another, has ensured that the school has been able to operate and deliver educational outcomes that our society expects. The current Parents & Citizens Association is only part of the continuum of these groups that have existed. No doubt as the state's public education system continues to evolve the structures of the P&C Association will have to evolve. Whatever the structure or make up of the group, I see the support has always been along very similar pathways.

During the school's history we have had to constantly lobby the government of the day to ensure that the school is being resourced in line with the Government's own guidelines. We have had to lobby for teachers, for new school sites, for buildings and for opportunities, such as the school's ability to offer Years 11 and 12. The most recent examples in the continual battle were the construction of the weather shelter at the Primary site and the retention of the demountable classroom at the Secondary site.

Another very important role of community support has been as a fundraiser that has allowed our students to have access to facilities and opportunities, that because of the school's size and location, they would never have received as part of their public education. Dances, review nights, raffles, street stalls, operation of canteens at both primary and secondary sites, catering for functions, working bees, soliciting of donations and simply making the most of opportunities that happen in our town, such as the Variety Club Bash visit in 1997 have all been used to raise extra funds. These funds (which supplement Government funding) purchase additional text books and teaching aids, furniture, sporting equipment, computers, air conditioners and many other items.

This aspect of the community support to the school is a little like trying to fill a bottomless pit and relies on people constantly putting in the hard years raising funds. Fortunately for Merriwa Central School there has always been a willingness in people to ensure our school has the extras. This is a major reason for the success of the school's pupils.

The final way the community support, which ensures the continued operation of the school, is by having direct input into the development of school policy and helping staff deliver an ethos to the students that reflects the community from which they have come. Sometimes this has certainly caused conflict between all players in the education system at the school. The proof of the success is the high esteem our community and school is held in by ourselves, its teaching staff and the wider society and Education Department at this point in time.

While ever Merriwa Central exists, it will always need to have ordinary members of our community supporting and guiding its direction. If, as a community, we start to believe that public education is "free", and will just be delivered to us, as our social right, then I believe



history tells us that Merriwa Central will disappear on a bus to another town.  
Let's be certain of the fact that public education has existed in Merriwa for 150 years because of community support and hard work, and not goodwill on behalf of any Government Department. Congratulations to the community of Merriwa Central School for 150 years.

John Small  
President P&C 1999

## **P&C Executive Committee 1999**

President:	John Small
Secretary:	Verina Rallings
Treasurer:	Maree Goodear

## **THE SCHOOL SONG**

*Boys and Girls, all students loyal,  
Raise our colours gold and royal,  
Sing a song all free from toil,  
To our Central School.*

*Most of us are striving,  
Some of us deciding,  
What we'll do when we leave school,  
And give up swot for something far more tiring.*

*Sport and frolic, these are they,  
That round out our working day,  
And for these we turn for e'er,  
To our Central School.*

(TUNE: "MEN OF HARLECH")

## INTRODUCTION

Merriwa Central School is a special place, as is the Merriwa District. Many people have come and gone, some have left a lasting impression and some have been a name in history.

As I have been gathering stories, pictures and anecdotes for this book, I have seen many people in another light and enjoyed hearing things from their perspective. A special thanks to Principals, past and present who were happy to share their experiences and who saw our school change over the decades, all of whom have had something to contribute to Merriwa Central School.

It has not been easy to gather all information - there are some gaps - but records are not kept on all aspects of the school. Every effort has been made to check the authenticity of the material presented, but no claim to absolute reliability is made.

History should always be factually recorded, but it is the thoughts and feelings of the real people of our district that make this history worthwhile recording. Much of what we take for granted today was a tremendous struggle for our forefathers, as we will read in the history of the town and the school and the steps that were taken to establish it, let alone its resources.

A special thank you to all those who were keen to offer their assistance from the storytellers, the keyboard operators and all those who supplied information and photos.

I do hope this book encompasses what everyone wants to read and remember. 150 years is a long time.

Best wishes to all - PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE.

Elaine Sparrow

## MERRIWA'S EARLY SETTLERS 1788-1830

The Aboriginal inhabitants of the Merriwa district called the area the Gummum Plains - implying "small", no doubt in contrast to the Liverpool Plains (just over the Range) which they called Uraboon or Corborn - meaning "great". The main water course of that undulating, black volcanic soil country was the Gummum Creek.

Naturally they were very suspicious and curious about the new settlers, whose appearance, behaviour and way of life was so different from their own.

The scene at Gummum Plains showed open and fertile country, equally adaptable to either agriculture or grazing, and was well supplied with water from several creeks. The new settlers approached the area from the west via Bathurst and Mudgee, as well as from the lower and middle Hunter.

The formal distribution of land to white settlers in the Gummum district commenced in about 1830. There however, as in other districts, it often happened that the applicants occupied the land for some period before it was surveyed and officially granted.

One of the earliest grants made on those Plains was to *Mr John Blaxland*, who received 7,680 acres in 1831. In the following year another prominent member of the community *Mr W C Wentworth*, took up a purchased grant of 640 acres (at the price of £160) in the area. During the next ten years he acquired several other blocks and became the largest landowner of the time in the northern portion of the district.

## MERRIWA AND THE VILLAGE RESERVE 1839

It was not long before it was decided that the district would benefit from a township and with that in mind *Mr J Blaxland* approached the Colonial Secretary on behalf of various settlers to request that the Village Reserve be thrown open for purchase. A design for a village, drawn up by Assistant Surveyor *J S Rusden*, was laid before the Executive Council on 26 December 1839 and it received the Governor's approval under the name of Merriwa.

The town was notified in the Government Gazette on 22 January 1840 and the "upset" price of land was £8 per acre. The first land sales of the township were held on 15 October and 10 December 1840. Many of the streets of the village were named after early settlers.

Here then was a repetition of what was happening all over the colony: first explorers and pioneers, then bush tracks, homes and finally towns.

The settlement grew slowly, its economy based on the large stations and on Merriwa's position at the river crossing used by Cobb & Co coaches on the Muswellbrook to Cassilis run. Merriwa was a primitive settlement in the bush, remote from major centres of population and isolated by lack of transport. A traveller to Merriwa relied on horse or bullock drawn vehicles over rough tracks, weather permitting and often the weather did not permit, as accounts of



teachers trying to reach Merriwa in the 1850's show. Lack of communication was a feature of life in the 1850's. Mail came to Merriwa once a week by horseback and in wet weather bullock teams took months to bring supplies the 90-odd miles from Morpeth.

## THE BIRTH OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

On 21 March 1848, the Governor of New South Wales, *Sir Charles Fitzroy*, announced the birth of state aided National Schools to be controlled by a National Education Board.

Initially special efforts were made for the establishment of National Schools in rural areas, as Sydney was already served by denominational schools. The Board experienced difficulties in making the availability of the system known and so appointed agents to travel into rural areas. This fell mainly to one agent, *George Rusden*, who had the task of making the system known throughout the whole of eastern Australia. In three years *Mr Rusden* travelled 10,000 miles on horse back in the performance of this duty.

National schools were equipped with black boards, wall maps, tablet lessons for teaching arithmetic, a timetable, an attendance roll and a pupil register. The children wrote on slates which cost a penny each and pencils were 4d for 100.

The national schools provided a general education for children of all religions. The Board provided two thirds of the cost of erecting and equipping a school, wherever an attendance of 30 pupils could be guaranteed and local patrons found to undertake the responsibility of raising the balance of the money and supervising the school. The Board appointed the teachers, whose income was derived from a fixed salary and school fees paid by the children. The town also had to form a school committee to manage the affairs of the school.



The church schools continued to operate with grants allocated by a Denominational School Board. The first national school was opened in September 1848 and by the end of 1849 fifteen were in operation. Four more opened in January 1850 and one of these was at Merriwa.

Merriwa National School was the 16th school to open under the National system of Education in NSW.

The school established at Merriwa was primitive, like many of the Board's early schools. The difficulties of setting up a system of education where none had existed before, and of establishing schools in isolated rural areas, were immense. Many parents were illiterate, and so were the children they sent to school, who were often up to eighteen years old. Many were poor and schools were usually built of slabs and bark or shingles. There were few trained teachers, and as teaching was not a highly regarded profession and the hardships, poor conditions and low pay were unlikely to attract many, they were often of poor quality and the whole system was inefficient. Nevertheless, it was a beginning, and slowly the schooling improved as the scheme developed. There were 268 National Schools in operation by 1865.

## MERRIWA NATIONAL SCHOOL 1849

In 1849 there were about 50 children living in or near the village of Merriwa and there was no school.

At this time there were three ways in which a community could establish a school: they could open a private one, seek a church school or apply to the Board of National Education for a Government School.

*Mr Job Webster Cheesbrough* was instrumental in the formation of a school at Merriwa. *JW Cheesbrough* was born on 3 August, 1815. He arrived in Sydney aboard the sailing ship "Clyde" on 17 August, 1834. He was one of 8 Cabin Class passengers and listed as a "Woolstapler". He settled in Gummum in November 1835 and was at "Brindley Park" Merriwa until sometime before his marriage on 1 April, 1854.



*Mr J W Cheesbrough*

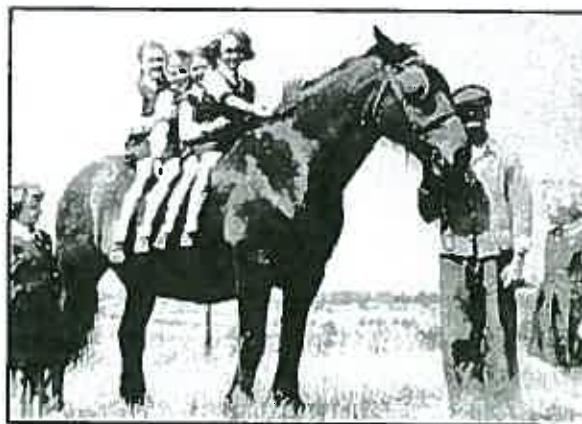
On 26 August, 1849, *J W Cheesbrough* wrote to the Board of National Education to request the establishment of a National School at Merriwa.

The settlers had been busy, realising there was a need for a school to educate their children. They had opened a subscription list a month before and 35 people had already subscribed £42/2/0 in amounts ranging from 5/- to £5. They had hired a room, engaged a schoolmaster named *H E Norris* and 21 children had been at school for three weeks at the time of the application.

In September, the men who were to be appointed as the school's local patrons, *J Cheesbrough*, *C Blaxland* and *E Ashbee*, returned the Board's official application form with the undertaking that 26 Anglican and 30 Catholic children would attend the proposed school. They suggested that *Norris* be retained by them till the end of the year when the Board could take over the school, and that one acre of government land near the river would be a suitable permanent site

for the school. The Board accepted these suggestions and officially granted the application on 4 October 1849. The first teacher appointed by the Board, *Mr F J Shaw*, arrived in Merriwa in March 1850, but since the local patrons had continued *Norris'* services until *Shaw's* arrival, the Board agreed to pay *Norris'* salary from the beginning of the year. Merriwa's status as a government school therefore, dates from January 1850.

Merriwa National School was a slab-wall, shingle-roofed building supported by cedar beams which occupied a site fairly close to the Merriwa River on the slope at the western end of McKenzie Street.



The seats at the school were at first long backless forms, until backless wooden desks seating six to eight children were introduced. There were no shelter sheds, no gardens, no fences, no cleared playground and no pathways, except those worn by children's feet.

There was a lack of toilets or "out offices" as they were then termed. The most common device used by all was a cesspit in the ground, but for many country schools, the bush growing close by was the first convenience.

Filth and flies were common place. The children walked to school, often barefoot in the dust of summer and mud of winter, or if lucky shared a horseback ride with a mate or brothers and sisters. So small horse paddocks and sapling fences eventually became a natural appendage to many bush schools.

*Mr & Mrs Shaw* took charge of some 30 pupils - which rose to 47 during the year - in a rented house, where they both lived and taught. The erection of a school room and residence - a building of slab walls and shingled roof supported by sleepers - had been begun by the contractor *John Simmons*, but it was not ready for occupation until November and not quite finished until January 1851. It cost £120, of which the local people paid £40.

At this time attendance at school was not compulsory, and for children attending school from outlying areas, negotiating the treacherous creek crossings and muddy tracks sometimes made it impossible for them to reach school.

The people of Merriwa were pleased with their school and teacher, whom they praised for his zeal as a teacher and his respectability as a citizen. Amongst his achievements was the establishment of a subscription library for the district's "poorer classes". At the end of 1850 the local patrons examined 42 children and distributed 30 books as prizes.

However *Mr Shaw*, found Merriwa a difficult place to live on a teacher's annual salary of £40,



plus whatever school fees he could get from the generally poor parents. The discovery of gold caused inflation all over the colony, and food prices became extremely high because of the cost of cartage. The high cost of living was not his only problem, for in September 1851, *Shaw* had to travel to Newcastle for medical attention for his failing eye sight, leaving the school in the hands of his wife and her sister. He returned in December, but was forced to resign after a week because of the "unhealthy atmosphere" and the draughts through the slabs of the residence which produced a relapse of his condition. The school was closed pending the arrival of another teacher.

## TEACHERS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN AND RETAIN

When Merriwa closed in December 1851, the residents expected that another teacher would be appointed and the school continue in a straight forward manner. However, it was to be well over five years before the school gained some stability of operation.

After four months the Board asked *Mr Cheesbrough* if an unmarried, middle aged female teacher would be acceptable and he quickly answered that they would be pleased to have her re-open the school as soon as possible.

And so it was that *Mary Bourke* left Sydney in May 1852, on the long journey that would take her by steamer to Morpeth, omnibus to Maitland and coach to Merriwa. On her arrival at Maitland she found further travel impossible because of major flooding. Here she stayed for two months. She finally reached Singleton and on 20 August the mail coach attempted, without success, to cross the still swollen Hunter River. Patience wearing thin, having spent three months trying to reach Merriwa School, *Mary Bourke* gave up and returned to Sydney.

In February 1853, the Board found another teacher prepared to go to Merriwa and *George Langley* set off on a journey which took him six weeks, arriving on 1 April. His stay at Merriwa was brief and unhappy for all concerned. He had only been there a month when he gave six months notice of resignation, without explanation. The local patrons were equally keen to have him removed for various reasons, reported a new member *Thomas Perry*. *Mr*



*Langley* was excessively dirty. The parents were dissatisfied with their children's progress and attendance had dropped to 18. *Mr Perry* found that the children could read and spell tolerably well, (although he noted that *Mr Langley* could not spell) but that *Mr Langley* was a teacher neither of grammar or geography. His conclusion was that *Mr & Mrs Langley* "appear to consider his present situation as quite derogatory to him .... It is not likely that he would, even if competent, be very zealous in the discharge of his duties."

In the meantime, *Mr Langley* had left in August for treatment in Sydney of an "affection of the eyes". He returned in September but after *Mr Perry's* report he was dismissed for his incompetency and unfitness for office.

It was not uncommon in this period for schools to be closed for some months between teachers. Teachers were difficult to obtain, especially for remote districts. However, Merriwa was unlucky to be closed for long periods on four occasions during the 1850's.

*Samuel Thicknesse* was appointed to Merriwa in July 1854 and re-opened the school in September. He had some experience in the Board's service. Merriwa was his fourth school since his first appointment in 1851. His journey from Lochinvar to Merriwa took 24 days, owing to the scarcity of feed and the straying of three of the bullocks. During the journey he and his wife had to sleep under the dray.

Nothing is known of the year spent in Merriwa by *Mr Thicknesse*, except that the attendance of pupils was stable around 25 and that he too, found his salary insufficient, "so much so that shepherds are able to live much better than myself, and without respectability and appearances to keep up." In August 1855 he was dismissed for reasons which remain unknown, as no records can be found. It is known that the local patrons suspended him and the Board confirmed their action.

Merriwa's third closure lasted for eight months, until the arrival of *Mr Herbert Fowler* in April 1856. *Mr Fowler* did no better than his pre-decessors, although it was his wife's health which was given as the reason for his abrupt departure in January 1857. This time another teacher was appointed almost immediately but declined because he regarded the expenses allowed for the journey as inadequate.

## PETITION TO END SCHOOL CLOSURES

The people of Merriwa had by now had a school for seven years, but their children had little education to show for it. A combined effort to impress their needs on the Board, was now begun. In April 1857 *Edward Marley*, a patron since 1854, and now secretary following *Mr Perry's* departure from the district, strongly urged the Board to send another teacher as soon as possible: "as the small quantity of instruction that the children here have received, will soon be rendered of no avail, should they be kept much longer in a state of idleness."

A month later he forwarded a petition, signed by 26 parents, which described at length their past and present difficulties.

*Merriwa 11 May 1857*

*To the Honorable, the Board of National Education*

*The humble Petition of the undersigned Parents of Children being the Inhabitants of Merriwa, in the District of Cassilis and colony of New South Wales Sheweth.*

*That for the last seven years or more there has been a National School at Merriwa.*

*That during this period there have been no less than four School Masters, none of whom have exceeded a period of twelve months in charge of the School, with the exception of the first Mr Shaw.*

*That for lengthened periods this village has been without a School Master at all, to the great detriment of the children who attended at the school, as the knowledge they gained whilst under the tuition of one Master, was completely obliterated or rendered nugatory by the long intervals that elapsed between the leaving of one Master, and the appointment of another.*

*That owing to our constantly being occupied in our several avocations, we are totally unable to give that attention to our children we could wish, and that in consequence they are necessarily neglected and the proper training of their minds so much required at their time of life is unhappy denied them, besides which from our not being able to look after them, they are exposed to temptations and to opportunities of seeing and hearing that which is liable to become implanted in their minds and exercises a baneful influence for the remainder of their existence.*

*That as we are aware a sum of money has been voted by the Government for the purposes of Education, of which sum we are entitled to a portion, we conceive that we are perfectly justified in placing before your Honorable Board, a statement of our grievance, and to point out with all the force we can, the great necessity for the immediate relief we stand in need of and humbly to request.*

*That your Honorable Board will lose no time in appointing a competent Teacher to take charge of the School at this place.*

*We further beg to state that at a Public Meeting held at this place on the above subject we have requested the local patrons to forward this our Memorial to your Honorable Board and to accompany it with such remarks as they think may influence and induce you to give it your earliest and most favorable consideration.*

*And as in duty bound we will ever pray.*



*And as in duty bound we will ever pray.*

*Patrick Logan  
Edward French  
James Heron  
William Webster  
Edward Marley  
Thomas Bourke  
Anne Thompson*

*John Palmer  
Owen Lawless  
Patrick Lawless  
James Lawless  
Charles Spratt  
Samuel Mathews  
Mary Ann Crasdale*

*William Tuite  
David Munro  
James Saunders  
Michael Cornish  
Patrick Cronen  
James Sherwood  
& five illegible signatures*

By July the Board had found Merriwa a teacher and the school's fourth and last closure ended in September. Merriwa's history thereafter was not without its ups and downs, but at least its operation has been continuous.

In 1855 *John Murray* was one of eight teachers brought from England by the Board and he was appointed to open the National School at Mudgee. He was well qualified, born in Ireland in 1824, trained in Glasgow in 1842 and had been teaching ever since. His dealings with the local patrons were very strong minded. Disputes between them, accompanied by sectarian squabbles, led to his removal from Mudgee, and subsequent appointment to Merriwa.

*Mr Murray* arrived in September 1857, having been delayed in Mudgee by floods. By the end of the year he had increased the school's attendance from 24 to 41. The local patrons were delighted with their new teacher, praising his "*care, attention and excellent system.*"

By this time the school and residence were in a somewhat dilapidated condition which was causing *Mr Murray* some discontent. The local patrons informed the Board, suggesting that some money be spent on repairs and painting which were carried out in 1858 for the sum of £30.

The operation of the school was clearly described in *Mr Murray's* report sent to the Board in 1859. His income then was £230 a year - £120 in salary and £110 in school fees. School hours were 9am till 12 noon then 2pm till 4pm, 245 days a year with one week's holiday each Christmas, Easter and mid winter. There were three classes being taught with children aged from four to seventeen. The 3r's were taught to the first class students aged four to seven, with 3/4 of an hour each day devoted to object lessons, singing, recreation and drill. The timetable for second and third class was more complicated, teaching the 3r's, dictation, grammar, composition, geography, scripture, vocal music, physical science, needlework for girls and recreation and drill.

Inspection reports described *J Murray* as "*modern*" and the children's proficiency as "*fair to good*". However this changed in 1861, with 62 attendances reduced to 27 and the inspection revealed a marked decline in the standard and tone of the school.

*"The moral tone is not satisfactory. The pupils are clean, properly dressed and orderly in general, but make unnecessary noise when at work and care little about following the examiner with attention. The instruction is modern in form, but scarcely so in spirit. The grammar may be considered fair, the arithmetic tolerable, and the geographical knowledge vague."*

*Mr Murray* applied for a transfer in 1861 but the request was ignored. The main reason for the school's deterioration was *Murray's* discontent. He complained of Merriwa's isolation and high cost of living, especially since he had eight children.

*Mr Murray* soon found another reason to press for a transfer. Later in 1861 he reported that local moves were under way to establish a Catholic school. Catholics outnumbered Protestants in Merriwa, and their children received religious instruction only once every three months. *Mr Murray* pointed out that if the Catholic school was established, the National School may close. He felt that he should be replaced by a Catholic teacher at the National School and the Catholics would then be satisfied. The local patrons supported his recommendation.

In 1862 the issue of a new teacher was settled. The incident involved an altercation over cattle and a public horsewhipping and the result was *Murray's* dismissal by the Board. He was re-appointed elsewhere.

In July 1862, *Michael Blake* took charge of Merriwa where he remained until his death in 1881. *Michael Blake* was a Catholic and during his time nothing more was heard of the proposal to establish a Catholic school. *Blake* was fortunate enough to take charge just as improvements to the school house, including the provision of a kitchen, a well and repairs to floors, slabs and shingles, were completed.

In *Blake's* first five years he wrote only twice to the Board, on each occasion about the thefts of his salary cheques by bushrangers who robbed the Northern Rail between Singleton and Muswellbrook. After that his chief communications to the Council of Education (which took over control of National Schools - now termed Public Schools - and Denominational Schools in 1867) were requisitions for extra books, inkwells, slates, maps etc.

The 1850's building was deteriorating rapidly, and *Blake's* teaching was described by inspectors in such terms as "nearly tolerable" or sometimes "nearly fair."

In 1872 the general state of the school received attention, following a critical inspection report:

*"The fences are falling down and the out-offices are in a disgraceful state. The school buildings are very unsuitable and require extensive repairs, or replacing by new ones. The methods are, on the whole, appropriate, but need to be applied with greater energy and zeal. The attainments are a little above moderate."*

*Mr J Bettington*, on behalf of the local Board, explained that the local people would not contribute their quota of the amount needed to repair the building, so nothing could be done. The stalemate was partially resolved after new regulations in 1875 provided for the Council to meet the total cost of new buildings. A petition from 62 residents in December 1875 made a strong case for a new school. The old building swayed in the wind, and there were gaps in the roof and between the slabs. The parents were concerned not only for their children's health

but also for their lives. The signatories criticised the local Board for doing nothing and praised the teacher for putting up with conditions so bad that he was, for example, "*subject to be driven out of his own bedroom by every passing thunderstorm.*" Inspector O'Byrne agreed completely with the petitioners, commenting that he knew of no other school in such wretched condition. In January 1876 the Council therefore resolved to build a new school and residence.

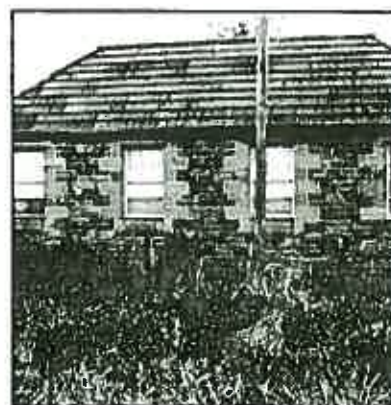
## A NEW SCHOOL AND NEW RESIDENCE

Plans for the new buildings were completed in May 1876. They were originally to be built of wood, but when it was decided to build in stone instead, the plans were not altered. **James Lawler**, owner of half an acre adjoining the school, offered to give it in exchange for the materials from the old building. His offer was accepted. This increased the site to one and a half acres and made it possible to erect the new school without disturbing the pupils in the old one.

In November, **Oliver Saunders'** tender, of £1532 was accepted and by the end of the year his workmen were busily quarrying stone from a hillside nearby. The buildings were finished early in 1878, and in March of that year, a sizeable number of pupils moved in.

Both buildings are still in use. The residence is still occupied by the School Principal, while the school building has been renovated and is now owned and occupied by **Mr & Mrs K Philipson**.

In 1878 enrolment stood at 83. These figures grew to 100 by 1883. A pupil teacher had been needed since 1874, but **Mr Blake** was not qualified to supervise one. The 1878 figures nearly justified an assistant teacher and it was decided in July to appoint **Miss Jessie Johnstone** as the school's first assistant. The parents were pleased with the influence she had on the school and pupils, although she found Merriwa difficult because of the old problem of expense. At one stage she was paying £52 for board and lodgings out of an annual income of £67.



The new buildings and the new assistant greatly improved the standard of the school, but unfortunately the old teacher was getting worse.

Letters of complaint were sent in January 1881. **Blake** himself was criticized for poor teaching, carelessness with the moral education of the children, general indifference and drinking.



*Inspector Dwyer* held an enquiry at the school on 13 and 14 January, 1881 and recommended that *Blake* be transferred for his own sake and that of the school. However, no further action was necessary, because on 24 January, *Miss Johnstone* reported by telegram: "*Head Teacher Merriwa Public School died this morning*".

Merriwa's new teacher was *Thomas Chapman*, fresh from training in 1881 aged 26. A clash of personality between *Mr Chapman*, who was enthusiastic and not very tactful in asserting his new found authority, and the hot-tempered and insubordinate *Miss Johnstone*, resulted in disputes, some of which occurred in front of the children. The Department of Education (established in 1880) took a serious view of this matter and it was decided in late 1881 that both should be transferred.

The parents took up a petition urging the Department to reverse its decision to remove *Mr Chapman*, who had "*made such a great difference to the school premises, the children's attendance, the quality of education and the respect in which the school was held.*" The department agreed to leave *Chapman* in Merriwa, but *Miss Johnstone* had already left. Early in 1882, she was replaced by another pupil teacher.

The early 1880's were good years for Merriwa Public School. The teachers were able and popular and the enrolments were high. (The peak of 100 in 1883 was not to be attained again until the end of World War I). The new buildings were highly satisfactory and in 1881 a weather shed was built and in 1882 another acre was added to the site to provide a paddock for the children's horses. But there was tragedy for *Chapman*. His young wife died in March 1883 and shortly afterwards, he was transferred.

*James Cosgrove* followed *Chapman* but was replaced after a few months by *John Craig*, another young bachelor in his first year of teaching. *Mr Craig* was very highly regarded in Merriwa, but it was during his time that the school's numbers dropped markedly. Numbers dropped from 100 in 1883 to 72 the following year and 60 in 1886, the decline continuing into the 1890's. The explanation was the opening of Catholic schools.

## DECLINING NUMBERS

Roman Catholic Church leaders, who originally supported the idea of an Irish National School System, decided that religious training and secular education should not be separated. A Catholic school established at Maitland represented the type of school Catholics advocated in place of National Schools. This school was to supply teachers to begin Catholic education in Merriwa.

The Public School attendance remained fairly static. Many factors contributed to this and the Catholic school opening in 1885 drew many prospective pupils away, with 76 pupils attending the Catholic school in 1886. Term returns from 1892 onwards reveal not only a scarcity of Catholic children in the Public school, but a large variation in weekly attendances due to



transport difficulties during inclement weather. Flooded creeks and sticky black clay underfoot made travel almost impossible on wet days. Another factor contributing to poor numbers was children from outlying farms who were either tutored at home by parents or governesses or sent away to city boarding schools. This practice of sending children away to schools continued even after transport facilities improved. This was a reflection of a local class distinction which had developed over the years.

As the school's numbers dropped, so did the quality of its teachers. In 1886 **James Davies** was removed from a larger school to Merriwa because of his inefficiency and he was an ineffectual teacher under whom the standard of education in Merriwa declined.

In September 1886 the pupil teacher was transferred and Merriwa remained a one teacher school until 1907.

In 1890 **Vesey Hines** began his sixteen year period in charge of the school. The enrolment was then 40 and attendance was under 30 until 1895. **Mr Hines** was a bad teacher, but a good man. **Inspector Flashman** in 1892 confessed that he was at a loss to know what to recommend, for Hines,

*"... is one of the most gentlemanly men under me but one of the poorest teachers... he can scarcely be sent to a less important place than Merriwa..."*

The situation worsened as the years went by and Hines' removal was recommended several times, but the Department only reduced the classification of both teacher and school.

Documents for September 1894 show that the enrolment had fallen below 40 and Mr Hines was required to explain why? He did so in some detail.

*"Total number enrolled is 38, of whom one left the neighbourhood during the fourth week; one absent for six weeks for want of a horse; one little fellow found distance too far to walk; one pupil absent frequently due to asthma; one pupil over 14 years often absent at work; occasional absentees among the rest of the pupils. Weak eyes and eye infections figure prominently. Two children are very irregular in attendance due to foolish mother and one boy compelled to remain home to look after the stock owing to the prolonged drought."*

**Inspector Rooney** in 1899 found the school very much in the doldrums. There was no shortage of children in the district, but only 44 were enrolled in the Public School. **Hines** was finally transferred in 1906 and the school showed an immediate improvement.

## STANDARD & NUMBERS IMPROVE

*Ernest Clarke* took charge of Merriwa in May 1906. By January 1907 numbers had increased sufficiently to justify the appointment of an assistant, *Miss Eckford* and in February, *Clarke's* application for promotion was granted on the Inspectors report that -

*"Mr Clarke has done good work at Merriwa. His management has raised the class of the school from 9th to 6th Class and has secured the hearty co-operation of the public in the furtherance of school affairs."*

There was an improvement in the standard of teaching after the turn of the century. Most teachers held certificates. Inspectors were demanding new standards of efficiency. There was a greater emphasis on creativity and there was more concern for the individual differences of children.

Progress continued for Merriwa Public School. A new teacher *Roland Woolley* arrived in 1909 and a Parents and Citizens Association was in operation by 1910. In the same year a new assistant became the first teacher to arrive by "motor", an innovation which did so much to break down Merriwa's isolation. At this time the town's population was growing rapidly, and great development was expected to result from the construction of the railway line to Merriwa, which was finally opened in 1918.

By 1910 the school building which had been in use since 1878 was dilapidated and unsuitable for modern teaching. It had a long narrow room (42 feet by 16) with a "gallery", or fixed desks on a built-up floor. The classroom (13 feet square) had been designed for religious instruction, needlework etc and was too small for teaching. It had been used as a storeroom and library, and by 1910 was equipped as a museum.

The problem of the school building was to drag on for years, until partial solutions were rejected, and a new school on a new site decided on. However, it was to be many years down the track before the new building began. In the ensuing years only the most urgent repairs were carried out as quotes for repairs and remodelling were too expensive. The P&C held an "indignation meeting", but despite their views, the necessary minor repairs and the conversion from cesspits to pans were all that were done in 1913 and further work was held over.

## A NEW SITE AND NEW BUILDINGS

By May 1916 the old building was worse, the railway had reached Denman, the earthworks to Merriwa were nearly completed and the town was expanding. It was then decided not to remodel the old building, but to erect a new two-roomed wooden building. Immediately the citizens asked for a new site. Opinion was unanimous that the existing site, acquired in 1850



Roland Woolley - 1909



and later extended, was unsuitable. Its situation near the bottom of the hill meant that most of the playground was swampy. The town had also developed away from the school site, leaving it inconveniently situated. These arguments carried so much conviction that in July 1916 the Department agreed to acquire a new site and a good block of nearly two and a half acres owned by *Walter Cornish*, and available at the reasonable price of £300, was selected in August. Because of Departmental delays and title difficulties the land was not actually acquired until 1918.

In April 1917 plans were prepared for a three-roomed wooden building but the Department did not agree the matter was so urgent. The old school officially provided space for 67 pupils in the main room alone and the average attendance in 1917 was below 60. There was also a shortage of funds due to the war. In 1918 the school's enrolment jumped to 98, due to the completion of the railway line; the occupation of the soldier settler blocks at the conclusion of World War 1; and the improvement of communications due to the advent of the motor car. Not only did the town grow steadily but the composition of local society changed. A new group of citizens, keenly interested in their children's education, had arrived on the scene.

When the Minister for Education visited Merriwa in 1918, a deputation from the P&C strongly urged their case. Early the following year tenders were invited, and *Albert Quiggan* of Ryde completed the new school buildings in McKenzie Street Merriwa in December 1919 at a cost of £1537. At the beginning of 1920 *Mr Woolley* and his assistant, *Miss Latimer*, with an average attendance of 85 pupils, were happily housed in their new school. This three-roomed wooden building forms the nucleus of the primary today and is still in use for three classes, and is in good condition eighty years on.

The occupation of the soldier settlement blocks in the district led to a steady increase in population and during the 1920's, six "subsidised" or "provisional" one teacher schools were established around Merriwa.



Little seems to have occurred at the Public School over the next few years, although a complaint against *Mr Woolley* resulted in his transfer to a lower-class school. At the end of *Mr Woolley's* career at Merriwa, he was granted another assistant, *Miss Nash*, who was evidently extremely capable and received many favourable comments.

In 1927 the school had grown, having an enrolment of 108 and a staff of three. The headmaster, *Mr Colin Walker*, suggested that a Lot adjoining the school should be acquired for a playing area, since the vacant land across the street, which the children had previously used, was now being built on. His suggestion was adopted and the land purchased in 1929.

## FIRST INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE

*Mr Walker* was replaced by *Mr Claude T Lovell* in 1929. In 1931 enrolment had increased to 129 with three very large classes. The school was affected by the serious illness of its headmaster, *Mr Lovell*, who died in September 1931 while on leave. He died not knowing that the first Intermediate Certificate at Merriwa had been gained by one of his 17 "super-primary" pupils.

With a larger group of "super-primary" children attending the local school each year, the function of the school underwent an important change. The unavailability of jobs during the depression years kept some pupils at school longer, possibly the depression pointed out the importance of higher education as the key to a secure job, and certain jobs were becoming available in the town which required a minimum of three years secondary school.

*Mr Perram* was appointed as headmaster in 1931 during the difficult Depression and pre-war years until 1939. In June 1932, Miss Gilmour was appointed assistant teacher.

The Merriwa & Cassilis News reported on 2 February 1934 that "*Mr T M Perram (Headmaster) and Miss Arkless resumed duties. Miss Gilmour transferred to Newtown after spending one year eight months at Merriwa. Miss E McLean, who has been teaching at Auburn (Domestic Science) succeeds Miss Gilmour.*"

Enrolments remained fairly stable with an ever increasing group of secondary pupils. The only high schools then available to Merriwa children were at Maitland, Tamworth and Mudgee.

In 1940 *Mr K W Partridge*, BA, became Headmaster. He enlisted the services of his wife, a Science Graduate, to teach Geography to the seniors (one presumes without pay) and noted in his comments on the super-primary classes "... *A Technical course would, I feel sure, meet the needs of these pupils, far more than the one which of necessity must be given ....*" and remarked also on the interest shown by the children in the newly introduced "*Business Studies*".

*Mr W J Thorpe* became Headmaster in 1943, and for a short time the school reverted back to a two-teacher basis due to depleted war time staffing. *Mr Thorpe* saw the need for improved facilities for secondary education and corresponded with the Headmaster at Denman regarding the possibility of establishing a fast train service to carry pupils to the Muswellbrook District Rural School.

There were frequent staff changes during the immediate post-war years and classes were large. *Mr Thorpe* noted in his comments in 1949 that "... *the large Kindergarten class is enough to occupy all the one teacher's time .. the teacher Mr Connolly, does well to keep these little ones profitably occupied whilst he is teaching the First and Second classes.*"



## HISTORY BEHIND PRIMARY'S NEW LOOK

An historical sundial was erected near the entrance, along with an attractive stone and wrought iron gateway and the main path was a solid example of stone paving.

*Recollections of Mr Doug Russell 1997*

### School Gates

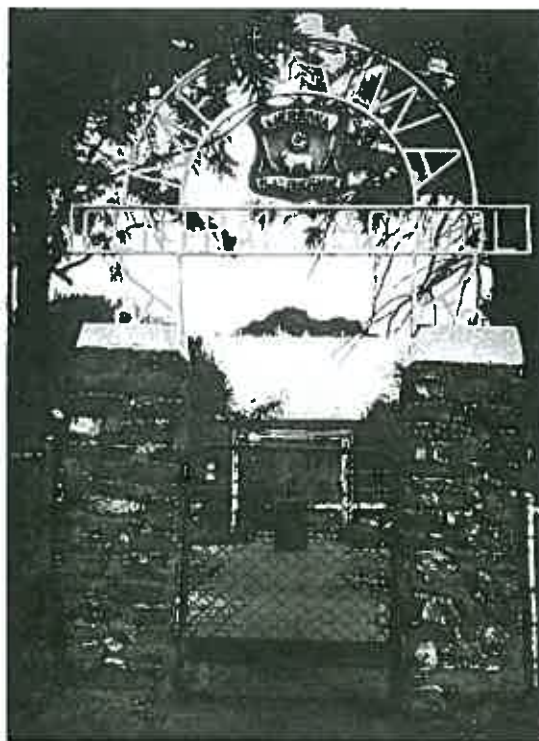
These were designed by *Mr Bruce Lemcke* (former Primary teacher) and the ironwork was made by *Mr Hec Hazell*, a former Merriwa Blacksmith.

### Brick Pillars

The stones were collected by school children in Mr W J Thorpe's red car (the School Principal at the time). They travelled out to "Galla Gilla" and picked them up from an old Convict Gaol on the property. *Mr Luigi Sartori* then put them together to form the pillars that now stand.

### Sundial

The sundial was owned by *Mr Gregory Blaxland* when he lived at "Cullingral Station" (convict built) in the early 1820's. It was presented to the school by *Mr T J McFarlane*, who was the owner of "Cullingral Station" at the time.



*Recollections of Barry Archer and Tom Russell (ex students)*

Another story is told by *Mr Barry Archer* and *Tom Russell* who both claim that there is no way the car owned by the then Principal William Thorpe, could have been used to transport rocks from "Galla Gilla" back into town.

Both agree that Mr Thorpe's car was a small red English model with a cloth roof and was probably either a Morris or a Singer.

They said the rocks were collected from the convict goal on Blaxland's property using a "blitzwagon" owned by *Vernon Vines*. It was the only vehicle which could get up the hill. Barry archer's father and Uncle Fred then took the rocks into town. Barry remembers *Luigi Sartori* building the pillars for the gates and mixing the mortar with his hands. He was helped by *Hughie* and *Fred Archer*.

## CLASSIFICATION AS A CENTRAL SCHOOL

The school was growing at a steady rate, and in 1950-51 received a sudden influx of children as two small schools were closed, and new bus runs were authorised by the Department to convey children from the Collaroy – Idaville area, and a little later from the Flight Springs - Coomealla district.

This led to the accommodation being overtaxed and the arrival of a third assistant who was to teach in a rented hall. The growing pressure of 30 secondary children in 1953, led to the appointment of a secondary teacher, **Mr Hindley**, who was also to teach in another rented hall. These halls were the old School of Arts Hall and the old small Parish Hall.

Having a specialised secondary teacher saw the school designated a Central School in 1953.

The need for additional accommodation was now pressing, and at the urgent request of the local people through the P & C Association and the local Member of Parliament, **Mr R B Nott**, MLA, the Department authorised the construction of a new two-classroom block.

The contract was let to **Mr Thacker** of Gosford and completed efficiently by November 1953 when the rooms were immediately occupied by the two classes previously taught in the halls. The new block was officially opened by the then Minister for Education, Mr Heffron on 10 April 1954.

**Mr Thorpe** was replaced as Headmaster by **Mr Paterson** in 1954. The enrolment at this time was 201 due to the many bus runs bringing children from the more remote areas of the district, which gave them the opportunity for full time education at a Public School.

**Mr G W Falkenmire**, BA, BEd, became Headmaster in 1956. During his leadership an amphitheatre was constructed and the old weather shed was remodelled into an attractive library which was opened by **Mr Gelfius**, Director of Education in the Newcastle area, in September 1958.





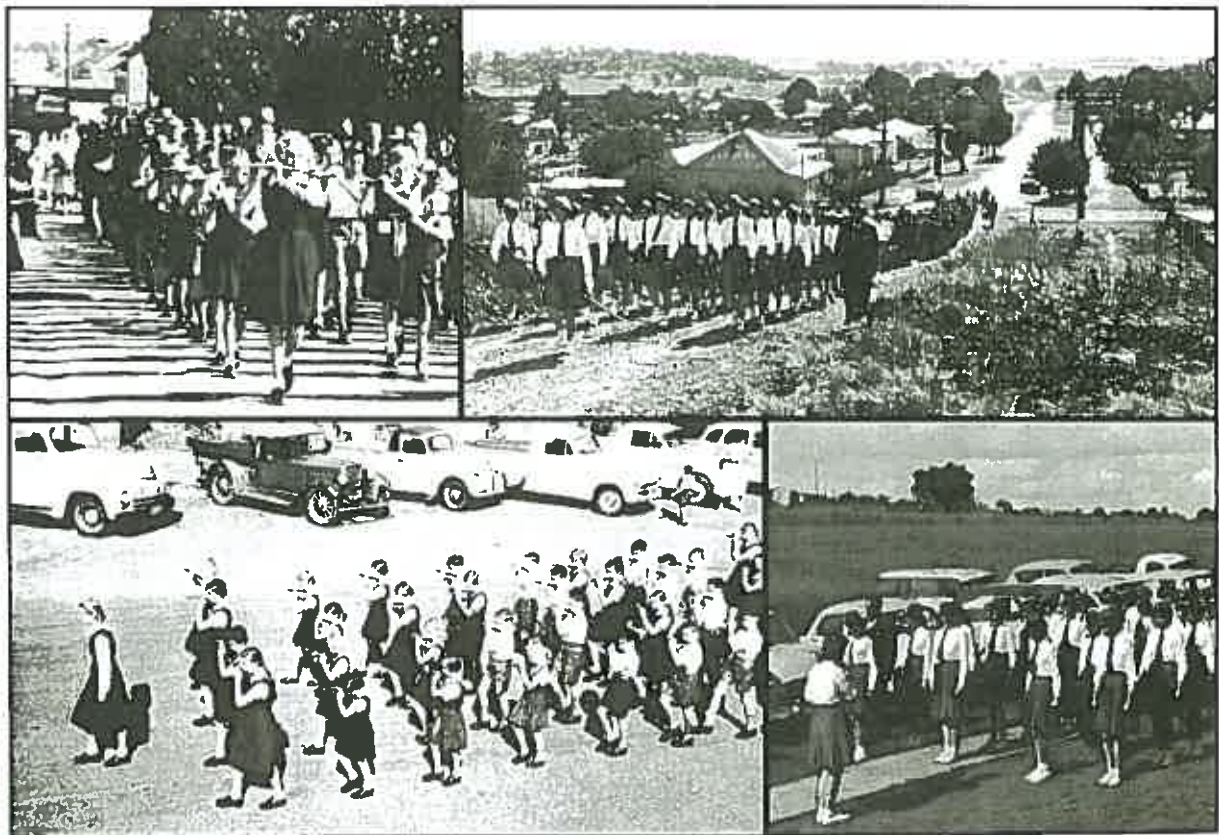
## THE FLUTE BAND

In 1956 *Mr Falkenmire* started a wooden flute band with the students dressing in black serge tunics and berets. In 1957 the uniform changed to yellow sports tunics, white blouses and sandshoes and socks.

In 1959 a second band was formed and silver flutes were introduced. The local publican, *Mr Alex Stayden*, donated uniforms, which although updated, the band students wear today. The royal blue pleated skirts, blue and gold hats, white blouses and blue and gold ties, are a feature of many local and district events.

Many flautists were taught by *Mr Hindley*, *Mr A Lynch* and *Mrs Del Leggett* in the earlier years. Over the years, the band has played at Newcastle, Scone, Muswellbrook, Cessnock, the Tour of the Hunter Bike Race, the official opening of the Merriwa secondary site and extensions in 1981, the Upper Hunter Wine Festival in 1981 and of course in Merriwa, where the band regularly performs at Anzac Days, local shows and functions.

In 1963 the flutes changed to silver fifes and in 1981, the Silver Jubilee year, all new uniforms were made available through the generous support of the school's P&C. Over the years many hundreds of students have been involved in the flute and fife bands.





*August Day, 1959*





## SECONDARY BUILDINGS ON NEW SITE

The school was reclassified and the first Deputy Headmaster appointed. Enrolment at the end of 1958 was 273 including 51 in the three post primary classes.

The never ending plea for more and improved accommodation continued. In 1958 plans were drawn up for a secondary building on a site of four acres acquired by the Department during *Mr Paterson's* period as Headmaster.

*Mr H R Lynch* was appointed Headmaster in January 1959. However lack of accommodation continued to hamper the work of the staff.

At last the new secondary buildings were erected on the corner of Bow and Langley Streets. They consisted of a two-classroom timber unit with office and storeroom which is now incorporated in the present complex as the northern wing. Also, a separate manual arts block comprising a classroom and an office and storeroom was brought into use at a total cost of £9,700. This sum also included the cost of providing toilet and ablution facilities.

The rooms were ready for use in July 1959. The official opening of the new secondary buildings by *Mr Nott* MLA, Minister for Agriculture, was on 27 May 1960. The enrolment in 1960 was 235 pupils in the primary department with six assistant teachers and 60 pupils in the secondary department with two assistant teachers.

The Central School now occupied two sites. However there were still inadequate teaching rooms available. The Third Year class was housed in the manual arts room three days a week, when it was not being used for manual arts, and was combined with Second Year class for the remaining two days and one primary class was still being taught in the hall away from the school.

Application had been made for the provision of a Kindergarten room, which would give sufficient room for the Primary department. The Headmaster, *Mr H Lynch*, also applied for a Home Science block and the introduction of a Home Science course, which was approved in principle and was being further considered by the Department.

*Mr Lynch* also reported that parents desired the erection of additional secondary classrooms, including a Science/Biology Laboratory and the replacement of pan toilets by a septic tank system. No firm proposals were being considered by the Department at that stage.

In 1960 a new and spacious Kindergarten room was added to the Infants block and provided adequate rooms on the Primary site for the next decade. In 1961, a new bus run was started transporting children from the outlying properties north of Merriwa on the Willow Tree Road.

*Mr E G Flood* BA, was appointed Principal in 1964 and in that year further extensions took place at the secondary site. Specialist rooms for Science and Home Economics were constructed along with ancillary accommodation.

## FOURTH FORM SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

In 1965, a pioneer group of thirteen students sat for and passed, the Fourth Form School Certificate. In 1966 there was a full time staff of seven teachers in the secondary department.

In 1967, *Mr Gordon Humphries* succeeded *Mr Flood* as Principal and the school continued to grow. Merriwa Catholic School's secondary section closed in 1968 swelling the numbers of secondary students at the Central School. Additional teachers were appointed and a block of three demountable classrooms were erected as temporary accommodation.

Another rise in enrolment came in 1970 when the Cassilis secondary classes were closed and bus transport arranged to Merriwa. Plans were drawn up for an up-to-date block of modern buildings, comprising Library and offices, Commerce room, Science room, Woodwork/Metalwork room. Construction commenced in 1970 and the buildings were occupied during 1971.

The official opening ceremony of the new accommodation was held on 23 November 1972. By this time *Mr R J Gorman* was the Principal. The official opening and unveiling of the plaque was carried out by *Mr E Gray*, BEc, Area Director of Education, Newcastle Region. Also there for the ceremony was *Mr L Nott*, MLA, and the Inspector for Schools *Mr J Pollock*, BA. The enrolment at the secondary in 1972 was 160, with 200 in the primary.

The buildings had been erected to provide specialist rooms for the secondary pupils. A new Library and Audio-visual room was the focal point of the school and was equipped with audio-visual equipment such as language laboratory, overhead projectors, strip film projectors, cassette machines and video equipment for taping television programs. A specialist Geography room and store room, a modern well equipped Science laboratory plus preparation room also formed part of the new complex.

The equipment for the new buildings and existing rooms was provided by the Department of Education and was supplemented by an energetic and ever generous P&C Association and Mother's Club.



## EFFORT TO ESTABLISH FORMS 5 AND 6

In 1973 there was a concerted effort to form a senior school, establishing Forms 5 and 6 at Merriwa. On behalf of Merriwa Central School, *Mr L Nott*, MLA, contacted the then Minister for Education, *EA Ellis*. The final paragraph in the return correspondence stated ....

*"The present travelling arrangements involve Merriwa students in a 1 1/2 hour trip each way. While this is no doubt a long trip, it does not compare unfavourably with length of travel required from many students, even in city areas. Until such time as a substantial number of children wish to follow the senior courses at Merriwa Central School, the interests of students will be best served by their enrolment at Muswellbrook High School."*

In 1976 a "time capsule" was placed under the Sun-Dial at the primary site. The inscription reads:

*"Hereunder lies a vessel containing relics of 1976. This vessel is to be unearthed on the 22nd Day of October 2000."*

In 1976 *Robert Gorman*, Principal, once more made application for the establishment of Form 5 at Merriwa Central School in 1977, giving information of projected enrolments.



*Mr Geoff Buckland* was appointed Principal in 1979 and it was not until mid July 1980 that he was led to believe that a Year 11 standard of education would be introduced in

Merriwa in 1981. The administrative staff and teaching staff had devoted much time, energy and money in preparation for the Senior School. However, by October 1980, the school had not been officially informed in writing of approval to commence a senior school in 1981.

The Area Director of Education, announced that funds had not been made available for the establishment of a senior school. The community rallied to this information with over 100 people attending a meeting held at the secondary to discuss the situation and examine the alternatives.

After much discussion it was resolved there be a petition signed by all stating *"We, the undersigned, humbly beg and petition the Hon. Minister for Education, Mr Paul Landa, to instruct the Director General of Education to confirm the commencement of Year 11 at Merriwa Central School in February 1981."*



A deputation to the Minister, consisting of the Shire President, *Mr I Peebles*, *Mrs Pat Philipson*, *Mrs Jill Inder*, *Mr Ean Cottle*, *Mr Peter Strachan* and *Professor CC Renwick* (the Director of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation) collected the petition and all relevant information, that being realistic facts and figures, and met with the Minister for Education, *Mr Paul Landa*.

*Mr Landa* was impressed with the thoroughness with which the arguments had been presented to him. He took all points into consideration and promised to give the matter his urgent attention. The deputation committee came away from the meeting, very happy and pleased with their efforts.

The first Year 11 class commenced in February 1981.



## MORE BUILDINGS ON SECONDARY SITE

More accommodation was planned and commenced on 5 February 1980. A new food service unit (canteen) was built as well as an administration block, toilet, change block, updating of electrical service, painting and landscaping. The total cost was \$447,800 and the contractor was Department of Public Works - Building, Construction and Maintenance Branch. Work was completed on 17 February 1981 and the official opening was held on 25 June 1981.

In June 1981 negotiations were at the contract stage to obtain five acres of land adjacent to the secondary site. This saw the commencement of the Agriculture Department of Merriwa Central School. Enrolment in 1981 was 180 in secondary with 31 students sitting for the School Certificate, and 198 primary students. The number of whole-school teaching staff was 23.



*First Year 12*

With the establishment of Year 11, more accommodation was needed and in 1982 the school was granted a demountable Science laboratory. Over the next four years the school enjoyed a significant growth in staff numbers allowing resource facilities and additional aid in Primary and the proliferation of elective courses in Secondary.



The first Year 12 students graduated after sitting for the Higher School Certificate in 1982. With its new buildings, recently completed renovations and paint work and pleasant well attended lawns and trees, Merriwa had a school environment of which it could be proud.

*Mrs Margery Ramsey* became the new Principal in April 1988, the year of Australia's Bi-centenary. To celebrate this occasion, a "time capsule" was buried under the flagpole at the secondary and is to be opened a generation on. Also to celebrate the Bi-centenary, every school student in Australia was given a Commemorative Medal to mark this special time in history.

## COMPUTERS & TECHNOLOGY

In 1988 the Rotary Club of Merriwa applied for a grant through the Rural Education Access Program (REAP) to support Merriwa Central School in acquiring computers for use by the school and the community and was granted \$9,800.

The school then set up a computer room which is used by students and the community. The computers have had many upgrades along the way involving considerable expenditure.

Over the last decade, modern technology has considerably changed the way things are done in schools. Not only is the office completely computerized allowing better record keeping, but there is an efficient computer network throughout the school, with access to the internet and therefore the world, and communication by e-mail is now possible.

Computers feature in learning throughout Merriwa Central School. Hopefully with the introduction of an optic fibre link between the two sites to replace the current microwave aerials, the use of these technologies will continue to improve.

## THE MERRIWA RINGER

In 1989 Assistant Principal *Mr Mal Frame* applied for a DSP Grant to begin a community newsletter using the school as the publisher. The grant provided a printing machine and sufficient resources to publish the "Ringer" for 12 months. Part of the submission was an undertaking that the "Ringer" would be self sufficient after one year.

Since then the "Merriwa Ringer" has developed into the "local paper". With strong community support it has gone from strength to strength. It provides local news, advertising and community notices, and provides employment for the co-ordinator. It is eagerly awaited by the community each week, with a circulation of around 900 copies and is usually about 20 pages long.

The name was suggested by *Mal Frame* as a combination of the historical significance of shearing in the district - the ringer being a Shearer and also the school bell.

## NEW PRIMARY LIBRARY

1989 saw a new library at the Primary with two buildings being joined together to make the lovely room we have today. Half the building was taken from the end of the existing primary block with the other half being transported from Cassilis.

The Official Opening of the new Library was on 26 July 1990. *Mrs Virginia Chadwick*, MP, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs unveiled the plaque.

In January 1990 *Mr Graeme Mason* took over as Principal. This was a difficult time in the history of the school with many changes taking place but with the support of the community and the P&C, the school was able to overcome these challenges and move forward.

Merriwa Central School is one of a handful of split-site Central schools in NSW. It has long been the policy of the Department of Education to consolidate these schools onto one site. This has the effect of creating an atmosphere of cohesiveness and saves money by enabling the common use of resources. The idea is to develop a "Community school". The Department formally advised Merriwa Central School of a proposed amalgamation of the two sites.

The amalgamation had to be agreed to by the community and was discussed at a Public Meeting in the early 1990's. This caused much consternation with many people. Parents and teachers alike argued the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation. The community rejected the idea outright, even though the plan involved a \$2.4 million upgrade and construction of a multi-purpose hall, and much of the work was to be carried out by the local trades-people at a time of severe rural recession.

Several years later the idea was reinvestigated and the P&C led a push to have the school amalgamated on the proviso that all stages of the process would be controlled by the school community. By this time the Department had placed the plan on a back burner and funding was now not available. Several plans had been drawn up and initial enquiries into land purchase etc had taken place. Fact finding teams had visited other schools in the Hunter which had been amalgamated in the past.

Currently the school is on a "waiting list" and whether the process occurs at all is still to be finalised.

During the early nineties, enrolment was on a gradual but continuous decline. Merriwa had a negative population growth; all country towns were suffering from the rural recession; there was a drought; work was hard to come by, and buses were transporting children to Aberdeen and Scone schools. The ongoing drop in student numbers resulted in nominated transfers for teachers and the loss of demountables (6 were removed over 5 years).

*Mr WJ (Bill) Rogers* was appointed Principal in January 1994 and he had a very challenging four years of leadership. *Mr Rogers* took the first steps towards developing the school's history records. He was responsible for much of the memorabilia displayed around the walls of the secondary administration building and many other articles stored away in archive boxes.

In September 1995 the "1919 Merriwa Public School Roll of Honour" was returned to the school. The Merriwa Historical Society returned the Roll of Honour which listed the names of ex-students from the Merriwa Public School, who served in the armed services during World War 1. It also indicates those who were killed in action. The Honour board had been stored since 1967, in the Society's museum. It was restored by the school and given pride of place in the main foyer.

In April 1996, following the Anzac Day march and Ceremony, a very special ceremony was held at the school to dedicate the Roll of Honour. Representatives from Year 8 history class, *Joanne Williams* and *Adrian Taylor*, spoke of Merriwa's involvement in World War 1.

*Mrs Pam Kemp*, President of the Merriwa Historical Society, made a formal handover of the Roll of Honour to the school saying that it had now "come home". *Mrs Kemp* also presented the school with an old bell. This bell is not the bell in the 1890's photo of the then principal, Mr Hines and his charges outside the school. The origin of this bell is unknown. Following the formal handover, *Father Rod Gallagher* gave a prayer of thanks for the Fallen and *Father John McEneaney* dedicated the Roll of Honour.

Following are the names on the Roll of Honour

Andrew AH	Andrew FO	Baker A
Beaver M	Bailey G	Earl R
French RS*	French PW	French RW
Hazell D	Huxley J	Hackett RC*
Hackett WC	Lawless ET	Lawless CR*
McMahon L	Parson EG	Parkinson LP*
Page S*	Page C	Pickering KP
Pittman S*	Scott A*	Witney RW*

In 1997 Merriwa Central School was reclassified due to the continuing smaller numbers. *Mr Grahame Jackson*, our current Principal arrived in January 1998.



## LOSS OF DEMOUNTABLE - THEN THE RETURN

In April 1999, the school was advised that one of its demountables would be removed. Following three months of unabated effort by the school's P&C to resolve the issue by negotiation, the building was finally removed on Monday afternoon, 5 July 1999.

The P&C president, *Mr John Small*, said students in all small country schools should have the same educational chances as those in the city. He said the formula used by the Department to determine portable classroom space available to small schools was inappropriate and urgently needed to be reviewed.

The first attempt to remove the classroom by the contractors failed due to a joint community demonstration. The driver did not pass the picket line.

The second attempt began early one morning at 6.15 am when the bells of Holy Trinity Anglican Church rang out over Merriwa to wake the community. It was a pre-arranged signal to indicate any action at the school. On the other side of town the bells of St Joseph's Catholic School and St Anne's Church joined in. Phone lines ran hot and the small group keeping watch at the school swelled, as grim faced people left their homes in town, left their farms and drove through the cold early fog, to do what they could to save the building.

Official warnings, confrontations, refusal to co-operate and arrests followed as the afternoon progressed. The building did leave the premises at the school at 5.10pm. Merriwa Central School made the headlines of all the local papers, every Sydney paper and a Newcastle paper. We also made every news coverage on television and radio for about a week.

Finally someone started to take notice. Less than two weeks later another classroom was returned to the school with the Minister for Education and Training, *Mr John Aquilina*, also present to show "good faith" with the community. There was no finer example of community spirit. The Merriwa community fought for what they believed in - and WON.

## **CAREERS AND PATHWAYS**

### **Vocational Education**

Although all education is seen as having a focus on the future employment or lifestyle of our students, we now have a very structured and deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between school and work.

Merriwa Central has moved with the times in introducing a wide variety of courses and programs designed to help students enter the work force. For many years, especially since the early 1970's, students have taken part in Work Experience Programs. These usually take the form of Year 10 students being placed into the work place for two weeks - usually trying two careers for one week each.

Some of the careers advisers who carried out these valuable tasks were Jeff Seymour, Jill Gaynor, Barry Moore, Gay Hoskings, Pam Amidy and Jenny Johnson. This has been a very successful program and continues today with all Year 10 students taking part. The school has been very proud of the conduct of all students over the years and has had excellent feedback from employers, many of who have offered careers to our students.

In recent years, many other initiatives have been introduced to give various groups of students the opportunity to experience the work force for extended periods of time - usually one day per week. These courses include "Staying on Track" and Transition Education" which are offered to Years 8 - 10 students who are identified as being likely to benefit from closer links with the work force, whilst still completing their formal school education.

The senior school is another area that has seen major changes over the past decade. In 1991 Industrial Practice Work Studies was introduced to the senior curriculum by Barry Moore, John Cowell and Margaret Carey. This started as a "hands on" course which taught practical skills as well as written career related topics.

In 1992 the school introduced its first accredited Vocational Education subject to the senior school. Merriwa Central School was chosen to be the only Central School in NSW to take part in the "pilot" course of Industry Studies - Hospitality. The subject has been well received by the students and community alike. The students have been very visible around the town in their French Chef's uniforms, catering for a wide variety of functions. In the year 2000 this subject will be replaced by a new course, Hospitality Operations, which is part of the Tourism and Hospitality National Framework. At the same time we will see the introduction of Rural Industries and Metals and Engineering Frameworks. These are all competency-based training packages recognised by TAFE and industry and the BOS.

Another exciting development in training opportunities for our students took place in 1998 when we first accessed JST courses at Muswellbrook TAFE. The students were able to travel by community bus to attend courses in such areas as childcare, office administration, automotive, hairdressing, computing software, auto refinishing, nursing, OH&S and first aid. The popularity of these courses was made apparent by the fact that the bus left Merriwa at 6.10am and nobody ever missed it!

In 1999 we also broke new ground by setting up our first part time traineeship. This was in response to a Federal Government initiative which aims to encourage senior students to complete their HSC whilst at the same time working 1 day per week and attending TAFE 1 day per week. Our first student was employed as a part time trainee in office administration at Merriwa Shire Council.

In the year 2000 we are hoping to extend this program as we have already had several offers of employment for suitable students.

We look forward to the future in this exciting area of education. As well as teaching our students the normal subjects we are also forming strong links with local industry and TAFE. This can only benefit the students who are fortunate enough to take part.

## AGRICULTURE

Agriculture as a subject in Merriwa Central School began in 1980 with its humble beginnings in the backyard of the Teacher Housing Authority Residence.

Extract from 1982 Images: -

*In June 1981 negotiations were at the contract stage to obtain 5 acres of land adjacent to the school's secondary site.*

*In 1981 vegetables such as beetroot, turnips, onions, cabbages, cauliflower and spinach were grown in the initial block after cultivation with a rotary hoe and the Howard 2000 tractor. Several batches of day old chickens were purchased from hatcheries and raised by the students until they were sold at 10 weeks of age to local residents.*

*In term 3 the school received an incubator which was used to hatch out our own chickens from fertile eggs. All profits from chickens and vegetables were used to purchase further equipment for the plot.*

*In 1982 we were very fortunate to have the P&C donate a shed for the storage of our equipment. This was erected by the students and our farm assistant Martin Nixon. The newly acquired block of land is still being developed. With fencing and better pasture establishment we will soon be able to run more sheep which are kindly being donated by some local farmers.*

*A major project which we are undertaking is an entry in the state-wide Angus Steer Competition. Students will be responsible for the training, feeding and grooming of an angus steer in preparation for the Royal Easter Show in 1983.*

*Other activities carried out in conjunction with agriculture are trial plots of pasture species, a rust resistance trial on wheat varieties for the Department of Agriculture and a series of sheep breeding experiments.*

*Chickens are also being raised again as a source of finance for the other projects.*

*Ivan Gant*



## **PARENTS & CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION (P&C)**

The P&C offers a real voice in the development of school policy and procedures. It is a recognised lobby group for the school community and has access to the Department of Education and Training and other relevant agencies. It is a forum in which constructive discussion helps to achieve meaningful and positive change within the school.

Another important role of the P&C is to raise funds to further develop educational programs beyond that possible with the base level funding provided by the Department.

The P&C operate sub-committees such as the canteen committee, uniform committee (this includes both staff and student representatives) and various fund-raising committees formed to investigate and organise issues as the need arises. By far the best fundraiser for the P&C are the two school canteens.

The P&C has been operating since before 1910, and throughout the years, in conjunction with a Ladies Auxiliary and the Community, has tirelessly raised money to purchase equipment which benefits the students' education and the efficiency of the school.

### **The Canteen**

The canteens at both primary and secondary sites are managed by a very diligent sub-committee of the Parents & Citizens Association and all money raised is presented to them each year, and is used to fund P&C projects and equipment needed for the school.

In recent times good profits have been made which have greatly helped the P& C provide those extras needed for the education of our children.

Thank you to each and every parent who has worked in our canteens.

and please see page

# PRIMARY SCHOOL





# SECONDARY SCHOOL





## **REFLECTIONS**

**Leila Collins (ex-student)**

(Written in 1975 for the 125years Celebration)

### **MY SCHOOL DAYS IN 1895**

It is almost eighty years since I had my first day at school. Mr Hines was our only teacher. We had to say - "Good morning, Sir", every morning.

At 9.30 the bell would ring and we all had to fall into line. Our teacher would ask us to show hands, front and back. Then he'd inspect our boots to see if they were clean. He was especially particular about the heels. Then it was "right turn", and we'd march up the steps into the porch. The girls hung their hats on the left side and the boys used the right.

There was a 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th class. The small children sat down at the northern end of the school. One class would have reading lessons while the others had writing and so on.

We had slates and pencils and always had to have a wet sponge and a dry duster to clean our slates.

The teacher would ask questions and if I thought I knew the answer, up would go my hand and the teacher would point his finger at me .... "Well, Smiles, what's the answer?" He always called me Smiles. I didn't smile one day though when I threw the duster at the boy in front of me. I was called out to get the cane. I did the wrong thing - so I deserved it. If we were caught talking, we were kept in after school.

Games we played included - egg in the hat, skipping, hop scotch, jacks, and two's and three's. We held Empire Day Picnics on the Red Hill on (Brindley Park). We also planted trees on Arbor Day and we had to look after them and our flower gardens. A number of children had Sandy Blight and their eyes were very bad. Our teacher promised a threepence reward for the first pupil to arrive at school with a green eye shade. I got it and was very, very pleased.

We left school at the age of 14 in those days. We had dumb-bells and clubs to drill with. We got one month's holiday at Christmas time and two weeks during the year. We were very sorry for our teacher when he was appointed to Lemington, only three miles out on the Common (called Muswellbrook Road now), with only a few pupils attending. He did not stay there long. He retired and lived at Wyong till he died, aged 100 years and one month.

### **Brian Collins 1930 - 1937 (ex-student)**

We are looking at years in the "Great Depression", when the parents of most of the children could not afford shoes, hence a very bare foot crew. I was given the nick name of "boots", as my parents made me wear boots to school. Our teachers were all very dedicated and had our utmost respect. They always dressed well which added to our respect.

One memory which has always stuck to me, was the visit of the Truant Officer. We little's were made to stand on our seats so that we could view the trees on the Cullingral Street side. We were then told: "Now you see how bent and ugly those trees are? Well that is how you will grow up if you do not attend school." A bit frightening to a little child.

Our teachers were Mr Tom Perram (Headmaster) a first World War Veteran, who had shrapnel wounds on his legs, a favourite target when playing soccer with the boys. Mr Perram was also a very well known cricketer, excelling with the slow spin discovery. Being a three teacher school over the years, we were fortunate to have Misses Doran, Downer, McLean, Curran and Arkless. Now Miss Arkless, an English lady, believed in saving shoe leather. She took one stride where most people took two when walking, which she did a lot of. Miss McLean, who paid me a visit a few years ago, married a Baptist Minister in Sydney.

In the early days we were lucky that plenty of pepper trees had been planted, as a rub on the hands during recess helped as a buffer to absorb the cane. Mr Perram was quite famous for his ability with the cane and the general idea was to pull your hand back as the cane came down, so that he would hit his war wounds. However this did not always come off, as he had a habit of hitting you on the back of the knuckles as he brought the cane back up and said: "Hold your hand out again." I remember one very frosty morning one lad (nameless) had apparently been very naughty. He was made to put his hands in cold water after each whack of the cane. We accepted that action in those days and the receivers usually skitted about it. When a new fence, with the wires strained extremely tight, was erected in front of the "horse paddock" in McKenzie Street, we were given fair warning not to swing on it. Begger and myself tried to walk the top wire. Yes, you guessed it. Later with six of the best each, we knew we were not to swing on the fence.

The girls mainly played vigaro (a form of cricket) and some played tennis on the school court, with a loud scream at recess "first serve all around." The boys played cricket and soccer plus big ring marbles.

Most disputes were settled down at Townsend Corner (McKenzie/Vennacher) after school, where someone proved their superiority with the fist or at wrestling.

Some things I remember ... Mrs Bhutto balancing a basket of laundry on her head on the way to wash at the weir ... visit of the governor General Lord Gowrie .... Charles Kingsford-Smith and the "Old Bus" in Hendersons paddock .... Electricity switched on to Merriwa ... opening of the Harbour Bridge .... Death of King George V ... the Big Drought ... old School friends of those days who are no longer with us.

## **FLASHBACK 1960's**

Interesting reading if you go through the old Punishment Book of the secondary department. Names have been withheld to avoid embarrassment to some prominent business and community members.

In 1961 "disruptive behaviour" sent to the Principal - 2 strokes of the cane; insubordination - 2 strokes; remarks and notes with double meaning - 4 strokes; continuous misbehavior, eating gum and telling lies one young male received - 2 strokes; animal noises and continued rudeness - 2 strokes.

In 1962 continuous disobedience and misuse of furniture - 2 strokes; serious insubordination to Headmaster earned this one male 6 strokes.

In 1965 smoking in the toilet was a common offence and earned 2 strokes. Misbehavior in art - 2 strokes.

In 1966 insolence, taking girls hats after warnings - 2 strokes; complete insolence, threat to teacher - 3 strokes.

In 1967 damaging school property - 2 strokes; leaving school grounds without permission - 4 strokes; flicking rubber bands - 2 strokes, rudeness and disorderly conduct - 6 strokes.

In 1968 interfering with school property (ablution block) - 4 strokes; swearing - 4 strokes; truanting from lessons (4 boys together) - 4 strokes; misbehavior in ablution block - 6 strokes.

In 1969 continued rudeness and disobedience - 4 strokes; insolence - 4 strokes.

In 1970 blatant disregard of school rules - 4 strokes; rudeness to teacher - 6 strokes.

In 1971 continued disobedience - 4 strokes.

In 1972 swearing at teacher - 3 strokes; continued disobedience - 2 strokes.

## **REFLECTIONS**

### **Joyce Henderson (Telfer) (ex-student)**

As I was a pupil at Merriwa Public School, as it was then called, for 10 years, starting in 1921, I am pleased to write my story of these years in which I received a very sound education that has carried me through my life.

There was only one building which is still here today. Mr Roland Woolley was Headmaster,



(his wife taught us sewing Friday afternoons) and from memory, there was one lady teacher. Over the years Colin Walker and Claude Lovell were the following Headmasters, George Shaeffer was there for a short period. It was probably while Claude Lovell was on sick leave.

I had to walk 2½ miles to school each day. In wet weather we had to miss school. We could not ride our horses as there were no facilities for them at school. It was hard walking in the mud - we changed our muddy footwear and left them in the paddock near town. We walked back to Sunday School each Sunday, so we actually walked 30 miles each week. I also did extra distance for music lessons. Mrs Potts was the teacher and she lived in the brick cottage near the Rectory, which is still there.

School was all school in those days. No sports carnivals, swimming carnivals, excursions away that happen these days. We assembled in front of school each morning. The flag was raised as we said "I honor my god, I serve the King, I salute the flag."

My last years at school, I really enjoyed. Claude Lovell was a great Headmaster and made school very interesting. He was not a well man. I presume that was why he was at a small school and hence our gain. Each Monday morning we wrote and added 20 words to our spelling book. Sometimes on Friday afternoon we would have a cricket match. Teams lined up each side of the room and we bowled from our spelling book.

Each morning he wrote 20 mental arithmetic questions on the blackboard. He had a roller-blind erected to conceal them. When this went up we had so many minutes to write answers. It was a great training as all my life I've used short cuts in my mental arithmetics.

In my last years of school sport was introduced. We acquired a tennis court and basketball court. An attempt was apparently made for inter-school matches. The only memory I have of such is one match. It may have been Muswellbrook. The girls arrived all immaculate in sports uniforms, of which we had none. It somewhat dampened our ego, we felt defeated before we started. Anyway to our surprise and joy we had an easy win.

We did not wear a school uniform but the little badge worn by pupils today was instigated in my day and we were so proud to wear it every day to school.

Merriwa was only a primary school so after finishing 6th class, further classes were created as you could not leave school at the age of twelve. I was in that first class to carry on at school. We were known as the "super-primary" school class. This is how a unique situation occurred in my life - I was Dux of the School more than once. Congratulations Merriwa Central School on 150 years of education.

As written by Joyce Henderson

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### **Tim Henderson -1952 - 1957 (ex-student)**

I started school in 1952 at the age of 6 years in 1st class, as the first Kindergarten also commenced in 1952.

#### Teachers:

1st Class - Miss Thelma Brennan (Married a local Les Norris)

2nd Class - Mr Go (or a name like that) class room was the old School of Arts

3rd Class - Mr Bruce Lemcke

4th Class - Mr Bruce Lemcke

5th Class - Mr Allan Hindley

6th Class - Mr Allan Hindley and Mr Geoff Falkenmire

Headmasters: Mr Thorpe, Mr Paterson Mr Falkenmire

#### School Improvements:

- \* The new Infants classroom, built in 1951
- \* Open-air theatre
- \* School front entrance gates, steelwork manufactured by Mr Hec Hazel, the local blacksmith.
- \* Stone for front gate and sundial from William Wentworth's original cottage on the now property "Galla Gilla".
- \* Open air concrete chessboard

All of the improvements except the Infants classroom instigated by Mr Geoff Falkenmire, who was a dynamic and inspirational headmaster.

#### Sports and Activities:

- \* Swimming Carnivals in Merriwa River under the bridge.
- \* Bronze medallion Lifesaving awards in Merriwa River under the bridge
- \* School athletics carnivals
- \* Inter-school athletic carnivals between Merriwa Central, St Joseph's Merriwa, and Curryal, Turill, Cassilis, Denman and Scone. My father transported the children to these carnivals in a sheep crate covered with a tarpaulin on an Austin Lorry.
- \* Zone athletics carnivals at Newcastle.
- \* School rugby league carnival at Muswellbrook. We played combined with St Joseph's Merriwa to make up enough boys.
- \* Fife Band

Schooling in those days was simple and uncomplicated compared with today's standards, with all children when finishing primary education, able to read, write and do arithmetic.

All the information I have supplied could stand correction as the mind is vague in some areas.

## **Reg Hopkins (ex-student) 1930's**

Tennis Pfeiffer Cup made by Lawrence Pfeiffer. It was a challenge cup for singles. The cup was made from a jam tin with a wooden stem, covered by silver paper. This cup was played for, for many years, until it disappeared.

The court was an antbed - no water and we relied on rain. The lines were marked by mixing lime with water and with a brush, and string to keep the lines straight. This was done by the students and certainly not in school time.

The school consisted of three rooms and an office (now primary school). Miss McLean and Miss Curran were my teachers for the first few years then the Headmaster Thomas Parram. When he brought his golf sticks to school we all knew no one would be kept in to learn more. However when he did not bring his golf sticks, "watch out!". Yes he did use the cane, only when he thought it was necessary. You would get one to six (a sixa). I remember some boys had the cane a few times. I received it once, so it did leave me with a memory I must have deserved it.

School sport was only played before school and lunchtime - mainly cricket. Bruce MacBeth was a big hitter. Two or three boys had to be put in McKenzie and Bow Streets, when Bruce was batting - over the fence was not out.

In the early days I remember Mr Harry Pittman's children who lived 3 miles (5 km) from school on a dairy farm on the Muswellbrook Road, coming to school in a horse drawn sulky. They milked before and after school and I do remember now and again, some of them would go to sleep in class.

Yes, we had the school "bully". When he left someone else took over. Generally he was the biggest but not always the bravest. Any disagreements were always settled by a fight at "Townsend's Corner" at the corner of McKenzie and Vennacher Streets.

The only "excursion" we ever had was a trip on the railmotor from Merriwa to Gungahlin on a Saturday morning to play cricket.

Annual sports day was held at the showground - first prize being a pencil or a ruler.

I also must mention that we played marbles a lot at school. The cheapest were "dinkies" which were made from clay and cost about one penny (2 cents) for 15.

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## **Heather Barber (ex-teacher)**

Merriwa in the year 1956

After alighting from the Brisbane mail at Muswellbrook (no XPT running at this point in time), I was advised the connection to Merriwa would be via Motor Rail. It arrived, rattling and jogging at the station and continued at this pace for the next two hours - a very slow trip halted along the way by sheep and cattle wandering onto the track. (A vivid contrast to the underground in city of Sydney).

However, it was providing me with the chance of admiring the countryside - 100's of sheep roaming the hillsides - tiny streams and hordes of galahs swooping in all directions. Finally, the motor rail rattled to a halt at Merriwa.

But where was the town - was this the town?? A few houses - distant view of a tennis court - silos on the hill - NO persons stirring!!!

Ah! A taxi. A very friendly fellow asking "Where to?" Somewhere to stay came my halted reply.

"Top or bottom pub?" he asked.

"Top, I guess?" (It sounded very up-market!)

The "Top Pub" proved to be country hospitality at its best. Comfortable bed, hearty food and lots of friendly questions. Plus being right next door to Campbell & Co (the store sold everything from sheep dip to mascara).

The following day (being Saturday) was to locate the Merriwa Central School (as advised from Department of Education). Not hard to find and I wandered around the school yard and inspected the lay-out. A real country school! Surrounded by lovely big trees and heaps of room in the playground area (grass areas - not tar or cement) Wonderful!

The next item of my own personal agenda was to check the town over - find locations such as the post office and newsagent etc.

On opposite hills, I discovered two very beautiful churches - both with impressive views of the countryside. So after an hour or more I had a concept where most places were located. Even a police station, which seemed to be an extremely well built building (was crime an issue in this pretty little town?)

On Sunday afternoon most of the population gathered at the showground - cars surrounded the perimeter to watch Group 21 do battle with teams as far away as Scone. To me, this was an amazing situation, considering the distance travelled. This was my first introduction to country league - which proved not to be my last.

Monday morning arrived - school was opened for the following term. Mr G Falkenmire was the Principal - he introduced me to the staff. They were all very friendly and made me very welcome. Without a doubt the country kids were a delight in comparison to the classes I'd taught in the city.

I could waffle on about my time - the life which unfolded in Merriwa. However as it spans 15 years there, it proved to be a wonderful episode in my life. Much happiness and at times tinged with sadness, but on the overall, an experience which remains vividly in my memories.

In conclusion, I did become a football fan of the Merriwa Team. Plus I married the dynamo Col Barber (a very vigorous half back).

My time at Merriwa Central School was very rewarding. Many close friendships were founded both within the staff and local towns folk. All of this before the fiasco of the demountable - which proved to me that the country people maintained determination to do things their way. In other words - A FAIR GO.

Congratulations and good luck on celebrating 150 years of Education in the area.

I'm sure this will continue for many years to come. I feel very proud to have been associated in a very, very small way as part of the progress leading up to the celebration.

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## **FLASHBACK 1975**

### **"SEW AND EASY - SUNSOAKERS"**

This must be one of the nicest and easiest Sew and Easy patterns you will ever make. This sensational beach top is made out of an ordinary scarf. For this little number, all you will need is a long scarf. Put it around your neck. Get the ends even, slip them through a plastic ring, take over your bust and tie at the back. Simple!

Mandy Riley  
(from Atranta 1975)

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## REFLECTIONS

### **Geoff Falkenmire (ex-Principal)**

Initially I was pleased and surprised to receive the appointment to Merriwa Central School as Headmaster. I had spent 1954 and 1955 teaching in Seattle and had just returned to Neutral Bay.

Merriwa impressed me immediately. It was a pretty town and the people were most obliging and friendly. I played cricket with Bob Binks' Settlement Cricket Club and tennis in the town competition. At school we introduced cricket and swimming in summer and hockey and football in winter. Friday was the popular sports day. In all of these, we included the convent school children. It was a great combination. Although our swimming was conducted under the bridge in the river, we did manage to win several State Lifesaving Awards.

Our Flute Bands became a part of Anzac Day celebrations and also performed in Muswellbrook and Scone. We joined the Combined Choir Concerts in Muswellbrook in the annual performances. We ran a weekly column on the local newspaper and persuaded the Commonwealth Bank and Golden Fleece to act as sponsors for our extra-curricula activities. At this time, we combined with the Bank to set up our own pupil-operated banking at the school.

I should say that in those days the Headmaster taught fulltime. There were no secretaries, librarians or gardeners. There were no pupil free days and all in-service courses were held out of school hours. In 1958 we chose the site for the new school for which we had been lobbying for some time. Three of our junior classes were accommodated in the Shire and Church halls. It was hardly a satisfactory situation - but was borne cheerfully. It was a magnificent school that did magnificent things. The staff and kids were superb.

My wife and I look forward to a wonderful celebration in 2000.

### **Grant Hodgson (ex-student)**

My recollections of Merriwa Primary School 1961 - 1964

My schooling started not at Merriwa Central but with a correspondence course. Mum taught me at home for two years and I can remember her getting frustrated at my lack of dedication to education - I much preferred to be out on the property helping Dad. As I got older this situation got worse and the only way Mum could retain her sanity was to send me to the Primary School in town. However, at that time, there wasn't a school bus service along the Willow Tree Road, so Dad and some of the other parents clubbed together and helped buy a bus to service the loop around the Willow Tree, Gumman and Mountain Station roads.

The bus driver was Neville Cashen and my first recollection of school days at Merriwa was



the bus trip to school. I made the major faux pas of sitting on the girl's side of the bus, which proved highly amusing to everyone on board except me. Neville's way of maintaining discipline was to segregate the girls and boys - this seems strange today but it certainly worked. For those who had trouble behaving he had a special cure. He had a wooden toolbox right at the front of the bus, next to the driver, and anyone who was unruly had to sit there so that he could "keep an eye on them". I recall Phillip Amidy spent a lot of time on the box! The bus used to alternate direction around the loop each week so that travelling time for everyone was evened out; one week the bus would arrive early and we would have a long trip to school, but a short trip home, the next week the direction would be reversed. David and I had trouble remembering if it was "early" or "late" bus but somehow Mum always managed to get us to the bus stop on time.

I started at school in third class and my first teacher was Mrs Peebles. Initially I was in a composite 2-3 class and this situation lasted for a few months until we were assigned a dedicated teacher. I don't remember much about my time in Mrs Peebles' class except that one of our members used to wet her pants.

Our teacher for the rest of third class was Des O'Malley. It was in the period long before demountable classrooms were thought of, but even in those days there was a shortage of space, so classes were held down the road in the old church hall. The walk down the hill from the main school assembly area was good fun as it enabled us to waste a few minutes before classes started, and I can remember Mr O'Malley getting upset on more than one occasion because of our poor behaviour. The only drawback of this remote location from our point of view was that we tended to get wet when it was raining as not many of us were organised enough to pack raincoats.

My other teachers were Shane Feneley in fourth class and Jack Green for both fifth and sixth classes. Unlike the layout of today's classrooms we were seated in rows. Discipline was strict and we were only expected to speak when the teacher asked us. Also there was very little group activity, but I can remember sitting on the front lawn on fine days practicing our reading. Once we reached sixth class we thought we were very grown up as we were allowed to practice our writing skills using ink and "post office" dip pens. I remember having to rewrite many pages because of the unsightly smudges. By the time I got to sixth class I was a reasonable student and usually managed to stay in the top 3 for most subjects and even got elected Senior Boy Prefect by my peers. The Senior Girl Prefect was Mary Gardiner and our classmates instantly regarded us as girl and boyfriend. It must have been a serious relationship as I remember someone carved "Mary loves Grant" on my wooden ruler!

I played in the flute band for about three years, although not as a flautist, just a drummer. We used to play after every assembly as the classes marched to their rooms. We also played on other occasions such as the annual ANZAC DAY parade.

During my time at school we didn't have many excursions. However one that did occur each year was attending a local council meeting. The students were always given an opportunity to

ask the Councillors questions, and Paul Burnett and I used to compete to ask, "When will the Willow Tree Road be tarred?" The answer was always "Next Year".

Together with Alan Johnston and Paul Burnett I conspired to get out of class half an hour early by volunteering for garbage duty. We had to collect all the garbage from each classroom and take it to the incinerator for burning. If we were lucky one of the classes would have thrown out some basket weaving cane which we attempted to smoke. It was the foulest tasting stuff, but smoking it made us feel very grown up. Burning rubbish is not allowed these days and I noticed last time I was in town that the old incinerator has been removed.

My fondest memories were the really wet days. If we were lucky the creeks would start to run and Dad would organise Alf Thrift, the local taxi driver, to collect Paul Burnett, David and me and drive us home before the crossings became impassable. If we were lucky the call would come before midday.

## **FLASHBACK 1934**

After being attached to the staff of Merriwa School for a year and eight months, Miss J Gilmour has been transferred to Newtown. During her residence in Merriwa, Miss Gilmour not only proved herself a capable teacher, but she was also a useful citizen, and willingly gave her services towards any effort put forward on behalf of the local churches or public institutions. She will be greatly missed in this respect and she takes with her the best wishes of her circle of friends.

(from Merriwa and Cassilis News)

## **FLASHBACK 1975**

### **125th ANNIVERSARY SPORTS DAY**

- \* Skipping Race - in which our Principal, Mr R Gorman, showed remarkable prowess and finished first.
- \* Egg and Spoon Race - which we finished with more broken eggs than winners.
- \* Obstacle Race - one of the big moments in this event was when Mr Fitzgerald knocked down the hurdle and caused a pile up of teachers and parents.
- \* Egg tossing - was the messiest event with eggs landing in the crowd and on faces. Mr Gartner showed everyone how it was done. It was an enjoyable day for all. Hope to see you all at the 150th Anniversary.

David Towler

## REFLECTIONS

### Geoff Buckland - 1979 - 1988 (ex-Principal)

Our family lived nine years in the Merriwa community. In those years we experienced both sad and happy times and made many friends.

Of course the happy times are the most memorable and probably the best of them were the nights we entertained at the school residence, in those days a beautiful home with lovely lawns, bushes and trees.

At that time we had a kangaroo (Hoppit) and a puppy (Tully) who both loved parties. By the end of the evenings each ended up asleep on the lounge room carpet full of food and, in Hoppit's case, drink that he had managed to gulp down when the owner wasn't looking.

At a similar party the builders constructing the secondary administration block were invited. They devoured wine maturing in the cellar and unbeknown to us all, drank the lot. Scarce wonder they received little sympathy from the entire staff the next day.

I've never taught with a staff that lacked a sense of humour and Merriwa teachers were no exception.

One poor victim was Frank Virgara, our then Librarian. Frank believed he could do the work of any primary teacher, so an exchange was arranged with Sharon Shelley's class - to last one week.

Frank did more work in preparing than he would have done with a class in one week. He continued to warn Sharon of the enormous burden of running a library.

During the week, Frank worked himself into a lather. Sharon, meanwhile, was assisted by all the secondary teachers - she taught the classes, they tidied the whole library, rearranged all the shelves. All new books, did the year's cataloguing and put up teaching aids and pictures.

On his return, Frank, sure Sharon couldn't have managed, was amazed that she had managed to do so much extra in "her spare time". The staff stayed mum. Every lip was sealed.

Poor Frank. At the same time he did not believe anyone could adequately run the library - even move the furniture when new carpet was laid. He insisted on moving the shelves with the books still intact - by himself, without help.

Eventually students ran to the staffroom reporting that Mr Virgara needed help with the shelves. Having been rebuffed, no one moved. The students persisted. Eventually staff emerged to find an enormous shelf unit flat on the ground. All that could be seen of Frank was two hands and his feet.

It took some time to rescue him. We had to wait until everyone had stopped laughing.



In later years I managed to establish an Agriculture Department and after protracted negotiations, acquire land. Without delay we sent out an appeal for animals. Not surprisingly we were donated lots and lots of goats!.

The mischievous animals entwined themselves in fences, wound up chains, escaped and ate everything in neighbours yards. They drove us crazy.

One morning two of my more "mischievous" teachers asked me did I want any sausages. They had an excess supply. Co-incidentally, at the same time, the goat population disappeared. (The sausages were delicious).

My little motorbike, a Yamaha "Chappie" and I over many years, were the butt of many jokes. This wasn't surprising as I was prone to accidents. One such occasion was early one morning just as the school bus pulled up in front of the school, I zoomed past, around the front of the bus aiming to enter the secondary car park. The gutter was full of sand following a storm and the little "chappie" didn't easily handle the soft surface. Over I went, arms and legs flailing, to the joy of all on board the bus.



The little motorbike and my helmet were constantly in demand - year after year, for Year 10 farewell skits and Year 12 pranks, all featuring caricatures of the Principal on his bike.

I was deeply involved in the Merriwa community, being a member of the parochial Council of Holy Trinity, a member of Lions and for a term a Shire Councillor. Our children grew up in Merriwa and both have done well as have so many of its young people, some of whom still stay in contact.

I am particularly proud of the senior school established in my time and those students who have completed their HSC and gone on to university, showing what a small school in a small community can achieve.

The sharing in the life of Merriwa's community is an important part in our family's life. We have enjoyed good friendships, memorable social occasions, joys and tragedies and still are always pleased to hear the latest news.

## FLASHBACK 1975

### ANYONE FOR A DIP

With the opening of the Pool, the Merriwa River has been forgotten by some as a swimming hole. The pool opened on 5 October 1975 and the school children hit the water for the first time on the following Wednesday.

David Towler  
(from Atranta 1975)

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## FLASHBACK 1982

### TO YEAR 12

Wherever you are, be happy  
Take your favorite dreams along,  
Greet each experience gladly,  
With a heart that's filled with song,  
Enjoy your new surroundings,  
Make the most of every day,  
Be ready for the pleasures  
That are sure to come your way.

Don't let the raindrop fool you -  
Look around and you will see,  
That there's a rainbow somewhere,  
Shining brightly as can be  
Whatever you do, be happy,  
Be alert to what life brings,  
For there's a lot of pleasure  
In some unexpected things.

There are places to discover,  
That you haven't known before,  
And life is always offering  
Something pleasant to explore,  
Be eager to meet people,  
And enjoy them when you do -  
But don't forget your friends back here  
Who will always remember you

*Kim Harrington*  
(from Images 1982)

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## REFLECTIONS

### John Colvin (ex-teacher)

Nothing goes unnoticed in Merriwa. On 27 January 1958, or thereabouts, stepping into the 'Tin Hare' at Muswellbrook for what was to seem an interminable journey "to the ends of the earth", I was greeted by another passenger with "you must be the new school teacher, we've been expecting you". So much for being able to achieve any anonymity in Merriwa!!

At Merriwa Station I was greeted by the ever affable Allan Hindley who took me to his place for a cuppa, showed me the school, thereafter departing me to the Royal, which was to be my home for a couple of weeks until I moved in with Tom and Bidy Bailey for the remainder of my posting - needless to say they were very tolerant people.

Recollections of the school are full of fond memories. We had a keen and dedicated staff which was encouraged and moulded into an effective team by Geoff, whose outstanding efforts at Merriwa were well rewarded by the Department. I understand his beloved "Flute Band" still survives albeit in a changed form.

Moving to the "top of the hill", on a very bare site provided the secondary department with some independence. Working in a small central school, such as Merriwa was, should be an essential part of the training for all secondary teachers. It provides one with a far broader and more human perspective of education than the relatively sanitised atmosphere existing in high schools.

In summary, I can say I wasn't keen about a posting to Merriwa - when the time came to go I resisted but in vain. I was fortunate to form friendships with parents, pupils and staff which have survived the tyranny of time and distance. Merriwa was a great place for a young teacher to develop professionally, live and more importantly grow.

Congratulations on 150 years.

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### Cam Leggett (ex-student)

I was a pupil at Merriwa Central School from 1942 to 1952. I think I spent more time in the garden than in the classroom, however I never let the truth interfere with a good story.

The teachers decided that Doug Kent, Noel Coward, Bob Gallimore, Noel Barwick and myself weren't doing any good in the classroom. So they decided to put us in the garden to work but then they found out that we weren't doing any good in the garden either, so they decided the best thing for us to do was to leave school. The comment was: "I can just see you fellows sitting on the hotel corner at 9am on a Saturday morning waiting for the hotel to open!"

There are two incidents I remember while Mr Thorpe was the Headmaster. One Friday afternoon, a few of us, namely Noel Barwick, Neil Sullivan, Bob Gallimore and myself,



decided that we'd run away from school because there was a circus in town and they were giving away free tickets to anyone who helped set it up. We all received the can on Monday morning for this offence.

Another afternoon I was kept in to write 100 times - "I must not swear at school". When they were checked at 4pm by the teacher, he said that I had to do them again the next afternoon as they weren't done well enough.

The next afternoon I ran away just before school finished. Noel Coward, Doug Kent and Neil Sullivan were sent to bring me back. They joined me at the School of Arts and we all went home together.

I received 6 cuts the next day for running away and they received 6 cuts each for not bringing me back.

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## FLASHBACK 1956

### SWIMMING

This is our first sport, and we had a fine experience in the very beginning when we learned life saving. Our two instructors from college, Miss Easy and Mr Feneley, gave us valuable and hard work. We sat for our exams and were examined by Mr Falkenmire, an examiner for the Australian Life Saving Society. The results were surprising because we won the State Pennant for Central Schools for our size. Philip Gaynon won an Intermediate Star, our highest award.

At present we are in the midst of our swimming school. The staff are trying to teach everyone in the school to swim. The boys have had great success. There are only four boys now who cannot swim and they should be afloat by the time school breaks up. About 60 boys go swimming. It's not easy to learn in the river. With a pool we could do much better. Some of the best learners have been Frank Williams, Tim Irwin, the Lee brothers, Bob Malone and Richard Wright deserves special mention. Teddy Cross makes no splash at all and that mighty atom, Paul Witney, overcame all troubles in a fine fashion.

The girls, who were afraid of the water, are now splashing madly. The river has not been the best. Despite the smell of mud and weed, about 24 girls have overcome their fear enough to try to learn. They splash merrily. The swimmers have co-operated fully in trying to teach the splashers.

It has been a real thrill to see the improvement in the girls in all three groups, worth all the inconvenience of using a river with its mud and smell. Thanks are due to Miss and Mrs Dureau for their help in teaching us.

(Taken from the Swimming Report - Merino 1956)

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## FLASHBACK 1982

### EXCURSION TO WARRAMBUNGLES

We went to Mini Land at Coonabarabran where we and the teachers, Mrs Hall, Mrs Johnson and Mr Stanwell, encountered a slippery dip. Mrs J was unable to find her braking mechanism.

(from Images 1982)

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## FLASHBACK 1992

### FAREWELL TO MRS LEGGETT

In December, 1992 the school and the P&C Association held a Farewell Dinner for the occasion of the retirement of Mrs Del Leggett who commenced teaching in Merriwa in January 1957, as Miss Delma Page. Not many teachers can say they taught 3 generations of the one family.

One of the highlights of the night was a performance of the "Del Leggett Retirement Fife Band" who entertained the 200 odd people with two lively numbers, "Three Blind Mice" and "Wooden Heart". The members of the band were all ex-students of the fife band (many years previously) After a shaky start, where they invited Mrs Leggett up on stage to refresh their memory on which notes were which, they settled down to sharing fits of the giggles and playing notes. They left the stage to a roaring round of applause and the MC's comment of "Del taught them everything they know."



The Del Leggett retirement band consisted of Heather Ritchie (Leggett), Janice Cronin (Graham), Amanda Deal, Sue Whitby (Coleman), Toni Barwick, Kim Orth (Ninness) and Mandy and Christy Bishop.

## REFLECTIONS

### Tom McBride (ex-teacher)

I was appointed to Merriwa Central School in 1966 as a Deputy Principal 2 and had four extremely happy years at the school.

The local people welcomed strangers and this immediately impressed me. Everyone knew everyone and there was a kindness and consideration for all in the community.

The strong community support for the school was very evident. The excellent parent and teacher co-operation resulted in wonderful academic results from children at their level of ability.

Children produced outstanding quality work. I was reminded of that excellence many years later by a Regional Director of Education who had visited the school.

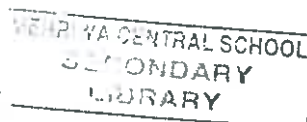
I often think of two incidents that occurred while I was at Merriwa. We decided to beautify the school with gardens. After these were established I was absent on an Inservice Course and our youngest teacher, Mr Gary Armstrong, decided that his class would weed the gardens. He called me that night to tell me what a wonderful job the children had done. The next morning weeds remained tall and healthy and not a flower plant was in sight.

The other incident which remains clearly in my mind was when a small child came to tell me: "We have a fire in our room." As it was an extremely cold day I did not think too much about it until there was great rushing around by everyone as wall charts had caught fire in a classroom.

The community spirit in Merriwa always moved me. It was with great pleasure that while reading newspapers this year, I saw that this unique community spirit is still alive and well in Merriwa. The outstanding support provided by the community to retain the much needed demountable is an example of this. Merriwa people are to be congratulated for their genuine commitment to their community.

Congratulations on 150 years of education.

TH McBride





## **Geoff Buchanan (ex-Assistant Principal)**

I arrived at Merriwa Central School in January 1966, after twelve years of small schools. I was destined to find my feet professionally there, spending seven and a half satisfying and happy years at the school.

At the time, during a period of great social change in Australia, school syllabuses remained cautious and conservative, and nothing of a revolutionary nature took place at Merriwa Central School. However, there was an air of purpose and confidence about the school and strong leadership from Eric Flood, a gifted and inspiring Principal and most important, a proud and supportive parent body.

There were twelve full time teachers, six each at the top and bottom schools. I was teaching 30 odd kids in the only "straight" (ie non composite) class - Year 3. My class, strangely enough, had twice as many girls than boys, perhaps this accounts for its generally good tone", as the inspector noted.

In those days there were no clerical assistants for the school, no relief from face-to-face teaching and a heavy load of extra-curricula duties. But it was a happy staff.

There are so many memories that I cherish. School concerts in the School of Arts, organised with military precision. Education week, Sports carnivals. On those gala days, the citizens lined up in the main street to view the house march. Once the Shire President judged the houses in order of merit, a process that impressed the staff, but not the students in the house that came fourth. Then there was Anzac Day, when the school Flute Band (or Fife) was an important part of the commemoration. (How the Year 6 boys vied for the prestigious position of drummer).

After being at the school for over four years, I fronted up for a List One inspection. A full day of being inspected and checked with every move being evaluated. "What about Music?" the Inspector asked. My class knew what to do. Kathy Hancock picked up her fife, the kids took up the dramatic pose we had rehearsed, and with the Sony providing the accompaniment we launched into "Little Red Caboose." The DI must have been suitably impressed, for at 3.30 he shook my hand and informed me of my elevation to the Promotions List.

At the end of 1969 I succeeded Tom McBride as Assistant Principal. In winter mornings with the help of Shirley Hayes I would stoke up the wood fires in the six rooms to thaw out the kids who arrived on the buses.

In 1972 the first permanent brick buildings were erected on the Secondary site and were duly opened by the Regional Director. Unfortunately the poor man suffered a suspected heart attack and collapsed during one of the speeches.

A feature of the occasion was the choir singing "Merriwa", an opus, I wrote to the tune of a Korean folk-song. I was the unwilling conductor and fortunately, Del Leggett was the accompanist, keeping one eye on my confusing signals and one on the music.

I remember today how much a part of the community our school was then, how proud the students were of their school, how warm was the friendship we received in Merriwa. Most of all I remember how delightful the children were but in 1973, I knew it was time to go. In my remaining years of service I was never again to experience such fulfillment or enjoy my work so much. Today I know a strong and proud tradition continues at Merriwa Central School, undiminished by the passage of time. The school and its students of those far off, days will always be in my heart.

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## **FLASHBACK 1956**

### **THE FLUTE BAND**

All thanks are due to Mr Falkenmire for starting a Band. He and Mr Hindley taught us many marches, jazz, waltz and classical tunes. With 55 in the band, including the bass and three kettle drums, we can really be heard.

The band has had quite a lot of opportunities during the year, in playing for other schools. These we enjoyed and they added to our experience. There is a flute band badge which each player has to earn. As yet none have been awarded because we have not yet been going long enough. They will come to those who qualify next year. Next year it will be difficult to increase the Band because it is already difficult to buy new flutes. We can only hope.

During the holidays, other towns will hear our players and we hope they don't throw shoes at us.

The concert was a real experience for the Band. Our jazz importation, Robert Carter sang "The Dark Town Strutters's Ball" with gay abandon, and on the second night, Pam added her hot lift to the tune. Our big ambition is to play next Anzac Day for the Returned Soldiers as they march to the Memorial.

Written by a Student (Merino 1956)

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## **FLASHBACK 1994**

### **MOCK-DEB BALL 27 AUGUST 1994**

The P&C and the school once again combined forces to create an hilarious night which was compered by Mr Peter Davidson and Mrs Deirdre Peebles who described the debutantes and their garments.

The debutantes were a mixture of teachers, ex-students, parents and P&C members. Those presented to the Queen were:

Camilla (Cam) Leggett and Dan (Del) Leggett; Rowena (Owen) Taylor; Martha (Matthew) Cronin; and Michelle (Michael) Joyce and Joanne (John) Sparrow and Jack (Jenny) Johnson; Ida (Ivan) Gant and Lloyd (Linda) Gant; Philamena (Phil) Martyn and Gertrude (Gary) Roberts and Stan (Sue) Roberts; Peta (Peter) Rallings and Vern (Verina) Rallings; Rosey (Ray) McConnell and Carl (Carlita) McConnell and Davena (Dave) Watt and ..... It was a great night.

## **REFLECTIONS**

### **Mal & Ros Frame - (ex teacher and current teacher)**

We arrived in Merriwa in 1982, along with four other teachers, two others with families. Accommodation was limited that year and one of the single teachers lived at the pub until a flat became available. We organised the rental of a house and the removal of our goods and chattels from Wilcannia, where we had spent the previous two years.

Our boys, Ian and Stewart, were 3 and 18 months in 1982 and Mal was appointed as Deputy Master. We anticipated we would be here for approximately five years but when Mal applied for positions as Assistant Principal in 1986 and was offered Merriwa, we happily stayed.

Mal resigned from teaching in 1995 and now operates school bus runs. I did casual teaching when we first arrived, then permanent part time when it was introduced and eventually was appointed full time in 1995.

Many changes have occurred in the eighteen years we have been here. In 1982, there were 8 primary classes and in 1999 there are 5. There was a demountable building east of the infants block which has gone. The room Mal started in, which was west of the primary block, was moved and joined to a building which came from Cassilis School to create the current library. The library had been in a demountable with the staff room at the other end. The library end became a classroom and is now a resource room. The office then was at the western end of the primary building.

When the new library was 'created' from the two buildings it was decided to turn the demountable building east/west, the same as all the other buildings. The whole school



watched in awe as cranes arrived and picked up the demountable and turned it around. The office was moved into the demountable.

Our most recent change is the cover over the basketball court which is greatly appreciated by teachers and pupils alike, in the heat and the rain. The cover is affectionately called "The big Top".

There are always changes occurring in schools - teachers, students and curriculum to name a few. Some changes come from outside the school, some from within.

In 1984 the staff decided to change the traditional end of year concern night from individual class items to theme concerts every two years in which every child participated. The first one was "The Circus" and we learnt some valuable lessons from that one.

The children were the circus "audience" on stage, singing performing or watching from the tiered seating. The show was going well when one of the teachers noticed a kindergarten child had nodded off on the top level and was in danger of toppling onto the children below. Disaster was averted but the lesson was learnt, start early and keep it short. Each concert since has had its memorable moments. It's not true that practice makes perfect when young children are involved.

No two days are the same in a school environment and each year brings new children and new challenges.

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## **FLASHBACK 1954**

The P&C Association in 1953 had a membership of well over 100. Up to 1954 the P&C had bought major items such as a piano; two sewing machines; strip-film projector; typewriter; duplicating machine; established a useful school library; occupational materials and store cupboards for them; Kindergarten wall blackboards for the Infants room; a radio with extension speakers; fitting of curtains to the windows; materials for the secondary boys woodwork course.

P&C also supported outdoor activities especially school sport, for which they have also supplied materials and transport. A major contribution to the sport was the construction of a tennis court by volunteer labour. Three functions were organised annually for the children by the P&C, the Annual Prizegiving (book prizes bought by P&C), the Fancy Dress Frolic and the annual picnic (P&C arranged transport and gave the pupils an outdoor treat).

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## FLASHBACK 1975

### HOT CROSS BUNS

Never again! As has been the custom in the past, 3rd and 4th Home Science girls have mass produced hot cross buns to sell and in this way raise money for the Pensioners Club.

We started yesterday (Tuesday) conveniently no one else was at school - and made 80 dozen buns. We started with a team of eight which was later joined by a bleary eyed Miss Maskey and two boys (Ian Byrne and Paul Dureau). By five o'clock, five of us were left with multiple buns and dish-pan hands.

Special thanks to Judi Bryan, who was here all day on Tuesday and at it again today; to the two boys for making a mess and then cleaning up; and to Miss Maskey for her help. AND I hope no one offers me an Easter bun over the weekend.

J Long  
(From Atranta 1975)

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## REFLECTIONS

### Bill Rogers - Jottings 1994 - 1997 (ex-Principal)

I will always remember my four years at Merriwa Central, when I learnt what it really means to be a principal. As with all periods in the rich history of the school, there were both highs and lows.

The highs for me include (in no particular order)

- \* The friendship and willingness of people to be involved in the life of the school, and the marvellous support of the P&C and Canteen Committee.
- \* The professionalism of the staff and their willingness to put students first.
- \* Discovering more about the history of the school and taking the first steps towards the development of the school archives.
- \* The continued improvement of "The Ringer", an excellent way for the school to serve its community.
- \* The ongoing development of Whole School Staffing in which secondary teachers took primary classes and vice-versa.
- \* Formalising school strategic planning, developing a new school Vision and Mission Statement and linking them to annual management plans and budgets.
- \* Seeing the students perform in public: the musicals (Sweeney Todd, The Wiz, Norgals) Christmas concerns in primary and review and drama nights.
- \* The success of our students in academic, sporting and cultural pursuits and being able to recognise these achievements at assemblies and Presentation nights.

- \* The tremendous work of staff in writing successful submissions for valuable programs: Reading K-6, Staying on, Integration, Wetlands, Students at Risk, etc.
- \* The development of our resources: the computer network, the major projects room 1A, the Learning centre.
- \* The success with our steers program (after I eventually realised that the steers don't actually come back from the shows!).
- \* The return to the school of the WW1 Roll of Honour and its re-dedication.
- \* Some of our fund raising efforts were a lot of fun eg the Sixties and Seventies nights: the "Bash" mini-fete.
- \* The annual Anzac Day march and combined ceremony with St Joseph's.
- \* The visit of Bulahdelah CS Band and its march up Bow Street with our own Fife Band.
- \* Education Week celebrations especially K-12 tabloid sport.
- \* The annual visit of Santa to the Infants children
- \* My own son's first four years at school (Merriwa Central School was a great place to start school).

The lows (and some real heartaches) included:

- \* The on going drop in student numbers resulting in nominated transfers and the loss of demountables (yes, it happened then too!)
- \* The death of the lovely old tree in primary and a kindergarten room riddled with termites.
- \* The occasional dog attacks on our sheep.
- \* The black mud after rain (it did sometimes!).
- \* The bushfires of 1997.
- \* Ongoing maintenance problems.
- \* (Perhaps the biggest low of all) the number of students not reaching their potential, despite all our best efforts.

Congratulations Merriwa Central School - I am delighted to have played a part in your history and I hope that the **next** 150 years will be as fruitful as the first 150. Keep aiming high.

### Una Smith (ex-teacher)

I lived in Merriwa from January 1968 until April 1986. During that time I worked as a full time teacher in the Primary Department for over seven years and then in a casual capacity as a craft teacher, teacher/librarian and replacement teacher for over a further ten years.

My two children, Phillip and Jenny, received most of their education at Merriwa, and I look back fondly on my time there, both as a teacher and a parent.

I guess my glasses are "rose coloured" at this stage of my life but I feel I enjoyed a good relationship with both students and fellow teachers and I am proud to have been part of the school for such a long period. Discipline was not the problem it seems to be today and most of the children lead happy and hassle free lives.

Many changes occurred during my time at Merriwa Central. I remember well when in the early seventies money became available to better equip the library and so began the process of building up the important resource centre.

The introduction of ancillary staff lessened the load on teachers while at the same time changes in programming, reporting and syllabus content gave teachers more responsibility in other areas. Parents received a greater input into the education of their children and I learnt to enjoy this aspect of my job.

I still chuckle about some incidents that happened. I'll always remember one little girl (now a teacher herself) who, on her first day at school, refused my efforts to console her when Mrs Leggett went home for lunch. She said tearfully, "I don't want you, I want that other woman." Another fond memory is of being asked by a couple of kindergarten children to put my glasses back on as I looked like a witch without them.

I feel I must mention my long association with Del Leggett with whom I worked closely during my years in Merriwa. Her expertise in music and art was a great help to me and other members of staff and I feel she was one of the great strengths of the school at that time.

I have enjoyed hearing of Merriwa Central School on television and in the press in recent days (July 1999) and I would like to congratulate everyone concerned on what you have achieved for your school and for country schools in general.

Congratulations on past achievements and best wishes for your forthcoming celebrations and for the future of your school.

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**Mandy Cronin (Riley) (ex-student)**

When I sat down to write my reflections of my time spent at Merriwa Central School, so many memories came back. Some good, bad and some unprintable. I went looking for some old class photos and one of the first things that came to mind was the nicknames of the people I went to school with

There was Weasel, Biggs, Ton, Arch, Frog, Puss, Wightie, Percy, Hoon and the list could go on, only the memory is fading.

How many of you remember "Choppers"? He was the school principal. Well, that wasn't his real name but that was what we all called him behind his back. He ruled like a true leader, marched us around to his office, put the fear of God into us, threatened to tell our parents, so of course we had to do what he told us.

History classes were sometimes taken up with scuba diving antics, when the guys in the class decided they didn't want to be taught history for the day. They would get the teacher to tell the class all about his diving adventures.

We had a commerce teacher (won't mention any names Mr T) who loved to fill the blackboard up with line after line after line of work, which had to be copied down extremely fast, because some lessons (I'm sure the man was possessed) he just kept on writing and erasing and if you didn't get it all down, beg or borrow from a class mate, it was your problem.

One of the highlights each year was the inter-school visit from Gulgong Central. We all took turns in billeting students. Lots of sports and debating took place. The school social was also a major attraction. A good reason to bring out the flares, polyester shirts with the large collars, indian dresses, caftans and all those wonderful clothes we wore in the 70's.

Another sporting moment was the introduction of basketball that Sid Nolan and Rod Tudball (two teachers) not only brought to the school but to the town. Who would believe that the old picture theatre could be converted into an indoor basketball court? And that the town had a thriving basketball competition in the 70's.

I'm sure that at one stage during my four years spent at Merriwa Central School, I did a lot of learning (Mrs Tranby can certify that she did her best with me in English) I also had a lot of fun and made some good mates. After all isn't there a saying: "Your school years are the best years of your life?"

Congratulations Merriwa Central on 150 years of schooling.

## **FLASHBACK 1934**

At a P&C meeting held on 22 June, 1934, it was reported that the school tennis court needed to be put into order.

At the next P&C meeting, 20 July, 1934, Mr Peterson reported that two loads of ant-bed had been obtained for the tennis court but thought two more would be required. Mr R Russell had very kindly donated his truck and driver for the afternoon.

(from Merriwa and Cassilis News)

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## **FLASHBACK 1979**

### **FAMILY SPORTS DAY**

\* A fourth form girl foolishly pushed Mark Inder off the pillow fight stand. Mark was beating Fiona Hunt and this girl, whose name we can't reveal, knocked Mark down, causing a painful accident - ripping the ..... out of his trousers and skinning his .....

\* During the day there was an obstacle course held. The contestants had to run to the sale yards, go over a series of fences and had to crawl under a very low fence. There were various people who had to struggle as they were too big. Kelvin Anshaw and Mr Neville tied for first place. While completing the course Mr Neville exerted himself a little too much which caused his pants to split.

Written by Brian Cornish, David Robinson and James Wightman  
(from At Random 1979)

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## **FLASHBACK 1992**

### **TOURNAMENT OF MINDS IN HUMANITIES**

Sydney Northern Division was won by Merriwa Central School.

Those in the team were Steven Taylor, Daniel Hunt, Melinda Meyer, Ian Frame, Kristy Byrne, Tina Haynes and Damien Eyre. Well done.

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## REFLECTIONS

**Gary Armstrong (ex-teacher)**

### *The Children:*

I remember with great affection my four years at Merriwa Central School 1968 -1971. In general, I remember sports days where we combined with the secondary being colourful fine events. I remember some great athletes - Christine Porter, Elizabeth Cashen and the only aboriginal boy we had at the school Reg Eulo. I particularly remember four little girls who were great gymnasts - Louise and Leonie Forster, Louise Savins and Katrina Kirkland; Ray Morgan the toughest little footballer I have ever seen; Wayne Harris who loved horses (I've often wondered if he's the Great Australian Jockey); Sammy Haynes who dropped a relay baton and caught it again before it hit the ground for us to win the senior boys relay at Muswellbrook.

I have always considered myself very fortunate to have such great kids to work with in my early years of teaching.

### *The Staff:*

The staff were a good mixture of youth and experience. Geoff Buchanan was a super mentor for all young teachers, well dressed, always well prepared and very professional. Gordon Humphreys, the Principal, and his wife, worked with very young inexperienced staff in the secondary department and did great things. In the primary we had Una Smith, probably the best teacher of reading I have ever seen and our Assistant Principal Tom McBride, who loved music, marching, folk dancing and neat books. The fondest thing I remember is how well the staff got along with each other. Morale was high.

### *The School:*

The buildings were old with wood burning heaters but they always seemed comfortable and kept very clean by our most efficient cleaner Shirley Hayes.

In my last year at the school, our numbers had increased and we had straight classes, no composites. I had a year 4 of 45 students in a Church Hall a block away from the school. It was a large room with a super storage room out the back. The desks and chairs were old and functional and there were lots of notice boards to pin the kids work onto.

I'm sure we walked hundreds of kilometres that year. We returned to the school area every recess and lunch. Six walks a day for over 200 days. No one seemed to mind, it was simply what we did.

The pan toilets at the school had been replaced but we still had one out the back of the hall so I rarely had the problem of children wanting to go to the toilet. They nearly always waited till they got back to school.

While some of my memories of the year are a little dull, I do remember it was a great year in the "Old Church Hall".

I remember concert nights and presentation nights in the town's hall. It was always hard work putting them together but much fun on the evening.

Overall I remember, with much affection, my time at Merriwa Central School. The teachers, the kids, the school will be everlasting memories for me.

### **Eileen Barwick (Constable) - (ex-student)**

My school days commenced at Merriwa Public in 1945, when my parents and family moved from Collaroy Station to Merriwa.

There were three classrooms, a weather shed (which is now the school canteen), and toilets. I walked to and from school each day with my sisters, from our home in John Street which was about 1/2 km. Lessons were mainly Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Composition, Dictation, History and Geography. Multiplication tables were learnt like poetry (eg 4 1's are 4, 4 2's are 8, and so on). We used pens with nibs and ink, which was in an ink well on each desk, with the boys being responsible for cleaning the wells and filling them.

Poetry was recited by the whole class. I remember "The Man from Snowy River" by Banjo Patterson and "My Country" by Dorothea McKellar.

Education was limited in my days. If your parents couldn't afford to send you to boarding school you stayed in Merriwa. My education finished in 6th class where I remained for three years until I reached the age of 14 and was old enough to leave school and commence working.

I loved school and sometimes did the homework for my friends (ask my husband). It was set out on paper, but mind you, not all got correct answers. The Headmaster Mr WJ Thorpe never did find out.

Homework was always done after the evening meal. Our home didn't have electricity, so it was done sitting around the kitchen table by kerosene lamp. Summer was always the worst time, when the flying ants and other insects came in.

I can now sit on the verandah of my home and listen to the flute band and I know the time of day when I hear the same old school bell ring.



**Kay Teale (Constable) (ex-student)**

*"School days, school days,  
Dear old golden rule days,  
Reading and writing and 'rithmetic,  
Taught to the tune of a hickory stick"*

My earliest recollection of my school days is one of sheer terror. It was 1947 and I went off to school secure in the shadows of my sisters, but it was a different experience, when I suddenly found myself without them. I cried my eyes out!

Looking back on those years now brings memories of many friends and fun times. There were also the times that weren't quite so happy .... I recall being made to sit next to the "bully" of the class because I had pulled the plaits of the girl sitting in front of me and then in my final year at school, my friend Pat (no surname here as I don't wish to dob her in!) and I walked out on the Minister, Rev Fisher. I am not sure if we were reported to the Principal, Mr Falkenmire, but somehow we escaped being punished. Rev Fisher had a bad habit of confiscating our pencils and this particular day Pat and I were kept in at lunch time to pay the penalty for doing something wrong in class.

The last day of term was always a great day as we would pack everything in the cupboards, empty the inkwells and generally have as much fun as possible. We even had a contest to see how many desktops we could run along. Not sure where the teachers were when that happened!

If anyone was game enough to retrieve their bike from under the school, they received a water bomb as they sped for the front gate.

The games we played were rounders, vigaro, volleyball, prisoners base, sheep sheep come home, marbles and jacks or knuckles as well as skipping. After school we would swap comics and make stilts out of empty cans and a piece of string ... a far cry from the entertainment items of the young today. I distinctly recall one teacher's immediate response if the girls ever crossed the path leading from the school across to the boys toilet "up your own end" could be heard all over the playground. The boys would play football or cricket on one side of the line, the girls played on the other. It was a good hit if the ball was hit over that path during a game of rounders.

The annual PSAAA carnivals were always a spectacle as we marched with our neighbouring schools down the main street to the showground. Our rare visits away to sports carnivals found us travelling on the back of Mr Henderson's truck. It was as if we were cattle with the metal fencing all around us. If it happened to rain en-route a tarp was thrown over the top.

Another big day was the trip to Newcastle to see the Queen. Other recollections of my school days are of the end of year break up party where we would sit in a large circle to receive our goodies and Empire Day which was always exciting as we had a half day holiday. We would race home to prepare our bonfire for cracker night.

I can still picture us all lining up for our daily bottle of milk as it was issued free to all students.

Before the days of canteen, we sometimes (not very often) bought our lunch down town. For sixpence (five cents) we bought threepence worth of devon and threepence worth of broken biscuits. We would get excited with that bag of biscuits. We'd toss them around to see if there were any monte carlo's or iced vo vo's and then make swaps for perhaps a piece of fruit.

Yes, I also learnt my lessons. Every morning (in the earlier years) we would recite our tables before we sat down. I learnt all the rivers down the east coast of Australia to the tune of a Scottish reel and I am very proud of the fact that I received an award on speech night each year. Those books and my dictation book of 1949 are fond momentos of my schooling days.

My school has grown over the years and I would hate to see it moved to a new position. It holds too many memories for a lot of people

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## **FLASHBACK 1934**

### **P&C REPORT**

Piano Fund stood at twelve pounds, eight shillings and eight pence with payments yet to be made amounting to twenty seven pounds, thirteen shillings and ten pence. Installments already paid are twenty seven pounds, thirteen shillings and ten pence.

The P&C proposed a vote of thanks to Mr A Edenborough for his efforts in raising the funds for the purchase of a vigo set for the school girls. The balance remaining has been handed to the Association.

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## **FLASHBACK 1975**

### **SLEET, SNOW AND SNOW BALLS**

On Thursday evening, 12th June 1975, we experienced the first snowfall in the Merriwa District for 10 years. Snow, the depth of 2-3", was to be found at the foot of the range. The snow capped peaks were clearly visible from school the next morning. Local bus driver, Mr Peebles, generously offered his bus to take a load of children from the Infants to view the snow - an excursion I'm sure they all enjoyed.

Roger Martin (from Atranta 1975)

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## REFLECTIONS

### Del Leggett (ex-teacher)

Memories of 30 years teaching at Merriwa Central School.

I arrived at Merriwa at the end of January 1957 - a naive 18 year old from Newcastle - all excited over my first posting as a teacher but also filled with apprehension.

I can't recall the number of students in the school but there were five teachers including myself - Geoff Falkenmire (Principal), Alan Hindley, Bruce Lemche and Heather Barber.

The classes were big, numbering between 30 and 40. I didn't think that I would make it through that first year but I did survive with the support of a great staff and community despite:-

- \* Children jumping out of windows and hiding under buildings and sometimes even running home;
- \* Being kicked in the shins;
- \* Cleaning up messes when children were sick or worse "....."
- \* Coping with bleeding noses and playground accidents;
- \* Having to remember to collect chips from the wood heap in the afternoon so we could light a fire the next morning during winter. NO CHIPS, NO FIRE (Year 6 boys would chop the wood for us);
- \* No casual relief if teachers were off sick - we had to double up classes which meant sometimes up to 80 children for a day, or two or three;
- \* Being homesick for the first 3 or 4 weeks.

I can remember interesting and enjoyable things like:-

- \* The St Patrick's Day Sports where we met up with the Convent School each year.
- \* The Infants Christmas Parties held in the old School of Arts and organised by the Mothers' Club - a very dedicated band of mothers of Infants and Primary children.
- \* The teaching of Primary Girls' Sewing in the 1960's.
- \* The teaching of art, music, PE and history in the Secondary Department in 1970 - 1971.
- \* All the wonderful school concerts we worked hard to produce.
- \* Our participation in the Festival of Performing Arts held in Muswellbrook each year. (We also held one here amongst our local and neighboring schools).
- \* Being involved with and feeling so proud of the Fife Band for 20 years. We had lots of trips away to different functions, one of them being when we put on a display at Garden City Shopping Centre and the Marching Koalas performed after us.
- \* The involvement and friendships with many wonderful people who came to Merriwa teaching.
- \* Many enjoyable staff parties.
- \* Lastly, lots and lots of children who have grown up to be very worthwhile adults. It has been interesting to see what some of them have done with their lives.

It was very interesting when I started to teach the children of my first pupils. It was amazing to see some of the same characteristics appearing in the second generation.

I decided to retire before I started teaching grandchildren of my first pupils. Teaching ideas had undergone quite a few changes since I started and there seemed to be more and more documentation needed.

In December, 1992, I said farewell to the children of the Primary/Infants Department and the P&C honored me with a memorable Retirement Dinner.

My teaching years in Merriwa were very enjoyable - Merriwa Central is a great school. I have seen many changes to the school both physical and educational but never once have I regretted receiving that telegram in 1957 which said:-

*"You have been posted to Merriwa Public School as an assistant teacher"*

#### **Joan (Gallimore) Morgan - 1941 (ex-student)**

My first day at the Public School Merriwa. Mother took me to school where she also attended a few years before. We walked in through the gate up the path and steps to the classroom. I do not believe I cried as my Aunty and Uncle and four cousins were there.

One other thing I remember about my first day at school was seeing Donna Walmsley and some other girls sitting on the school verandah playing jacks and Max Hopkins walking down the steps.

Five months later our family went to Cowra to live as Dad was in the Army there. Early in 1942 we came back to Merriwa to live and me back to the Merriwa Public School. In May 1942 my mother died. A week or so later when I was back at school Miss White, my teacher, sat me by myself in the first row of the classroom. I often wondered why, and being seven years old I had no answer and years later still don't.

I remember a few little things during the years 1941 to 1949, like the skipping competition I won and received an iced cup cake with pink icing, also learning to spell Pneumonia and I was amazed it started with P instead of N, or being asked in class if we knew why the Blue Mountains were called so, and knowing the answer, the school concerts and Wilfred Merrick reading a poem called Incy Wincey Spider, playing with good friends Margaret Pittman, Aileen Barwick, Eileen Constable, Maree Coward and Bertha ....., the latter doing such beautiful needle work that you could use it either side. Our sewing teacher, Mrs Thorpe, such a lovely lady, would bring her baby Heather with her, and she slept on a rug and pillow at the front of the class.

During the year there were air raid shelters dug into the front lawns.



On Empire Day 23 May Mr Henderson, a very nice gentleman, came and gave us a talk on the Empire and the Great War. He was always dressed in a light weight khaki uniform-like clothing and what we always called a lion tamer hat and under his arm a baton, and much better we got half holiday.

Show time was a time for showing our skills with writing, printing, mapping and painting. Mr Thorpe made sure we knew how to write a business letter and have respect for our elders.

There were ink wells in the desks which the boys checked every day, open fire in the winter and a beautiful picture over the fire place of the landing at "Gallipoli".

One other thing we always said the Lords Prayer before class started.

These are just a few of my memories - nearly forgot our break up party at Christmas we received a glass of raspberry cordial, a bag of boiled lollies and a piece of fruit - raspberry cordial and boiled lollies I don't like.

My two brothers, Bob & Les Gallimore; my mother and her sisters and brothers (Train); my six children Robert, Duncan, Roy, Jane, Leslie and Matthew Morgan; and most of my grandchildren went to Merriwa Central School.

## **FLASHBACK 1936**

Geoffrey Walter (Geoff) was born at Cassilis on 2 August 1919. He attended Bow Subsidised School, Greenarm and Merriwa Public Schools before going as a boarder to the Maitland Boys High School in Year 9. Maitland Boys High at this time (1936) was the only first class high school between Tamworth and Sydney. Prior to boarding school, sporting gymkhanas, shows, cricket and tennis occupied every spare moment.

For 9 years he rode 26 kilometres per day on horseback, it is estimated that 48,384 kilometres were travelled during the initial years of his education.

From the Archives of Merriwa Central School.

## **FLASHBACK 1975**

### **OPEN FOOTBALL - MERRIWA vs GULGONG**

Well one could sit and rave about all the excuses for our bad form - excuses such as rain, mud, sleet, cold fingers and slippery ball - but let's just face facts. We were not a team and Gulgong

just capitalised on this and made us look like a mob of Brown's cows.

Best player goes to Paul Tudor. Tony Constable won the "Bex Award" for I figure by the time he got home he would have had an aching head, as he came off in the second half with mild concussion.

The "Uncle Sam" Award must go to David Vero for standing on the wing for an hour without touching the ball. His team mates must have thought he had BO!! This could have been used to our advantage fellows.

The "Snoopy" Award goes to "Bones" Amidy for doing his best with the ball but being unable to make those tackles connect. Perhaps a few more push ups each night and some porridge for breakfast might put some beef on those bones.

Kevin Hartup wins the "Dropsy" Award. Cor blimey! I've never seen a player knock a ball on so much in one game. In his favour, however, it must be said that he was there calling for the ball.

Snappy Snapper (from Atranta 1975)

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## **FLASHBACK 1995**

Mrs Johnson's, Industry Studies - Hospitality class was awarded the Young Achievers Award at the Merriwa Australia Day Awards in January 1995.

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## **INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE**

Merriwa Central School has had many Exchange Students who were hosted by the Merriwa Rotary Club. These students attended school and provided their fellow students with excellent opportunities to learn other customs, languages, traditions and family life in another country. This helps to broaden their horizons. Over the twelve months that they live in Merriwa they make many friends within our community and form life-long friendships with many of our students.

Some Merriwa students have also had the benefit of the Youth Exchange Program and have spent one year attending school and gaining worthwhile experiences from an overseas community. Living and learning in another land is a journey in friendship, deeply gratifying to student, host family and community.

Following is a list of incoming and outgoing students and the country they came from or went to.

## INCOMING STUDENTS

|           |                                  |
|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 1972 - 73 | Junko Fukasawa - Japan           |
| 1974 - 75 | Cheryl Kieft - America           |
| 1982 - 83 | Kaz Nakayama - Japan             |
| 1983 - 84 | Gunhild Jaensen - Denmark        |
| 1984 - 85 | Stacey Boswell - America         |
| 1985 - 86 | Masato Nakano - Japan            |
| 1987 - 88 | Pia Makinen - Finland            |
| 1990 - 91 | Mette Touborg (Jensen) - Denmark |
| 1991 - 92 | Saori Ikegami - Japan            |
| 1993 - 94 | Lizl Lamprecht - South Africa    |
| 1994 - 95 | Paula Turic - Argentina          |
| 1995 - 96 | Fernanda Bueno - Brazil          |
| 1998 - 99 | Marzena Rutkowska - Poland       |
| 1999 - 00 | Marie-Aline Gilloteux - Belgium  |

## OUTGOING STUDENTS

|           |                               |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 1974 - 75 | Bronwyn Bailey - Canada       |
| 1982 - 83 | Sally Ann Hunt - South Africa |
| 1982 - 83 | Kim Harrington -              |
| 1983 - 84 | Tracey Cornish - Canada       |
| 1984 - 85 | Susan Medd - USA              |
| 1985 - 86 | Angus Peebles - USA           |
| 1989 - 90 | Kirsty Macintosh - Finland    |
| 1991 - 92 | Fiona Gorman - Denmark        |
| 1992 - 93 | Myf Peebles - South Africa    |
| 1995 - 96 | Kristy Byrne - Japan          |
| 1999 - 00 | Amanda Meyer - Germany        |

## STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (SRC)

### President's Report

The final year of this century has been an extremely busy one for the SRC. All 14 members have been working hard towards the goals that we set ourselves at the beginning of 1999. These activities not only benefit the students of today but also those of tomorrow and the community as a whole.

In our goal setting, we decided that we would support four charities. These were Red Nose Day, Jeans for Genes Day, Amnesty International and Bandage Bear Day. Also for the past three years we have supported a World Vision Child. This has proven to be very satisfying, as we are able to monitor the progress of not only a child but also a community.

Throughout the year the SRC has assisted in the purchase of various items, which aim to help the entire student body. These items include a camera (worth \$800). This camera was bought for the art department for the senior students doing their major works. However, it is also available for excursions and other class activities. We are now able to capture moments that the entire school can enjoy.

The SRC also provided \$3,000 to help fund the computer network recently installed. This network not only upgraded the computers but improved the entire system. Student access to the internet has increased dramatically.

The SRC has also been involved in various minor activities during the year. We continue to run the Coke machine as it is extremely popular with the students, and also provides a regular income for the SRC. The coke company gives bonus points for cartons purchased. These points are then accumulated and used to "buy" prizes. The school has recently received a TV and VCR with these bonus points.

At the beginning of the year we committed ourselves to having a mufti day once a month (out of uniform). On these days we charge the students 50c. To complement these days we have also provided lunch to the students for 50c. Money raised goes towards our charities as well as purchasing sporting equipment and other items.

As in recent years, we continue to have a disco once a semester usually run at the same time as other activities. In 1999 this took place with the "People to People" visit and the Year 10 Graduation.

In the year 2000, the SRC will continue to improve the school for all students. We wish the 2000 Committee a profitable and successful year.

On behalf of the SRC and all students, congratulations to Merriwa Central School on 150 years of excellent education.

Katie Cronin  
President SRC 1999

#### SRC Executive 2000

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| President:      | Sara Goodear |
| Vice President: | Jackie Brick |



## “BROADENING YOUR HORIZONS”

To all students attending Merriwa Central School in the year 2000 and beyond.

Merriwa Speech Night, 11 December 1990.

The following speech was given by an ex-captain/student of Merriwa Central School. It has a valuable message for each student to take “on-board”.

“Broadening Your Horizons” by Angus Peebles.

*Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.*

*About 5 years ago, a tall, thin, fair skinned 17 year old, stood on this stage and welcomed everybody to speech night 1985. Half a decade later I'm back, this time with a little more weight and a chance to get back at those teachers who are teaching you and who also taught me!*

*As it was not so long ago, when I, like you, sat out there. My memories of Speech Nights are still vivid - memories of dignatories espousing the virtues of education, over 15 minutes long. Now I'm not saying education is a bad thing - far from it - but 15 minutes is a long, long time, and as such I have brought a stopwatch to ensure that I get nowhere near double figures.*

*It was quite an honour a few weeks ago, when Graeme Mason wrote to me and asked if I could speak at the 1990 Speech Night along the lines of “Broadening your Horizons”. And I was thinking, “What the hell, I could tell you all about that particular subject,” How am I qualified to speak on that topic? Well here goes.*

*I guess every school revolves around three groups - parent, teacher, student. And top of that list in importance is the student, then the parent and then, of course, the teacher.*

*Now you guys, the students, are fairly lucky - it is easy to take your teachers, parents and school for granted, but this is a damn fine institution, and I for one, am proud to say that I was a student at Merriwa Central School. I've never shirked that, and nor should any of you.*

*The school may not have the resources the others do, but its teachers' dedication is unparalleled in many other places. Allow them, and you will receive all the help you want, or need, to broaden your horizons. Don't allow them, and maintain the thought that school sucks and you will never get anywhere. School is a means to an end and the education you receive is your ticket to do whatever you want.*

*I believe that everybody in this world - you - me - the guys up here on stage, all have the same opportunity to do something with our lives.*

*All it takes is a belief in yourself, and your own abilities. Everybody has a talent, whether it be musical, sporting, dare I say maths, or even woodwork. Use the talent that you have to set goals and go about reaching them.*

*When I was a kid in year 7, I knew I wanted to be an exchange student. By Year 9 I had made up my mind that I wanted to be a journalist.*

*I've been lucky in a lot of respects, I admit that, but set those goals, work hard, and honestly, anything is possible. Now I'm not saying it's an easy path - you'll probably get knocked along the way for having a go, but believe in yourself. Realise that there is a big, beautiful and at times bad world out there. Remember also, the individual is number one - if you get knocked down, get back up again and keep striving forward.*

*Now we've talked about school education and setting goals. To broaden your horizons, you've also got to educate yourself.*

*Now let's just take that term - "broadening your horizons." It's quite appropriate, given the way Merriwa physically finds itself.*

*Yep folks, the town is in a Valley - look east you have a hill, the same if you look west.*

*But remember that beyond those horizons is Gungahlin, Cassilis, Muswellbrook, Dubbo, Newcastle, New Zealand, Europe or America. You can't broaden your horizons by being sheltered in the valley. I'm not for a moment suggesting a mass desertion of this place, but see a bit more of the world to work on an overall opinion and not one developed by what you see in this town or district.*

*I guess what I'm saying is educate yourself with the world past the next horizon.*

*It's all very well and good for teachers to tell you all about science, english and the likes. By the same token, parents have a major roll in forming your moral opinions, teaching you what's right from wrong.*

*But the emphasis is on you - don't look to others for success. Be a leader of men and not a follower - set the fields. Listen to what you're told by parents and teachers for guidance and then educate yourself.*

*And finally, there is no finally ..... thanks very much. ONLY JOKING!!*

*Just one more thing. Always be proud of where you are from. People will always put Merriwa down - some of it is right and justified - it has a lot of growing up to do - a lot of residents must also broaden their horizons.*

*But there is so much good in this place: be proud of it, promote it and never be ashamed of saying where you come from. Most of us here have been lucky to be born, and live most of our lives in this town.*

*For me, it will always be home and a great place to grow up in. And the advantage of broadening your horizons through travel, work and further education, is that you get to appreciate your town and this school and much, much more.*

*(He starts to sit down, returns to microphone, holds up his stopwatch and says: "only 5 minutes 45 seconds.")*

Angus received a standing ovation and to this day, his speech is still being talked about. It was a fine example of what our local children can achieve if they "Broaden Their Horizons".

The Merriwa community was shocked and saddened to hear of the untimely death of Angus Peebles in May 1991.

He will always be remembered for his happy personality, his enthusiasm, and his message to the youth of Merriwa "to believe in yourselves, set your own goals, and look beyond the horizons of Merriwa."

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## **FLASHBACK**

### **The School Shield**

Mr Eric Flood (Principal 1965/66) was anxious to consolidate the secondary department of the school on its new site in Bow Street. This relocation was to cater for the ever increasing number of secondary students at Merriwa Central School. The primary grounds had an impressive gate way and it was thought that something similar was needed for the secondary site to give it some status and image.

The concept of a school badge, suitably mounted, was proposed by Mr Eric Flood. Mr John Hodgson offered to carry out the necessary acquisition of steel, the cutting, welding and erection of the completed work. The outline of the shield was drawn by Mr Flood and the cutting out was the work of either Lionel or Gordon Houlahan. Bruce Bond then prepared the surface and painted the school crest. Bill Young (Art Teacher at the time) then drew up a plan for the metal lattice which was to surround the shield. The majority of the horse shoe iron used was obtained from Hec Hazell, well known blacksmith in Merriwa and the Hunter Valley region. Finally the metal was cut, welded and painted, and the shield was attached. The resulting 'work of art' was then put in place and graced the front of the original secondary timber classrooms.

In September 1996, after a long absence, the School Shield once again graced the verandah. This was possible due to the wonderful support of Bruce Bond, who again did all the artwork, and John Hodgson, a keen school historian, who re-installed the Shield with help from his wife Judy.

What a great way to celebrate Education Week 1996.

*From the Ringer 12 September 1996*

## CONCLUSION

Merriwa Central School has had a long history. One hundred and fifty years ago it started as a tiny one roomed building, catering for a handful of barefoot scholars, to a complex institution, on a split site, providing for the needs of students from five years old to the 18 year old young men and women of today's Year 12.

It is the students who represent the soul of the school. It is the students and teachers efforts that ensure high standards of work and recognition. The future of a school and the directions in which it will develop, are the responsibility of the entire community. The support and involvement of parents and the continuing dedication of teachers and students provide the foundation on which a school must build.

The function of the school has changed in many ways. Nowadays, a school must equip and educate children with skills and values applicable to our modern technological society. Subject choice has increased and extra curricula activities have exploded. The decision making process has been broadened in an effort to allow all the stakeholders in education a chance to have an input.

We now have, not only the P&C but also a Student Representative Council (SRC), and committees for just about everything from curriculum to budget to student welfare to Occupational Health and Safety. The school now controls a large part of its own finances and has more power to make decisions about what happens within its boundaries.

People make a school what it is and the people of Merriwa, staff, pupils, parents, clergy, the community at large, have all contributed to make Merriwa Central School a true community school. There are many personalities amongst the students and teachers over 150 years of education. There are countless outstanding achievements in all manner of areas. Mock trials, Public Speaking, Science Competitions, State Finalist in 'Write around Australia' Competition, Swimming, Athletics, Cross Country, Football, Maths Competitions, and cricket to name a few.

Over the years, so much has changed yet one thing has remained constant - Merriwa Central School is a school that cares. The achievements accomplished in its history would not have been possible without the ever present spirit of co-operation and self help, which has been for this school, as in many others, its very life blood.

150 years since the opening of the school, it is appropriate to reflect on the events that make up the life of the school, the people that have shaped its history and the service it has given the community. We, who have been part of it, should be proud to have been associated with Merriwa Central School. This anniversary doesn't just celebrate our past achievements but highlights the exciting future for public education, as it prepares young people for their future and the new millennium.

And so ends the history of the humble little school, the school established so many years ago, the school advancing with increased enthusiasm into the future.

To the students, staff and community of Merriwa Central School, past and present, I hope you have enjoyed reading this book of your history. Congratulations on 150 years of superb education.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/REFERENCES**

We wish to acknowledge the following sources of information used in the production of this book:

- \* NSW Department of Education - Archives
- \* Mary McPherson, History Information Officer - DSE Library
- \* The Establishment of a National System of Education in NSW - CC Linz
- \* Telling Tales of out of School - Mary McPherson
- \* Government Schools in NSW - 1848-1983 Department of Education
- \* Ex Principals, staff, parents and students of Merriwa Central School
- \* Citizens of Merriwa
- \* School Magazines - 'Atranta' 'Images' 'Merino'
- \* "The Lure of the Land" by Helen Bettington

# HISTORY OF PRINCIPALS

## PRINCIPALS

## DATE APPOINTED

	<i>Private school opened in August 1849</i>
H E Norris	August 1849
	<i>National School from January 1850</i>
H E Norris	August 1849
H E Norris	January 1850
F J Shaw	March 1850
	<i>Closed from December 1851 to April 1853</i>
Mary Bourke	May 1852 (declined August 1852)
George Langley	February 1853 (arrived April)
	<i>Closed from September 1853 to September 1854</i>
Samuel Thicknesse	July 1854 (arrived Sept 1854)
	<i>Closed from August 1855 to April 1856</i>
Herbert Fowler	March 1856 (arrived April 1856)
	<i>Closed from January 1857 to September 1857</i>
Charles Mountain	January 1857(declined Feb 1857)
John Murray	August 1857 (arrived Sept 1857)
Michael Blake	June 1862
Thomas Chapman	January 1881
James Cosgrove	July 1883
John Craig	October 1883
James Davies	June 1886
Vesey Hines	January 1890
Ernest Clarke	May 1906
Roland Woolley	January 1909
Colin Walker	June 1924
Claude Lovell	January 1929
Harry Schaeffer	Relieving Oct 1930-Dec 1930
Louis Hill	Relieving June 1931-Jan 1932
Thomas Perram	December 1931
Kenneth Partridge	November 1938
William Thorpe	January 1942
	<i>Central School 1953</i>
Herbert Paterson	February 1954
Geoffrey Falkenmire	January 1956
Herbert Lynch	January 1959
Eric Flood	January 1964
Gordon Humphreys	January 1967
Robert Gorman	February 1972
Geoffrey Buckland	January 1979
Margery Ramsey	April 1988
Graeme Mason	January 1990
William (Bill) Rogers	January 1994
Grahame Jackson	January 1998

# PRINCIPALS SINCE CLASSIFICATION AS A CENTRAL SCHOOL



Herbert Paterson - 1954



Geoffrey Falkenmire - 1956



Eric Flood - 1964



Gordon Humphreys - 1967



Robert Gorman - 1972



Geoffrey Buckland - 1979



Margery Ramsay - 1988



Graeme Mason - 1990



William (Bill) Rogers - 1994



Grahame Jackson - 1998

## HISTORY OF DEPUTY / ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS, AND HEAD TEACHERS

	YEAR APPOINTED
Alan Hindley	1958
B Kelly	1960
Jack Green	1963
Thomas McBride	1966
Geoffrey Buchanan	1970
E (Max) Gartner	1972
Alexander (Sandy) Bishop	1973
Gay Hoskings/Aboozaid	1979
Doug Rose	1982
Mal Frame	1986
Brad Russell	1986
Mark Hewitt	1989
Marg Carey	1990
Gary Roberts	1991
Val Stanton	1995
Anna Middleton	1996
Alan Lacrosse	1998

## SCHOOL DUX

### *Secondary*

1999 .....	Daniela Kiely	1987.....	Darren Crouch
1998.....	Amanda Meyer	1986 .....	Brian Hancock
1997 .....	Gina Walton	1985 .....	Jenny Russell
1996 .....	Brenda Daniel	1984.....	Maree Inder
1995 .....	Michaela Ekkman	1983.....	Marney Fitzpatrick
1994.....	Julianne Campbell	1982.....	(1st Year 12 Dux)
1993.....	Bronwyn Mason	.....	Fiona Hunt
1992 .....	Ray Kiefel	.....	Year 10 Dux
1991 .....	Leonie Furze	1977 .....	Nicole Redman
1990.....	Justine Caines	1973 .....	Noelene Louise Russell
1989.....	Sally Williams	1935.....	Geoffrey Potter
1988 .....	Jodie Byfield	1928.....	Joyce Telfer (Henderson)

### *Primary*

1999 .....	Ashleigh Johnson	1993 .....	Jaye Pescud
1998.....	Amanda Nutt	1992.....	Anthea Wright
1997 .....	Emma Marshall	1991.....	Angela Lister
1996.....	Malcolm Smith	1990 .....	Ian Frame
1995 .....	Jamie Nutt	1989 .....	Kelly Markey
1994.....	J Williams	1988.....	Matthew Griffiths



## SCHOOL CAPTAINS/SRC PRESIDENTS

### SECONDARY

1999 .....Katie Cronin  
 1998 .....Bianca Cashen  
 1997 .....Amanda Meyer  
 1996.....Gina Wilton  
 1995 .....Kate Morgan  
 1994 .....Lauren Medd; Mathew Griffiths  
 1993 .....Danielle Cronin; Amylee Morgan  
 1992 .....Danielle Cronin; Michael Caines  
 1991 .....Michael Daniels; Kate Mason  
 1989 .....Kylie Beavan; Donna Rawlinson  
 1988 .....Kerry Cashen; Lincoln Amidy  
 1987 .....Tim White; Lincoln Amidy  
 1986 .....Philip Nicholls; Sara Swift  
 1985 .....Jenny Russell; Angus Peebles  
 1984.....Kim Rains; Stephen Dooker  
 1983 .....Elizabeth Cottle; Marc Hancock  
 1982.....Kim Harrington; Liam Philipson  
 1981 .....Karen Johnston; Liam Philipson  
 1980.....Karen Johnston; Michael Ryan  
 1979 .....Kay Meyer  
 1978 .....Kerry Gleeson; Terry Anshaw  
 1977.....Nicole Redman; Tony Amidy  
 1975 .....Amanda Riley  
 1974 .....Bronwyn Bailey; Roy Morgan  
 1973 .....Rosie Hain; David Hayes  
 1972.....Dianne Meyer; Ian Amidy  
 1969.....Kerry Swift; Lee Hunt  
 1968.....Narelle Porter; Alan Johnston  
 1967.....N Pfeiffer; Max Amidy  
 1966.....Marina Kyriakou; Neil Duggan  
 1965.....Cheryl Bradley; Bill Cashen  
 1964 .....Kay Roe; Neville Byrne  
 1963.....Daphne Malone; Barry Hazell  
 1962.....C Pittman; Ian Lee  
 1961.....Jenny Aldwell; M MacBeth  
 1960.....Nola Wicks; Adrian Leggett  
 1959.....Ann Thrift; Robert Kelly  
 1958 .....Margaret Hazell  
 1956.....Garry Pickett  
 1955 .....Les Gallimore

### PRIMARY

1999 .....Tanya Collison; Zach Morgan  
 1998 .....Amanda Nutt; Kate Middleton  
 1997.....Emma Marshall; Domonic Slade  
 1996.....Kym Coulton; Kent Eyre  
 1995 .....Lindy Whitby; Jeremy Szlicht  
 1994 .....Candice Medd; Peter Henderson  
 1993 .....Emily Munro; Jason Nutt  
 1992.....Amii Previati; Grant Meyer  
 1991 .....Kim Gill; Mark Sparrow  
 1990 .....Melissa Moore; Ian Frame  
 1989.....Kristy Byrne; Greg McKenzie  
 1988 .....Pamela Carrall; Ben Cowell  
 1985 .....Nikki Bishop; Michael Daniels  
 1973.....Judy Leggett; Peter Ponder  
 1972.....Paul Tudor; Jill Ponder  
 1969 .....Noeleen Louise Russell  
 1964 .....Mary Gardiner, Grant Hodgson

## STAFF OF MERRIWA CENTRAL SCHOOL - YEAR 2000

<i>STAFF</i>	<i>DEPARTMENT/SUBJECT</i>	<i>QUALIFICATIONS</i>
Mrs Pam Amidy	Maths/Science	Teachers Certificate
Mrs Shirley Bevan	Cleaner	
Mrs Nicole Boswell	P/T Casual School Assistant	
Mrs Julie Byrne	School Assistant	
Ms Margaret Carey	H/T English/History	BA Dip Ed
Mr Terry Connell	English/History	Dip Ed
Mrs Loretta Cooper	Cleaner	
Mrs Janice Curry	Cleaner	
Ms Lisa Cutting	Art	BVA Grad Art Dip Ed
Mr Peter Davidson	Maths/Science	BSc Dip Ed
Mrs Robyn Dorney	Library	Dip Teach; Grad Dip
Mrs Roslyn Frame	K-6	Teachers Certificate
Mr Ivan Gant	TAS	Dip AgSc; Dip Ed
Mrs Suzie Goldthorpe	P/T Casual School Assistant	
Mrs Shaen Hill	K-6	Dip Teach (Early Child)
Mrs Debbie Hunt	School Assistant	
Mr Grahame Jackson	Principal	BA Teach Cert
Mrs Jenny Johnson	TAS	BA Teach Cert
Mrs Bernadette Kearney	K-6 P/T casual	Dip Teach
Mrs Jean Keeping	School Assistant	
Mr Alan Lacrosse	H/T Maths/Science	BEd Dip Teach
Mr Peter MacPherson	P/T Casual Teachers Aide	
Mr Andrew McGuirk	K-6 Casual	BA Dip Ed
Mr Tony March	English/History	Dip Teach
Mrs Lynda Marshall	K-6	Dip Teach
Mr Philip Martyn	TAS	Dip ApSc Dip Ed
Mrs Gwenyth Meyer	Maths/Science	Dip Teach
Mrs Anna Middleton	AP K-6	
Mrs Lyn Moroney	Senior School Assistant	
Miss Narelle Newton	English/History	BEd
Mrs Sharon Parker	Ringer Co-ordinator	
Mr Sam Ricketts	Sport, Maths/Science	B PhysEd
Mrs Fiona Strachan	K-6	Dip Teach
Mrs Ellen Taylor	P/T Casual General Assistant	
Mr Ross Taylor	Farm/General Assistant	
Mrs Julia Thompson	P/T Casual School Assistant	
Mrs Yvonne Vidler	P/T Casual Teachers Aide	
Mrs Robyn Vandine	School Assistant	
Mrs Dale Wesley	P/T Casual Teachers Aide	
Mr Derek Wigmore	English/History	BA Dip Ed



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Spa



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