

# The Upper Plenty Primary School



## THE FIRST CALL FOR A SCHOOL

During the 1860s there were six families in the district, all with a large number of children. Parents were either farmers or wood cutters and splitters in the forest. Mr George Harrison, a local land owner, petitioned for a school for Upper Plenty. Mr Harrison described large families of children "growing up as wild as kangaroos", about which something needed to be done. Among the signatories were Christopher Mahady, George Harrison, Ewan McPherson and Mary Roe (widow). The School Inspector of the time denied the request on several grounds.

The building provided by residents was described as of, "weatherboard, shingled roof, 24 x 12 x 7 1/2 feet ... mud floor, requires lining ... fireplace at one end ... on Crown Land reserved for Commonage". Further, the Inspector believed that school fees, "are higher than could be obtained ... splitter families are likely to move on ... One family (7) would have to cross a creek, which is occasionally impassable after heavy rain ... another family (4) are closer to Wallan ... Considering the circumstances of the parents the elder children will frequently be required for farm labour ... I do not think an average of 20 children is at all likely to be maintained". The inspector then wrote, "I would call attention to the circumstance that all the names on the form of application are in the same handwriting ... and many of what purport to be the signatures of the parents in the attached list of children." Taken from *The Inspector's Report on Application for Aid for a Non-Vested (Private) School*, in 1865.



Very early bush schools were constructed out of whatever materials were available and were usually quite basic in construction. The above example is the Stanthorpe State School, Queensland, 1873.

A very early schoolhouse is located on the Gardiner property – Brooklands – possibly only for family use before a local school became available.



The old schoolhouse at Brooklands. The schoolroom is tiny, measuring approximately 2.5m x 4m. A weatherboard outhouse completes the amenities provided. Courtesy: Pina and Jerry Klonis.

## Funds provided

In the late 1860s, the sum of 20 pounds was allocated to build a school on its present five-acre site. The first building was a one-roomed sapling hut with a dirt floor, iron roof and slab fireplace. It had no equipment or furniture. This first school was privately run by the community and had no trained teacher. Prior to its establishment some children walked or rode horses to Wallan, Wandong or Glenvale State Schools – a long trip over unmade roads and dirt tracks in all kinds of weather.

On behalf of the fathers of families in this locality I return thanks for your inclination to promote our views in the matter of a school – desiring of being able to comply with the regulations of the Commissioners we have subscribed among ourselves and purchased a house convenient to where the Inspector and Mr Sherwin pointed out to me which will answer all the requirements of a school ... [It] is now open and 13 scholars in attendance ... before we cannot pressure to claim a salary we venture respectfully to submit that we might be allowed some assistance to enable us to support and keep a teacher. We are entirely destitute of tablet lessons both in reading and arithmetic ...

Letter from George Harrison, 23 June 1866.

In 1873 the Board of Education granted 155 pounds to build a new weatherboard schoolroom, the population now being considered stable enough to warrant it. It had three very small rooms, two windows, a small fireplace, an iron roof and a small paddock for the horses, which some children rode to school. It could accommodate up to 40 students. The school was now established as State School No. 1244, with a trained teacher, and was finally gazetted in 1875. There was no teacher's

residence. Teachers boarded with local families and many complained about the high boarding fees.



Upper Plenty Primary School, 1905, showing the 1875 school building. Courtesy: Museum of Victoria.

In 1873, Mr George Clarkson was appointed first Head Teacher. In 1874 the school had an average attendance of 28 pupils.

The school had few amenities and was not fenced. Wild cattle, pigs and swagmen would camp under the porch attached to the building. Children rode or walked to school, usually over rough bush tracks.

In 1902 an enclosed verandah was attached to the west side to reduce heat inside the building. In 1904 a teacher's residence was built in the grounds by Miss Victoria Smith, resident teacher 1901–18. Her elderly mother lived there with her until her death. The house is believed to have been two-storeyed with leadlight windows.

By 1879, Miss Belinda Flanagan had charge of both Upper Plenty and Scrubby Creek (Humevale) schools, teaching on alternate days. In May 1881, the Scrubby Creek school was closed when pupil numbers fell to nine. Miss Flanagan did not return to the Upper Plenty school in 1882. To maintain facilities, Beveridge school was made half-time with Upper Plenty school in 1886–87, with Miss Phebe Fay as teacher. Beveridge was later closed for a short time until pupil numbers increased.

Correspondence to the Shire of Broadmeadows from Upper Plenty School Committee notifying that it intended to pull up the bridges across the creek at the Upper Plenty School ground as they were considered unsafe. It was intended to build a footbridge over the creek for the convenience of the school children. The bridges on the school grounds had been much used by some rate payers and in the winter time it was only by using the school bridges that they could get in and out of their respective properties. It would be necessary for the Council to construct a crossing of some sort on the road near the tennis court for the benefit of rate payers ... It was agreed that the Engineer report on the matter.

Correspondence, Kilmore Free Press, 29 February 1912.

In February 1919, a devastating bushfire swept through Upper Plenty destroying the school and the teacher's residence (see history board *Life and Death, War and Peace – 1900 to 1935*). All school records were lost in the fire. Fortunately, the hall was spared. The hall was used as a schoolroom from 1919 to 1920 until the new school building was built, measuring six by five metres, with a small porch attached.

The building of 1921 remains today. It cost 333 pounds, 7s, 5d to construct. It was not painted for many years due to lack of government funds.



The 1921 school building.

## THE 1930S AND '40S

In the 1930s and '40s, most children didn't go to high school. Primary school was from Grade 1 to 8, when children generally reached the age of 14 and could leave school.

Two pupils from Mr AP Doherty's school at Upper Plenty gained first prizes at the recent Whittlesea Agricultural Show – Dugald McPherson, Grade 8, 1st prize, Pastel Drawing; Jack Carnell, 1st prize, Handwriting.

Kilmore Free Press, 9 December 1937.

## Empire Day

Empire Day was celebrated at Upper Plenty State School on Monday. Short addresses were given by the Shire President (Cr Cameron), Rev JA Lee and Crs Hadfield and Laffan. Cr Cameron, on behalf of the Shire Council, presented a Coronation Portrait to the School ...

Kilmore Free Press, 27 May 1937.

## I remember ...

... in the 1930s ...  
"Mr Harold Bower was our teacher. I remember Albert Day, Terry Day's uncle – he was always in trouble. One day when Mr Bower got so mad with him he accidentally slammed the top of the desk on Albert's fingers. When Albert swore, Mr Bower grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and made him stand in the corner."  
Minna Kendrick (née Mair), 2004

... starting school in Upper Plenty. I would have been about 12 and my sister was about 6. We lived at Bruses Creek and went to the Glenvale School until it closed down [1934]. We had to walk to school – it was seven miles by road but only four by going over the paddocks. Many a day I sat in class with wet feet. We did have a bike at home but it had to be shared by five of us. If you used it you had to get it back pretty quickly in case someone else wanted it. We couldn't ride the horses to school because they always had to do something at home."  
Albert Jenkins, 2004

... in 1938 ...  
"Mr Doherty was our teacher. He boarded in Kilmore. On the way to school he'd stop off in East Wallan to pick up half a dozen kids to keep the numbers up. He used to do his washing at school on Fridays and hang it up to dry over the weekend."  
Eileen Jongebloed, 2004

The school was closed in 1941–42, the pupil numbers having fallen below the cut-off point for remaining open. Mrs Mavis Patton (née Lear) remembers spending half days at school at the age of four-and-a-half to keep the school open in 1930.

Thanks to Katrina Walsh for much of this research into the history of Upper Plenty State School No. 1244.

## THE 1950S TO '70S

The school catered to students from Prep to Year 8 until at least 1959. Broadford Secondary College opened in 1960, and Whittlesea Technical College in 1977. Many children went through to Grade 8 at primary school and then left school at the legal leaving age of 14 without ever attending high school.



School concert, 1950s.

High schools became more prevalent in city areas post war and while increasing numbers of city children began to attend, they were difficult for country children to access. Many country schools had no option but to continue children's education to Grade 8 to allow them to reach the legal leaving age. Valda Miller attended Preston Girls High School after Glenvale Primary School closed down; however, she was only able to do so by boarding with family friends.

The school is situated on a hilltop; the area is extensive but not much of it is suitable for playing purposes ... There is no shelter at this school but negotiations are proceeding ... There is no fixed playground equipment – horizontal bars and a sandpit might be considered when circumstances permit ... The school is fairly well equipped – a radio, projector, rain gauge, barometer, thermometer and tuning fork have been added since last visit ... The enrolment is now 18 – an advance on last year.

Inspector's Report Book, 1953.

Grounds are neat and tidy but rather barren ... minor repairs to the picket fence enclosing the school are needed ... The boys' out office requires minor repairs, particularly to the urnal, but a septic system is to be installed soon ... The library is well stocked; reference material for social studies has been purchased recently.

Inspector's Report Book, 1961.

## I remember ...

... in the 1960s ...  
"Riding my horse to school and leaving him to graze in the school yard until it was time to go home. I could ride him in the middle of the road and not see a car."  
Glenda Mugavin, 2014

## Hume and Hovell centenary – 1924

In 1924 a centenary celebration was held at the school to commemorate the naming of Mt Disappointment. Captain W.H. Hovell and Mr Hamilton Hume, a noted bushman, were in search of an overland route from Sydney to Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne). On 9 December 1824, they ascended Mount Disappointment, so named because they had expected to be able to see Port Phillip Bay from its summit. Due to the dense and virtually impenetrable bush they retraced their steps and found an easier route south.

The centenary celebration went all day. A plaque was unveiled by Miss Olive McDougall, a former pupil of the school whose father, Archibald McDougall, was a prominent active community member. Norman Gardiner, who started at the school in 1897, also attended on the day.

## Back to Upper Plenty – 1974

The 150th anniversary of the attempted ascent of Mt Disappointment by Hume and Hovell was marked in 1974, but this also marked the 100th anniversary of the opening of State School No. 1244, Upper Plenty State School, now known as Upper Plenty Primary School.

In 1974 there were 12 pupils enrolled.



Celebrations of the 100th anniversary, 1974.

## I remember ...

"I started at Upper Plenty Primary School in 1967 along with my twin brother, Neil. The school only consisted of one room during my time. The entrance foyer was where we put our bags and coats. The main room had a small area in the corner for a teacher's office, the remainder of the room had the students' desks and library shelving. The room was heated by a wood-fired heater set within the chimney. All grades were conducted in this room by the one teacher. The only other outbuildings were the toilets and the shelter shed. The only outdoor play equipment was the monkey bars and a sandpit. There was an incinerator that was used to burn all the waste paper."

Student numbers went up and down, and on average there would have been about 12 attending at any given time. Some grades only had one or two students. At recess and lunch ball games and hopscotch were generally played. When required, the older boys were given the task of mowing the grassed area; this was something we rather enjoyed doing. We would sometimes scam the teacher by requesting he take us on a nature walk along Clarke's Road. We considered this an excellent way to get out of class and have some fun along the way. Every Monday morning on hearing the school bell ring the students would fall into line and sing 'God Save the Queen'. We would then march into class where a framed picture of Queen Elizabeth hung above the blackboard.

The annual school concert was an event that all students took part in. It was held in the Upper Plenty hall and was made up of songs and plays developed by the students, as well as the usual Christmas carols."

Ross Mugavin, 2011

## THE 1980S TO TODAY

In 1980 the first portable classroom arrived on site and, by the time the school was funded \$2 million by the State Government's Rural School Replacement Plan in 2009 to provide larger, better and more modern facilities, there were three portables in use. Kim Laffan (née Tierney) became Principal of the school in 2003 when there were 33 students enrolled and 3.5 staff.



Portable classrooms.

## A mudbrick art room

A four-square mudbrick art and craft room was constructed between 1984 and 1986. The mudbricks were made over a period of time from clay dug from Howard and Wendy Stokes' farm nearby. The structural timber beams were cut from timber that also came from Stokes' farm. The Principal at the time, John Quinn (1983–2002) was a driving force behind this project. School Council funds and volunteer labour, driven by Howard Stokes – a school parent and experienced and enthusiastic advocate for mudbrick as a construction material – made the project become a reality.



ABOVE: Preparing the timbers for the art room. Left to right: Helmut Runge (bending over), Gill Livesay, man unknown, David Stokes, Howard Stokes.



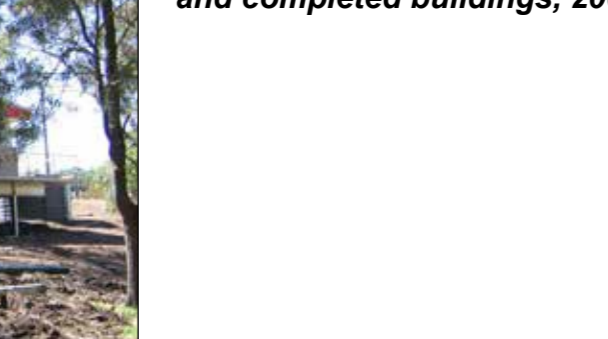
ABOVE: Construction in progress.

BELOW LEFT: Getting there.

BELOW: Finished play area with mudbrick art room in the background.



The State Government's Rural School Replacement Plan resulted in a \$2 million building replacement project. In May 2010, Education Minister Bronwyn Pike unveiled a plaque with the school captains, Matthew Holmberg and Gemma Parsons, to officially open four new classrooms with a central learning space, administration area and staff



VARIOUS: Construction works and completed buildings, 2009.

and student toilet facilities. Access to wireless internet, low-energy lighting and self-sufficient watering systems were amongst the new building's many features. In 2010 the school had an enrolment of 131 students and 15 staff.



Launching the beginning of construction. Left to right: Emily Jongebloed – former student and grand-daughter of Eileen – Eileen Jongebloed (attended UPPS in the 1930s), Principal Kim Tierney (now Laffan), Scott Hassan from Melbourne Construction and Coatings, Andrew Griffin from OSA. Photograph: Kilmore Free Press, June 2009.

A further \$925,000 from the Federal Government's Building the Education Revolution program led to three further classrooms being built with a central learning space, access to learning studios and improved information and communication technology facilities. The building was pre-fabricated and delivered onsite to provide minimum disruption to school activities.



VARIOUS: Construction of new amenities, made possible by the Building the Education Revolution grant, 2011.

In 2011, Upper Plenty Primary School's Grade Prep made school history by being the school's first ever Prep-only grade.

## Preps create school history



Prep-only grade, 2011. Source: North Central Review.

In 2014 there are 170 students enrolled at the school. The majority of these come from outlying areas, attracted by the school's leadership under Principal Kim Laffan, its quality of teaching and emphasis on academic and personal development.



Upper Plenty Primary School, circa 1900. Teacher: Miss Victoria Smith.



Upper Plenty State School, 1936.



School photograph, circa 1946. Teacher: Miss Eva Amour (1943–46) seen at rear right, later married one of the McPherson boys, whose family she may have boarded with. Front row, left to right: unknown, Gwen Smith, unknown, Ken Smith (small boy at front), Beverly Smith (behind Ken, wearing glasses), Gerald Lodge with Miss Olive McDougall behind, unknown, Kevin Lodge in front with David Lodge behind. It has not been possible to identify many of these people. Some will be school parents with pre-school children. If you can help with identification please let us know.



School sports and concert, 1950s.



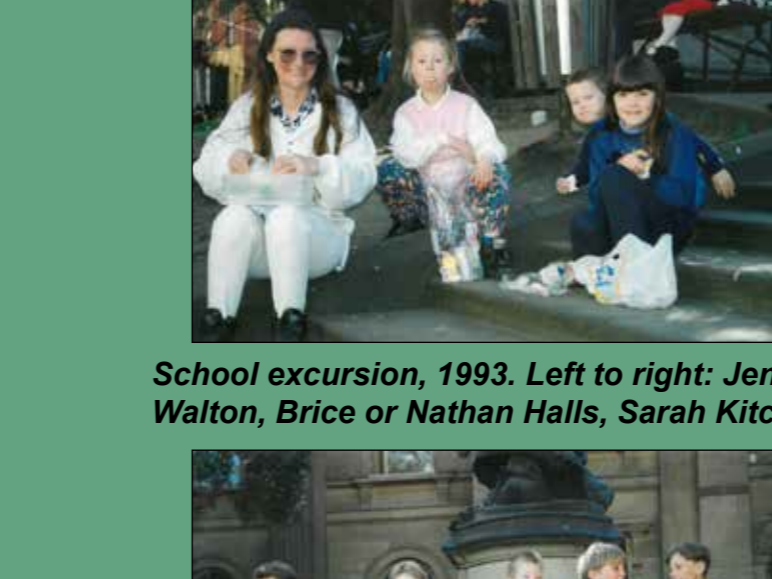
School photograph, 1955. Back row, left to right: Patricia Clive, Judy Bramich, Joan Lawrence, Margherita Andreatta, Barbara Woods. Middle row: Bruce Woods, John Mahady, Teddy Brockwell, Alfie Brockwell, Ernie Patton. Front row: Marion Brockwell, Rosemary Van Wynden, Coby Van Wynden, Glenns Woods. Sitting: Cesarina Andreatta, Stephen Patton, Alan Woods. Teacher: Mr George Brownbill (1954–62). Photograph courtesy: Tricia Best.



School photograph, 1963. Back row, left to right: Laurie Patton, Kevin Power, Billy Patton, Geoff Congram, David Bradbury, Pat Power, Marilyn Patton, Robin Bradbury, Judy Power, Paulina Chiminello. Front row, left to right: Raymond Pollock, Colin Patton, Andrea Andreatta, Steven Pollock, Glenda Mugavin.



School photograph, 1980. Back row, left to right: James Daoud, Dean Harrington, Stephen Stokes. Middle row: Mrs Bradley, Jason Pace, Geoffrey Best, Christopher Lantz, David Pace, Ian Williams, Brett Groves, Scott Groves, Miss Hawke. Front row: Sally Livesay, Carmen Pace, Angie Wright, Susan Vassallo, Wendy Owen, Arne Williams, Julie Stokes.



School excursion, 1993. Left to right: Jenny Walton, Brice or Nathan Halls, Sarah Kitchingman.



School photograph, 1994. From back, left to right: Meaghan Westcott, Tenille Mounsey, Timothy Likos, Catherine Molan, Heidi Walton, Matthew Molan, Matthew Kitchingman, Karina Wallis, Travis Symons, James Gregory, Emily Jongebloed, Les Walton, David Best, David Maskell, Jack Ogilvie, Robert Ogilvie, Darcy Maskell, Lindsey Crowe, James Quinn, Daniel Quinn, Alistair Crowe. Seated: Ashley Austin, Dean Villola, Kate Quinn, Sarah Kitchingman, Nathan Halls, Kathleen Gregory, Elise Westcott, Kirsten Westcott, Jacqueline Morrow, Kerry-Michelle Bott, Brice Halls. Teachers: Mr John Quinn, Mr Peter Jakubowski (Mr J).



School excursion, circa 1999. Teacher: 'Mr J'.



An appreciative audience. School concerts were held in the hall until student numbers outgrew the hall's capacity. Circa 2004.



School photograph, 2014.