

THE KOWEN SCHOOL SITE

In May 1881, Frederick Campbell of Duntroon lodged an application for the establishment of a school at Kowen. The following parents and guardians undertook to send 18 children: Stephen McNerny (three), Martin Campbell, guardian (one), William Collier (six), John Gallagher (four) and John McInnes (four).

The application was successful and the Kowen Provisional School opened in July 1882. The parents provided the building and furniture while the government paid the teacher and supplied books and equipment. Fees were three pence per child per week with a maximum of one shilling per family per week. The first teacher was Isabella Ann O'Neill. In December 1882, the school was raised to 'Public' status.

Location

The dead pine tree near the locked gate on Charcoal Kiln Road and the remains of another near the sheep loading ramp are all that are left of several trees that would have been in the school grounds to shade and shelter the children. There is no remaining physical evidence of the school buildings. The school was probably located where this sign is now, just south of where the charcoal kilns were subsequently built and on the southern side of where Charcoal Kiln Road is today.

The school buildings

Nearby residents built the school house from local materials. It was a vertical slab construction, had a



An embroidery sampler made by Catherine (Kate) McInnes, aged 12, in August 1882, shortly after the school was opened. Photo: Marilyn Folger, 1998.

fireplace, glass windows and was lined and floored. The roof was probably iron. In 1898, the NSW government built two pit toilets at the school and carried out repairs. A 400 gallon (about 1,800 litre) ship's tank was also placed on a stand and connected to the roof for drinking water. In February and May 1901, John McInnes wrote to the Minister for Works requesting a new building. He said the existing building was not fit to accommodate children because they had to put their overcoats on to keep dry in wet and windy weather. He said it was not even fit to stable the School Inspector's horse. It was to no avail and only small repairs were carried out later in 1901 and in 1904.

The teachers and students

Between 1882 and 1906, there were 11 teachers at Kowen School (seven women and four men).

Two women taught there when it became a subsidised school.

There is very little surviving information on the students who attended the school apart from lists (name, age and religious denomination) that accompanied the application for the establishment of the school and the request to re-open the school in 1890.

Ups and downs

After Isabella O'Neil left at the end of August 1885, the school had a succession of teachers and attendance was irregular, partly due to childrens' farm duties. The school was under threat of closure in 1890 because of low attendance and it shut down for a short period. The residents rallied, and in May 1890, the following parents guaranteed the regular attendance of 16 children: John Gallagher (three), Luke Colverwell Jnr (three), Thomas Harman (three), William Cooper (two) and John McInnes (five including two Horrocks). The school reopened, but in October 1906, attendance fell



John and Sarah McInnes with their two youngest children, Lillian May (Maisie) and Australia Janet (Top), c 1888. Both children went to Kowen School. Photographer not known.

for the September quarter and the school was closed that month. However, a subsidised school operated in the building in 1908, 1912 and 1913. The government paid a subsidy per child and the parents were responsible for providing the teacher.

Reflecting the health of the community

The rise and fall of the school to a significant extent reflected the growth and decline of the small rural community. The establishment of the school demonstrated the value the residents put on the formal education of their children. As families such as the Colliers, McNurneys, Coopers and Harmans left the area, the small number of children of school age from the remaining families such as Maria Colverwell (her husband Luke Jnr had died in 1896), James Curley and John James Edmonds (who left in 1906) meant that the school declined and closed forever.



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