

Warialda Public School
An Early History
1848 – 1874

The establishing of a national school in Warialda would have seemed a natural progression in the development of a town which was playing a major role in the development of the north of New South Wales and the southern areas of Queensland. Warialda was the business centre for pioneers moving further northward from the established areas in the Hunter Region. Warialda was the administrative centre for northern New South Wales Lands department and Police departments. The Warialda Police district covered an area of some 38,000 square miles.

Many pioneering towns would have found it difficult to establish a school under the Private and Denominational schooling system before the establishment of the National board of Education in 1848. The establishment of 'The Board' allowed towns to apply for the establishment of a school. Communities wishing to establish a National School were asked to select local patrons. The patrons at Warialda were; R. B. Ottley, Richard Bligh (Police Commissioner), George Gally (magistrate), William Geddes (store and Post office keeper) and James Snape (clerk of the Bench).

Land for the establishment of a school was noted on the first surveying of Warialda in 1849 by the Government surveyor James Galloway. This early allocation of land allowed for little impediment for the establishment of a school, as ownership of land was a major obstruction in many early school applications. The area allotted for the building of a school was one acre, consisting of lots 2 and 3 of section 55 (this allocation of land is the north eastern section of the present school grounds). The local patrons had to wait for Warialda to be surveyed before they could apply for a school to be established.

In 1849 Warialda consisted of;

- Police Commissioner's house (Richard Bligh) and hut (possibly Hamson family).
- Barracks, stables and huts (Holden Street)
- Chief Constables house (Thomas McGee)
- Constables house (Crn Stephen and Hope St.)
- Lock up (Crn Stephen and Hope St.)
- Snape's house (Hope St)
- Court House (Stephen St)
- Hogg's house (Hope St)
- William Geddes store and Post Office. (Hope St)
- Pound keepers hut (Near present day sale yards)

Mr William Geddes forwarded a letter to the National Board of Education on the 24th May, 1849, requesting that a National school be established at Warialda. A favourable replay was received and fund raising was commenced. By 14th January 1850 a sum of 42 pounds had been raised by subscription, this was the local patrons one third contribution. A request was made to 'The Board' to forward their two thirds contribution of 64 pounds.

It is interesting to note that in 1850 the closest bank to Warialda was the Bank of New South Wales in Maitland. The Local Patrons requested that they be permitted to deposit their subscribed funds at Maitland as it was closer than Sydney.

National Board Of Education

In January 1848 Governor Fitzroy appointed a Board of National Education to establish common schools in the colony of New South Wales. These schools were modelled on the Irish education system with books to be use from Ireland. All school prior to this date were denominational schools run by four major religions. There was no restriction as to where national schools might be established, however Governor Fitzroy felt that they were better suited to smaller communities of mixed denomination.

The National Board of Education set up a model school (Fort Street Model School) for the training of teachers. To alleviate the shortage of teachers, schools could be established with temporary teachers recommended by the local patrons.

By the end of 1849 there were twenty five schools operating with an average establishment cost of 150 pounds. The National Board of Education would supply two thirds aid to each school established. The total sum allocated by The Board for schools in 1851 was 3,500 pounds

It was desirable for the local patrons to be representative of different religious groups. The local patrons determined the physical conditions under which a teacher had to work. They submitted specifications for buildings, were responsible for the building and settlement of any difficulties as well as providing accommodation for the teacher. The patrons has to inform The Board of any matters relevant to the teacher conduct (at his time there were no inspectors of schools)

The Board employed a salaried officer who performed the dual role of inspecting and examining teachers and established schools, and promoting the establishment of new schools. In 1850 Mr Rusden went on a tour of inspection of schools from Sydney to Morton Bay (near Brisbane). In his itinerary submitted on 26th November Mr Rusden outlined a route from Armidale to Warialda where William Geddes was building a national school, since there was a drought in the Namoi, Rusden offered to take leave without pay at Warialda, where he had friends, until rains furnished natural feed along his proposed route.”

The Building

The ‘Board’ specified that the teacher’s residence was to contain not less than two decent rooms and a kitchen, provisions being made also for necessary out buildings and water. In 1849 plans prepared by Mr M Wilson were drawn up. These plans reflected the teaching practise of the time where males and female scholars were taught in separate rooms.

Specification given by the builder, Patrick Reid, show the slab foundations and wall plates were of ironbark, while beams and weatherboard cladding were of local pine. The chimneys were built of iron bark slabs and rough stones on the inside. The roof was of iron bark shingle construction.

On the 22nd June, 1850 an agreement was entered into between the Local Patrons and Patrick Reid (Carpenter of Bingera) for building construction at a cost of 105 pounds. This building was completed in early November, 1850 (except for window glazing).

School furniture consisted of two 15 foot long desks, six 7 ½ foot forms for room One and one large table (7 ½ft x 5 ½ ft) with two 7 ½ ft forms for room Two. These items of furniture were built by Patric Reid for a cost of 11 pounds.

Patrick Reid

Teachers

Teachers were generally badly educated and poorly regarded by community members and were often incompetent. Due to a lack of 'Board' funds teacher training was limited to one month (at Fort Street Model school) and as teacher numbers were very few, temporary (untrained) teachers were often appointed. It is worthy to note that neither Margaret Geddes nor John Keating were incompetent, both appeared most diligent towards their duties.

A request was sent on 29th January 1861 for the appointment of a teacher as all building and furniture work had been completed. A further request was sent on 8th April for temporary teacher from Sydney. A parcel of books was received from the 'Board' in early June. These books were Irish school books as our system of education was based on the Irish system.

A Mr Wilson was prepared to come to Warialda, however he was not favoured by local patrons as he was a single person. The local Patrons wanted a married couple who could board pupils.

Warialda National School was opened on 15th July, 1851. Miss Margaret Geddes was the first teacher (temporary). She commenced her duties on a wage of 20 pounds per annum, plus fees. Fees could be anything from one penny per student per week to one shilling per student per week. It is obvious that the greater number of students the greater the remuneration for the teacher. At this time Warialda had a population of 45 residents with 11 children in attendance at school. Miss Geddes was assisted by Mrs Hamson, wife of Commissioner Bligh's orderly.

A typical timetable of 1851 included the 3Rs, grammar and singing with needlework for girls and geography for boys. One hour each afternoon was set aside for religious instruction by visiting clergy or silent reading of scripture lessons. It was common practice to have the teacher give one lesson in one room (boys room), set the children to work on a silent task, then move to the second room (girls room) to deliver the another lesson. School was open for five hours each weekday and three hours each Saturday morning, the only vacation being 10 days at Christmas.

When Warialda National school was opened there were only 43 other National Schools in New South Wales (Queensland and Victoria). The attendance at all these schools was 2,750. Warialda was the second school established 'beyond the Settled Districts', Kempsey was the first. Warialda was the first school built with the assistance of the 'Board' beyond the 'Settled Districts'.

In September 1851 Miss Geddes was replaced by Mr John Keating. Mr Keating had trained at Fort Street and had previously taught at a denominational school at Singleton. He first applied to train as a 'Board' teacher in February 1850, he again

inquired on 24th May 1851. The 'Board' requested he train for one month to "acquaint himself with the details of the system." He commenced teaching on a salary of 40 pounds per annum. A teaching position with the 'Board' was seen as desirable as a teacher's income in the denominational system depended solely on fees and local subscription.

Mr Keating had a wife, daughter and four sons.

In October 1851 Mr Keating began corresponding to the 'Board' complaining about the conditions at Warialda. He wished to be placed at a school at a more favourable location. His main complaints were;

- the lack of student numbers (15 children including his own, instead of 40 he was expecting), which greatly reduced his income.
- the poor condition of the building "The school house is of slabs so open, that I can thrust my arm through every part".
- lack of fencing and 'out buildings'.
- expenses involved in moving to Warialda
- high cost of living
- apathy of locals and school Patrons.
- high cost of education for 'poorer classes' (shepherds)
- isolation.

Mr Keating ended up selling his watch, clothes and furniture to pay his debts, however it was inevitable that he could not sustain his family as he anticipated going into debt at the rate of 14 pounds per year.

The 'Board' responded by forwarding Mr Keating a bonus of 5 pounds in November (for 1851).

In response to Mr Keating's letter the local patrons replied in a letter to the 'Board', this letter stated;

- they have no control over the cost of provisions
- Mr Keating's dwellings were superior to any house in Warialda
- Mr Keating was not deceived as to the number of pupils
- Mr Keating was thought highly of by pupils, had a lot of zeal and was efficient.
- a man with a large family was not suited to such a remote place.
- 10 pupils at school paying one shilling per week (excluding Mr Keating's children).
- Gold mania will probably reduce pupil numbers.

In a letter dated January 1852 Mr Keating states that he had been in Warialda for sixteen weeks and had only received one application from a student wishing to board and that he anticipated only 5 or 6 children who would attend in February. He outlined his belief he was deceived by local patrons and states his efficiency as a teacher has never been questioned while at Warialda.

Mr Keating left Warialda in January to stop his family going further into debt. With his departure the school was closed.

A further reduction in numbers would have occurred when the Bingera gold fields opened in June 1852.

In January 1853 Richard Bligh wrote to the 'Board' asking that the school building be used by his clerk Mr John Lawson. This request was granted and Mr Lawson occupied the building in February. The agreement between the Commissioner Mr

Bligh and the 'Board' was that seven days notice be given if the building was to be reopened as a school.

Hugh MacIntyre

A request, from Mr MacIntyre to be appointed as teacher was forwarded from the local patrons to the Board in March 1853. In his letter of application Mr MacIntyre stated that he had lived in the district for about two years and had previously taught under the denominational system from 1845 to 1851 at Muswellbrook. He had a wife (capable of teaching reading, writing grammar and needlework) and three children. Mr William Geddes guaranteed a salary of 40 pounds per annum for one year. Mr MacIntyre is listed as being appointed as teacher in March 1853, however it would appear that he was not still in that capacity by May 1853. There is also a degree of conjecture as to whether Mr MacIntyre officially commenced duties at Warialda as the 'Board' did not renew a salary for the school after the departure of Mr Keating. It may be possible that his salary was met by Local Patrons. Teacher salaries for teachers beyond the boundaries were increased to 60 pounds in 1853. The idea of a boarding school was mooted by the Warialda correspondent to the 'Empire' of 3rd June 1854.

It would appear that the school closed and did not reopen until 1861. The problems experienced by Mr Keating were common, as seven out of the fifteen teachers who left the service at the end of 1851 mentioned unsatisfactory working and living conditions or insufficient salaries as reasons for their resignation. Of the thirty seven teachers appointed by the 'Board' in 1850 and 1851, only eleven remained by the end of 1852.

In reports of 1853 and 1854 Warialda is listed as a school "where schools have been applied for, but not fully organised yet." A report in 1858 lists Warialda as not operating, the return notes the School site was granted by the Government and that the school house was in the course of erection.

It is interesting to note that in 1859 Mr W Wilkins (inspector of schools) lists schools in which the average daily attendance of pupils was less than 30. This was the minimum number set by the 'Board' for a school to remain open. This was obviously brought in to stop the difficulties experienced by Mr Keating (where student numbers were exceptionally low) from reoccurring.

A public meeting was held in Warialda on 14th June with the Inspector of the Northern Districts, Mr W MacIntyre. From this meeting a request was made to the 'Board' to reopen the school. The letter listed the new patrons as John Geddes (Presbyterian), Thomas McGee (Roman Catholic) and Mr Ludwig Phillips (Jewish). The letter, written by John Geddes, goes on to request that repairs needed to be carried out to the building, and that a water closet and fencing were required. It would appear that the local Patrons were also willing to pay travel expense from Tamworth for a teacher and guaranteed a salary of 52 pounds per annum for two years. An amount of 84 pounds was subscribed by five individuals for this purpose. It would appear that Mr Keating's complaints of 1851 may have been justified as the Local Patrons were at this point endeavouring to rectify many of the difficulties experienced by the Keating family.

In his recommendation to the 'Board' Mr Wilkins (Chief Inspector) recommended that the school should be reopened as a means of carrying education to the interior and remote pastoral localities (although the number of children who would attend would be under 30). He suggested that the same conditions apply to an application from Bingera. To test the resolve of the Warialda community Mr Wilkins suggested that the funds promised by the Local Patrons be committed before a reply was forwarded.

A letter written by John Geddes on the 12th August 1861 indicated that the 'Board' was prepared to pay a full salary, and that advertisements had been placed in the local newspaper for a teacher.

In March of the same year a request was made for the following upgrades by the Inspector Mr W McIntyre;

- fencing along Hope St.,
- the roof to be made waterproof,
- the slabs in teachers residence to be closed, chimneys repaired and bedroom walls to be papered.
- Erection of a water closet
- Provision of a book press, blackboard, hat pegs, hand bell, two chairs and a teachers tablet board.
- 18 tablet boards (slates)
- 3 pounds for the purchase of school books to sell to children.

It would appear that all of these upgrades were carried out as the Local Patrons sent an account for 37 pounds 17 shillings to the 'Board' on 13th November.

The school was reopened on 2nd September 1861 with Mr Ed Moroney as teacher. Mr Moroney was 'called to another Colony on family business', and is listed as leaving his position on 3rd October 1861, once again closing the school. The enrolment was 23 children with average attendance of 18.

Mrs Clara Leslie (Mrs Manson) was appointed in October and commenced duties on 27th January 1862. Mr James Snape is listed as a Local Patron on the recommendation for Mrs Leslie's appointment. An inspectors report dated 11th December 1862 states that there were 22 pupils present at inspection.

"The children conducted themselves with considerable propriety, they were punctual and regular in attendance, clean, decently clothed, and attentive to their studies. Progress is fairly satisfactory and general intelligence is credible for the time under instruction".

Mrs Leslie continued to teach until 31st August 1863. She was replaced by ? Cullen who taught until the end of the year. Mr Charles Hill commenced duties in January 1864 and taught at Warialda until December 1869.

In 1866 Bailliere's Gazette and Road Guide notes that;

"Warialda has a hospital and a National School. The hotels are the Gwydir, the Gwydir Arms Inn, and the Race Horse Inn. There is a court of petty sessions (which is the head quarters of the Crown Lands department in the Gwydir district), a Crown Land agency and a court of request.... There are annual races and the nearest telegraph office is at Tamworth, 140 miles away."

William Elliott taught from January 1870 to 30th June of the same year. He was replaced by Sarah Meynink on August 1st. In an Inspectors report for 1872 the following comments are noted;

“The teaching is marked by a want of industry and intelligence. The schoolroom is small, and the furniture rough and not very suitable. The books and apparatus do not appear to have been well cared for.”

A similar report in 1874 records ;

“the results of the discipline are of a low order. Little acquaintance with appropriate teaching methods is shown.”

Sarah Meynink resigned on 31st March 1874. She married (Mrs Goodfellow) and reapplied for the position and was appointed on 9th June 1874 until her final resignation on 31 December 1875.