



## **The History of the Victorian School for Deaf Children**

*The original title was the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution.  
This was changed to the Victorian School for Deaf Children in July, 1949*

### **Part One**

In 1910 when the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the commencement of education for deaf children in Victoria, one of the Board Members, Rev. Doctor Edwin Watkin<sup>1</sup>, wrote a short history which was included in the 1911 Annual Report.

Part A of these historical notes are Dr. Watkin's "History of the first 50 years."

Part B was written by Mr Harry Powell in 1975

### **"The History of the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution"**

**by the  
Rev. Dr. Watkin**

In 1859 a letter appeared in the Melbourne "Argus" calling attention to the necessity for the establishment of a School for Deaf Mutes. Other correspondence followed. Among the correspondents was Mr. F. J. Rose, a deaf mute, who had been educated in London.

As neither the Government nor the general public took up the matter, Mr. Rose commenced a private school for the deaf. From 1860 to 1866 this school was conducted in several buildings in Windsor, and the pupils increased from 12 to 28. To Mr. Rose, who still survives, belongs the honour of founding the Institution. For some time he conducted the school at pecuniary loss, but timely help came from the Denominational School Board making a grant of £100 towards the teachers' salary.

In consequence of the inability of some parents to pay the school fees, an appeal was made for public support. A provisional committee of eight persons was appointed. The following were the committee:- The Revs. S. L. Chase, Donald Macdonald, James Bickford, William Moss, the Hon. A. Fraser, M.L.C., the Hon. Geo. Rolfe, M.L.C., with Messrs. H. Jennings & Alexander Morrison. The Rev. W. Moss was Hon. Secretary. There is no one to whom the Institution owes such a debt of gratitude as to Mr. Moss. He was secretary for 30 years, and during part of that time every year he gave up his holidays and accompanied Mr. Rose and some of the pupils who attended public meetings in aid of the institution, in all parts of the State. These meetings, with the object lessons presented of the way in which deaf mutes were being educated, were of immense service to the funds.

In 1866 the land occupied by the Institution, with an area of about six acres, was granted by the Government, and vested in trustees.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Watkin, who was the President of Wesley College, joined the Committee in 1884 and was appointed Hon. Secretary when the original Hon. Secretary, Rev. William Moss, died in 1890, and he remained as Hon. Secretary until the Committee in 1903 appointed Mr. John Adcock who became the first paid "Superintendent and Secretary". When Dr. Watkin died in 1916 he had given 32 years remarkable continuous service to the institution.

The foundation stone was laid by Sir Charles H. Darling on March 6th, 1866, and on October 13th of the same year the opening ceremony was performed by Sir J. H. T. Manners Sutton, K.C.B. The buildings then consisted of the central edifice and the southern wing. In 1870 the increase of pupils rendered it necessary to complete the northern wing. In 1907 further additions were made.

Most of the site available for building has now been utilised. Further additions must necessitate reducing the size of gardens and playgrounds.

A cottage hospital was erected in 1887, to provide isolation for pupils during epidemics. Through Divine providence, the occasions on which the hospital has been utilised have been few.

The buildings are fairly adapted to the requirements of the institution, in school-rooms, dormitories, dining-rooms, kitchen and laundry. The total cost of the buildings has been about £27,000, towards which the Government has contributed £14,500 and the public £12,850.

### **PUPILS**

The pupils number at present 97. Four more are to be admitted in August. Of these 99 will be resident and 2 non-resident, making 101.

These pupils come from Melbourne and suburbs, and very many other parts of the State. The number of pupils enrolled since the establishment of the Institution has been 534. In August the accommodation will be quite taken up. There will not be room for another resident pupil.

### **METHODS OF INSTRUCTION**

For many years the manual and sign system was the only one employed. Excellent results were obtained by Mr. Rose and his assistants. For a number of years the combined manual and oral systems have been employed with improved results.

On the subject of the method of instruction, the Head Master (Mr. W. D. Cook) writes: "Our programme of instruction is a comprehensive one, and is substantially that adopted by a majority of the schools for the deaf in other parts of the world. The prime object in our teaching is to give the pupils a practical understanding and command of the English language, and in the attainment of this end we employ the best means within our reach."

"Daily instruction in articulation is given to every pupil that shows capacity for such training, and at the present time the large majority are being taught by this method. In no case, however, is oral training carried on at the sacrifice of intellectual development. Natural signs and manual spelling are occasionally employed as supplementary aids in teaching, though, as the pupils advance into the higher grades, communication between teacher and scholar is conducted almost entirely through the media of lip-reading and speech. Instruction in drawing and modelling is given to all in the school, also painting to those who show talent for artistic work, and who desire such teaching.

We have adopted the oral system in preference to all others for the reasons tabulated below -

1. "It is well-known that the natural use of the organs of the body strengthens and develops them, and the use of the pupils' lungs for speaking as well as breathing, has been proved to be beneficial to their health."

J. M. BROOMALL WARD, M.D.

2. "We recognise that deaf children, after leaving school, must live among hearing people, who have little or no knowledge of manual spelling or signs."
3. "We have found by experience that pupils instructed on the oral method acquire a better command of our language than those instructed on the silent or manual system."
4. "The gesture language as used in some schools prevents the acquiring of English as a vernacular. It also causes the deaf to associate in adult life, and the consequence is they

intermarry, and their affliction is transmitted to their offspring, so that statistics to-day actually show that the deaf mutes are increasing in number”.

DR. GRAHAM BELL.

Mr. Cook has had twenty-nine years experience in the Institution as a teacher, first under the manual and secondly under the oral system, and so is thoroughly qualified to judge of the merits of the respective systems. The staff of teachers consists of the Head Master, assisted by one male and seven female assistants, and four of these have had over 10 years experience as teachers of the deaf. With the exception of one junior teacher, who is still studying, all have conformed to the rules of the Institution in passing examinations satisfactory to the Education Department of Victoria.

From the remarks made by those who have recently visited kindred institutions in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, the Board of Management is of opinion that the education given in the Victorian institution will compare favourably with that given in the Mother Country and the United States.

The staff of teachers is very efficient. Mr. W. D. Cook has shown himself for over 20 years an efficient Head Master. All his staff have been trained by him. Teachers trained by him have been appointed Head Masters of the Brisbane and Hobart institutions.

It has been a source of regret to the Board of Management that they have not had the funds at command to pay the staff of teachers as liberal salaries as are paid to teachers of deaf mutes in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The first Superintendent and Matron were Mr. and Mrs. F. J. Rose. They were succeeded by Mr. and Mrs. W. Jones. After the death of Mr. Jones and the retirement of Mrs. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. J. Adcock were appointed.

For a number of years Mr. Evans has made a most efficient Assistant Secretary.

All have discharged their duties with a devotion and ability worthy of the highest praise.

#### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS**

There is a well-equipped gymnasium, which was brought up to date in 1904, when a competent instructor (Mr. G. Bell) was appointed. During the last few years a Cricket Club, also a Lacrosse Club, has been formed. Matches are arranged on Saturdays against teams of hearing boys, and the deaf boys more than hold their own. For the winter evenings there is bagatelle. Other interesting games are also provided, and the Library supplies suitable books.

#### **OTHER BRANCHES OF EDUCATION**

Many of the boys are taught carpentering, bootmaking and gardening, while there are dressmaking and sewing classes for the girls, who also have experience of all kinds of domestic work.

#### **THE ADULT DEAF AND DUMB SOCIETY**

The institution only provides for the deaf children. The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society has done admirable work for deaf mutes who have passed school age. For many years funds were collected towards the cost of the Church and Social Hall for the Adult deaf in Flinders Street. Since the arrival of Mr. Abraham, his enthusiasm and ability have done wonders in securing the necessary funds for the farm at Blackburn. The members of the Board of Management rejoice in knowing that the Committee of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society and Mr. Abraham have found most hearty co-workers in former pupils of this institution. The Board further desires that there should be most cordial co-operation between themselves and the members of the adult Deaf and Dumb Society.

#### **JUBILEE GARDEN PARTY**

One of the most interesting functions held in the history of the institution was on April 22nd of the present year, when, at the invitation of the Board of Management, a large number of the old

scholars assembled to commemorate the jubilee. Addresses of welcome to the old scholars were given by Dr. Watkin and Mr. David Brown.

The prizes for 1910 were fitly distributed by Mr. F. J. Rose, the founder of the institution. The following presentations were made by the old scholars:- A cutler oak desk to the Head Master (Mr. W. D. Cook); a purse of sovereigns to Miss Jones, who had been sub-matron for over 30 years; and a framed historic group of photographs to the Board of Management. Afternoon tea was served in the hospital buildings. The weather was fine, and the arrangements reflected the highest credit upon the Superintendent and Matron (Mr. and Mrs. Adcock).

### **THE FUTURE**

For many years the Board of Management has brought under the notice of successive Governments the necessity for the compulsory education of the deaf. By the Amending Education Act of 1910, this has been made law, and it must lead to an increase in the number of pupils, further accommodation will therefore be needed.

With this in view, the present State Treasurer and Acting Premier (Mr. Watt), made the very practical suggestion at a late interview with members of the Board of Management, that the State Education Department should take over the cost of education, leaving the maintenance grant to be applied to that portion of the work of the institution that is not compulsory, but without which the application of compulsory education to the deaf and dumb would be manifestly impossible. The appeal for the deaf children is so very pathetic and powerful, that neither the Government, nor a public noted for its open-handed gifts towards worthy objects, will turn a deaf ear, when in the near future they are asked to contribute the sum required to increase the school and house accommodation, and to equip the Institution with all that is necessary to make the education of the deaf in Victoria equal to that given in the institutions in any other part of the Empire or in the United States.

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## **Part 2**

Written by Mr. Harry Powell, July, 1975, for the purpose of an Historical Lecture to the Institute of Special Education, Burwood

It was not until 1913 that the State Education Department "took over" the payment and training of the teachers. From reading the reports, it can be seen that the Department transferred all existing teachers on to the Departmental list, and in the Headmaster's Report for the year ended 30th June, 1913, Mr. W. D. Cook writes of the smooth change-over and mentions that the main alterations demanded by the District Inspector were for additional time to be "devoted to drill and physical exercises, and needlework has been included in the school curriculum". There were 94 pupils on the Roll at that date: "75 are under instruction on the oral, and 19 on the manual system".

From 1913 until 1927 the school class work continued to be carried out in the same area as had been used since 1866. In 1926 the Board of Management offered the Education Department some of the St. Kilda Road land for the construction of classrooms at the expense of the Department. This allowed the Board to use the whole of the bluestone building for residential purposes, although the Department still uses some of the areas in the old building for teaching purposes.

Since 1913 the following dates are notable:

1913 In 1913 the Education Department assumed responsibility for Education, leaving the Committee the responsibility for maintaining the home and caring for the general welfare of the deaf child.

1927 The building by the Education Department of the present schoolrooms.

1949 The alteration of the Corporate Name from Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution to the Victorian School for Deaf Children.

- 1950 The establishment in Elgar Road, Burwood, of the Princess Elizabeth Kindergarten for the Deaf, as the first residential and daily pre-school centre for deaf children in Australia.
- 1957 The W. D. Cook Pre-school Centre was opened, built by the Board of Management - the first pre-school unit in Australia for hereditary deaf children.
- 1958 The acceptance by the Education Department of the responsibility of staffing the Princess Elizabeth Kindergarten for the Deaf.
- 1960 The celebration of the Centenary of the commencement of deaf education in Victoria.
- 1962 The 100th. Annual Meeting was held.
- 1963 A new wing of 3 classrooms was added at the Kindergarten.
- 1963 and 1964 The modernisation of dormitory areas was completed.
- 1966 – 1967 Weekly bus services from Geelong and Gippsland were established.
- 1970 Policy Investigation Project carried out under the direction of Dr. Pierre Gorman.
- 1971 The “H. P. Green Wing” was built by the Education Department.
- 1973 New wing of classrooms opened at the Princess Elizabeth Kindergarten for the Deaf, Burwood. Provision of private home weekend care for Boarders.
- 1973-4 Introduction of Medical, Welfare and Guidance Services.
- 1974 Provision of private-home care for deaf State Wards.

In Dr. Watkin's history he refers briefly to the founders and “great names” of the first 50 years - Rose, Moss, Cook and Jones. The “great names” of the years 1910 - 1975 would have to include the following:

**W. D. Cook 1882 - 1927**

Mr. Delafield Cook's continuous service spanned 45 years. He was Headmaster from 1882 - 1927, and was a brilliant man of many talents.

**J. H. Burchett. M.B.E. - 1912 – 1950**

From a “student teacher” in 1912, Mr. Burchett was appointed Head Master in 1927 and retired in 1950.

**A. R. Cook - 1920 – 1966**

Mr. Rodin Cook was Mr. Delafield Cook's son and between them they gave 91 years of teaching service. On Mr. Burchett's retirement, Mr. Cook became Headmaster and he retired in 1966.

**H. P. Green - 1929 - 1970**

Mr. Green only served as Headmaster for 4 years as he retired shortly before his death, but he was always a dedicated teacher and a very faithful “lieutenant” to both Mr. Burchett and Mr. Cook.

**Mrs. Thelma Spicer. M.B.E. - 1934 - 1975**

Mrs. Spicer joined the Education Department staff when she was Miss Thelma Brook, as a junior teacher. Following her war service in the W.R.A.A.F. and a year's study at Central Institute for the Deaf, St. Louis, U.S.A., she was appointed by the Board of Management as the first Directress of the Princess Elizabeth Kindergarten for the Deaf when it opened in 1950, and was re-appointed to the Education Department as Principal when the Department agreed to “take-over” the financial responsibility of paying and training Pre-school teachers of deaf children in 1958.

**G.E. Hansford - 1943 - 1956**

Mr. Hansford was appointed Superintendent and Secretary just as the “school” was being transferred to Marysville for a short period during the war, while the St. Kilda Road building became R.A.A.F. Headquarters.

Mr. Hansford was the “founder” with Mr. Burchett, of the Burwood Kindergarten. At the same time he was responsible for the Board building three new wings onto the old bluestone building to cope with the record enrolment of those years and to modernise the resident childrens' living conditions.

### **Mr. John Adcock - 1903 - 1930**

Mr. Adcock was the first "Superintendent and Secretary" when the Board appointed him in 1903. He gave 27 years service in this position and the glowing tributes which were paid to him, both during his life-time and upon his death in 1930, show that he managed the administrative side of the "institution's" work successfully.

### **The Reynolds Family**

No history of the deaf people of Victoria could be written without mentioning the Reynolds Family. Mr. Cornelius Reynolds was a student at the "Institution" from 1877-1888 and he was on the staff from 1916 until his death in 1936.

His son, Mr. E. A. Reynolds, M.B.E., has been associated with the school all of his life. Before he became a member of staff of the Adult Deaf Society in the 1930's he gave honorary services to the school and continued to do so until his retirement from the Society in 1970. He was the Superintendent of the Adult Deaf Society for 28 years.

His son, Mr. Brian Reynolds, joined the Education Department staff at St. Kilda Road in 1951, and was appointed Headmaster of Ewing House, Ballarat in 1963. He returned to the School as Assistant Principal in 1968 and was appointed Principal in 1970.

### **Others**

Under the rather plain title of "others" we have to be careful that we do not offend anyone, but teachers who gave long and dedicated service to the children in their care include:

Mrs. Rose Jeffrey, Miss Ethel Saunders and Miss Gwen Reeves who all gave over 40 years continuously in the classrooms; Miss Eileen Standley and Miss Phyllis Barrett who both gave over 30 years. There are a number of teachers today who commenced at St. Kilda Road and who are now in other deaf schools and services, who have joined the "over-20-years" group.

No doubt some of the young teachers in training and service today will find their names recorded when the 150 years anniversary is reached in 2010!!

### **Board of Management**

This brief account of the 115 years service given to the deaf children of Victoria has referred rarely to the people who have given, and continue to give, quiet honorary service which entails many hours of sometimes daily attention to the administration of the physical, social, and spiritual wellbeing of deaf children.

Long years of service on the Board of Management are taken for granted, although Rabbi Jacob Danglow C.M.G., O.B.E., set the record with 45 years from 1912 - 1957.

Two of the present members are "third generation men", as Mr. Alan Watkin (1947 - 1975) is the grandson of Dr. Edwin Watkin (1884-1916) and the son of Mr. Stanley Watkin (1934-1954), who served as Hon. Treasurer and Vice-President for many years. Mr. Alan Watkin served as President from 1969-1973 and has been largely responsible for the recent introduction of our welfare and health services.

The other "third generation family" is the Lonies. Mr. A. M. Lonie joined the Board in 1934, his son Mr. Frank Lonie, M.B.E., served from 1940 until 1972, during which he was President from 1954 - 1969.

When he retired, his son, Mr. Ian Lonie was elected and continues to serve as the school's Honorary Solicitor as his father and grandfather did before him.

Our present President, Mr. Charles Hocking has had a close association with the School since his son, Richard, was enrolled as a pupil in 1948. He was an office-bearer of the Parents Association for many years before his appointment to the Board in 1958, when he also was appointed Hon. Treasurer. He was elected as President in 1973.

## **Conclusion**

One hundred and fifteen years of continuous service to deaf children must have had “low-points” as well as “high-points” if we were to consider the school's progress on a graph. It was the foresight of a small band of men and women in the late 1850's which led to the commencement of instruction and care for Victorian deaf children.

In these last few years the Board has endeavoured to continue to assist the Education Department and the parents of deaf children and, perhaps three matters stand out:

- (a) The formation of the Nelson and Brook Educational Trusts in 1972 which give deaf children the opportunity of additional education and scholarships which were not available to them in former years.
- (b) The formation in 1974 of the Deafness Foundation (Victoria) and the Australian Deafness Council, which both are a direct result of the Board's Policy Investigation Project headed by Dr. Pierre Gorman in 1970.
- (c) The visit to Australia in September, 1974, of Professor Armin Lowe of Heidelberg, West Germany, who gave several public lectures and visited schools in Victoria, New South Wales and Canberra. One of the major reasons the Board invited Professor Lowe to Melbourne was to give advice on the latest auditory training equipment for deaf children and his recommendations are now being implemented.

This paper has not pretended to be an “official history”, as the School's publication “Utmost for the Highest” written by Mr. Burchett and published in 1963 is the “Official History” of the first 100 years. The records of the school are remarkable as not only does it have every Annual Report, Minutes and complete Registers of every child from 1860 - 1975, but there are also the school books of the original pupil, Lucy Lewis.

In conclusion, tributes should be paid and appreciation expressed to the Commonwealth and State Governments for their co-operation in all of the various facets of the School's Administration and the Victorian public for the extreme generosity which has enabled the Board of Management to carry out its task.

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