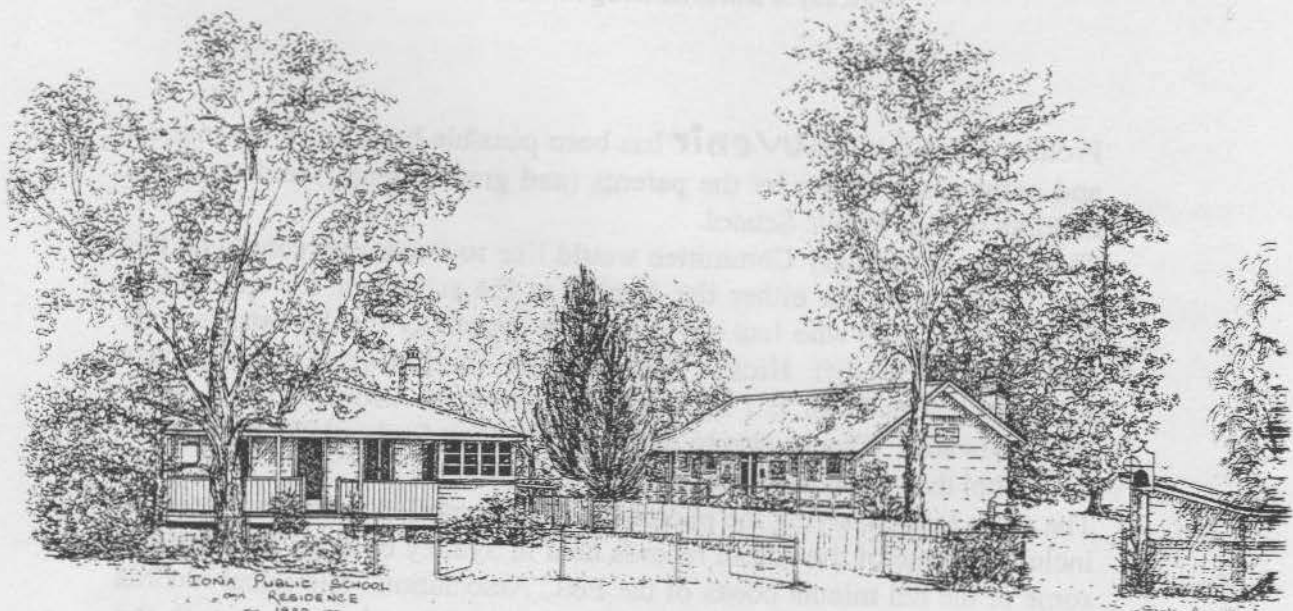


**Iona Public School**  
**Celebrating 150 years of**  
**education**  
**1850-2000**  
**Souvenir**



**Produced by the Iona School Sesqui-Centenary Committee**

## Iona Public School celebrates 150 years 1850-2000



Everybody has one!

First day at school for Doug Richards in 1955

Production of this **Souvenir** has been possible because of the interest and enthusiasm shown by the parents (and grandparents!) and staff and children of Iona Public School.

The Sesqui-Centenary Committee would like to thank everyone who has lent photographs for either the display at the school or for use in this **Souvenir**. Those who lent old photos are especially thanked and include Mrs Munday, Cliff Hicks, Fay Rumbel (including Arthur Cook's collection), Mrs & Mr E T Richards, Mrs & Mr B Alford and Mrs & Mr Merv Edwards. Thanks also to Sally Ann Bennett for her 1989 drawing of the school that embellishes the cover.

The story accompanying the photos has been compiled from many sources including some of the school records held in Sydney by State Records and some of the old minute books of the P&C Association. Historical records that are available about the school are numerous and together with the reminiscences of past students, would enable a much more detailed 'history' to be written and hopefully in the future this will be done.

The Committee has compiled this **Souvenir** in good faith and without intent to trouble anyone by omission, unintentional error, incorrect spelling of names or ambiguity in the interpretation of events.

We hope that the Sesqui-Centenary will be long remembered by present day pupils and that former pupils will find pleasure in revisiting the school and recalling old time and old friendships.

*Desilee Richards, Cynthia Hunter, Sandra King  
and the staff of Iona Public School*

## **1850 - Iona Public School celebrates 150 years - 2000**

This year, the children and their families and the teaching staff of Iona Public School celebrate 150 years of providing public education in the Iona-Woodville area.

Iona Public School grounds are part of one of the first farms in the Hunter Valley worked by European settlers. These farms have been occupied for about 188 years. Nowhere else in the Hunter Valley, except about the convict outpost at Newcastle, can the endeavour of a locality claim such a long history.

The area where a few people were permitted to settle was called Paterson's Plains, a place of fertile land on either side of the Paterson River, which was named in honour of Colonel William Paterson. William Paterson led an expedition to survey the rivers of the Lower Hunter and the country thereabout, in 1801. The explorers found forests of valuable timber growing near the rivers.

From that time, a settlement of convicts at Newcastle provided labour to cut down the cedar and other trees, which were used for housing in Sydney and elsewhere.

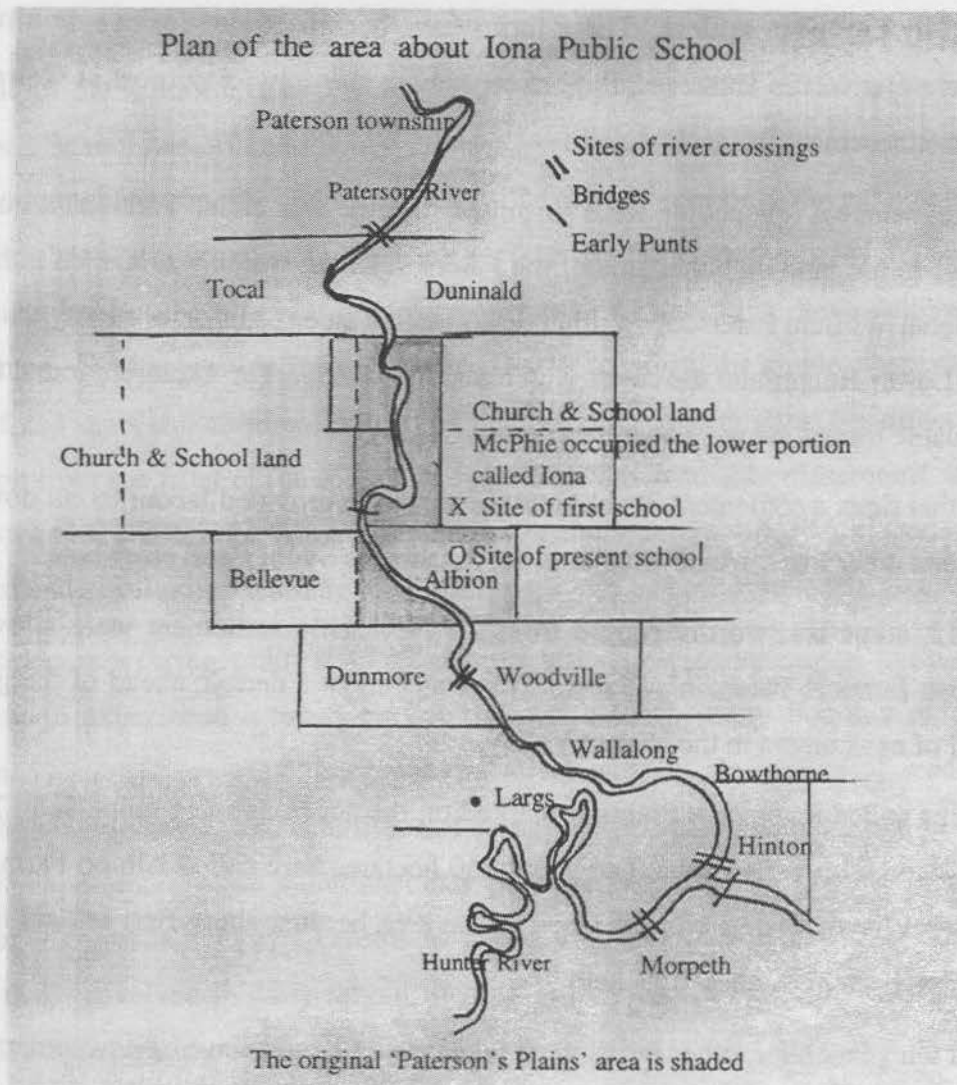
In 1812, some trustworthy people from the Newcastle settlement were allowed to establish farms at Paterson's Plains. This was almost a decade ahead of the general arrival of newcomers in the Hunter Valley.

The area called Paterson's Plains is marked on the accompanying map. John Tucker and his son, also called John, had about 250 hectares here called Albion Farm. This land must have been equal to the best in the area because these first settlers had the first choice and they chose this land.

About ten years later, other farms were taken up by a new wave of newcomers and a large farm of about 950 hectares in three parts was allotted to an Englishman John Galt Smith and his wife Elizabeth Walsh. One part was called Woodville and this is also marked on the Map. After the deaths of John and Elizabeth, Woodville and its homestead passed to the Roberts and Croaker family.

In the late 1820s, another large area of land extending on both sides of the river was set aside to be managed by the Church and School Corporation, which was set up for the benefit of the Church of England. It was intended at the time that the Church would derive an income from land granted to the Corporation to be used to fund schools and religion in New South Wales. Within a few years this was repealed

because it was unfair to other religions. However, the land set aside in the early years has continued to be called 'Church and School land' even though it was first leased and later sold to other people. The 'Church and School' land in the vicinity of Iona School is also marked on the Map.



By the 1850s, much change had occurred about Paterson's Plains. A wealthy retired soldier named Benjamin Lee bought some of the very early farms adjoining Albion Farm. Here, in the 1880s, one of his sons, John, a Maitland businessman, built a new large mansion with a tower called Leeholme to replace an earlier and simpler cottage.

A little further up the Paterson River, other early farms had new owners. Above Leeholme was a farmhouse called Carlton Cottage, now enlarged and known as Tressingfield. Families associated with farms here were those of Thomas Carter, and

John Pearce who also owned part of Albion Farm. Further up the river was Stradbroke, the home and farm of the Arnold family. These landowners were relatively wealthy people and they provided a livelihood for many farming families who worked for them as tenants.

The Church and School land was leased in two parts, the northern part to a retired mariner Captain J H Dunn and the lower part to a Scottish farmer John McPhie. John McPhie named his farm Iona, after the mystic island of Iona on the western coast of Scotland.



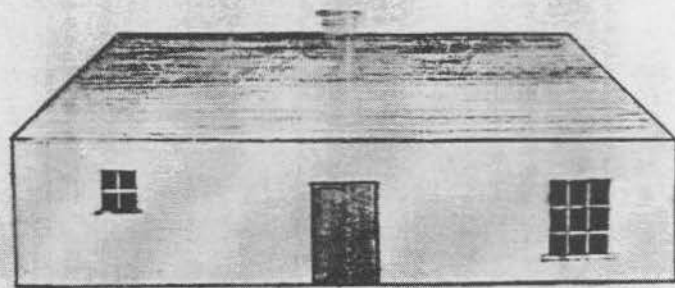
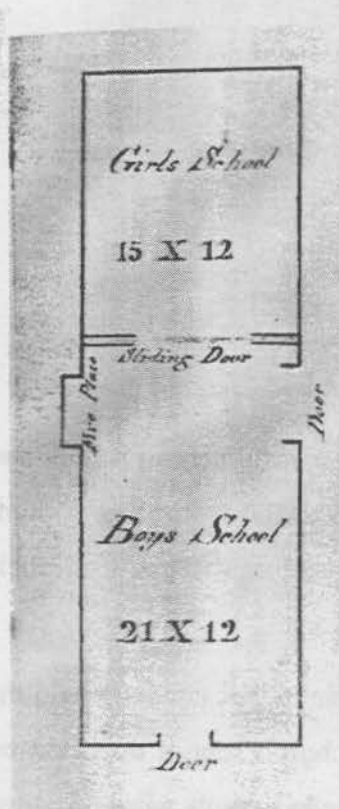
### *Teaching the children*

Prior to European arrival, Paterson's Plains must have been a vast open-air school and play ground for countless generations of Aboriginal children who learnt how to hunt and fish, recognise fruit and food plants and acquire skills and knowledge from their elders. Unfortunately, little detail is known of this long history.

In the modern era, as early as 1845 a Church of England school was conducted on the Woodville estate and prior to 1850, another private or church school operated on Albion Farm where Donald Ferguson was the teacher. These schools were provided for the children of the many farming families working on estates in the district.

The south-west corner of the land leased by John McPhie became the site of the first public or 'national' school in the Woodville district, which opened in late 1850 with about 50 pupils. This is the event celebrated in 2000. The site was on the old line of road between the river crossing at Woodville, and Paterson. John McPhie and the government would have permitted the site to be used this way and the parents of the district would have united to build the schoolhouse.

Several public schools opened in the Hunter Valley following the setting up of a public education system in 1848. The earliest ones were at Largs, Hinton, Murrurundi, Glen William, Clarence Town, Tomago and Hexham (in 1849), Merriwa and Woodville (in 1850), and others followed. Usually these schools had been operating previously under the guidance of various churches other than the Church of England. In the neighbourhood of Woodville were many well-educated and liberal minded settlers who saw the advantage of public education, such as Andrew Lang of Dunmore, (brother of John Dunmore Lang), Henry Carmichael of Seaham, Thomas Holmes of Clarence Town, and others. These men encouraged district communities to establish public schools.



WOODVILLE NATIONAL SCHOOL, 1850

The Woodville Public School closed in 1851 and reopened in 1853 as Iona Public School, the new name taken from Mr McPhie's estate on which the school stood. This name change distinguished the school from another 'Woodville', in the County of Clarendon in southern New South Wales. Iona School continued here until December 1872. It is not known why the school closed. Perhaps no teacher was available.

A plan of the school building, above, appears in a book 'Sydney and the Bush: A Pictorial History of Education in New South Wales.' Other records say that a teacher's residence was attached to the school. The teachers who taught at this school were Messrs Flower, McFarlane, O'Brien, Burke, McLeod, Johnstone, McCormick and Henry.

A calamitous flood devastated the Lower Hunter Valley in 1857 and undoubtedly affected all the families of the children. However, the 1860s was a more favourable era and the local member of parliament Mr Arnold of Stradbroke was influential in getting built the first bridge across the Paterson River linking the estates of Dunmore and Woodville, which opened to traffic in 1863 and replaced a punt or ferry service.

Mrs John Roberts, owner of Woodville, donated some land at the junction of the roads to Paterson township and William River as a site for a Church of England church and a new church schoolhouse. Her brother Mr Charles Croaker helped get All Saints Church built and opened in 1864. Mr Munday came to teach at the church school about 1869 or 1870, replacing Mr Hare. Mr Munday was soon highly regarded by the people of the district.

While the workmen were building the church, they also built the Woodville Store, which was leased, to a storekeeper. Recalling that a lot of vessels passed up and down the river and horse and bullock teams continually used the tracks between the settlements, it is easy to realise that the 1860s was the start of a period of growth and expansion for Woodville and district.

In the 1860s, Albion Farm was subdivided and some portions sold to several settlers. The government decided to subdivide into smaller farms and sell the Church and School land leased by John McPhie and Captain Dunn.

They instructed the surveyor to mark off a small allotment, No 15, of two hectares, where the first Iona Public School stood. However, about this time the school closed.

In 1870, some of the local people formed the Woodville Mutual Improvement Society. These societies were forerunners of 'Schools of Arts'. Men of the district met together for their betterment and usually invited speakers to address them on a number of topical or educational issues. The Woodville Mutual Improvement Society met regularly in the Church of England schoolhouse until September 1876 when the Bishop withdrew the privilege because ministers of other religions (who belonged to the Society) had addressed the members in the building. Tensions between religious groups were at times high in the 19<sup>th</sup> century! The Woodville Mutual Improvement Society then looked about for another meeting venue and eventually John Pearce, the President, provided a site for a building of their own on that part of the Albion Farm estate that he had purchased and which fronted the Paterson Road. The site was on

land least affected by periodic flooding although not completely free of inundation in the worst instances. The new hall opened as a 'School of Arts', without sectarianism, and continued providing practical education and social activity for the adult members of the rural community.

The building was a weatherboard hall and porch built on piles about a metre above the ground and enclosed by a fence. It stood out as quite different in appearance from the surrounding farmhouses and together with the nearby schoolhouse, and the 'Red House' – the Albion Farm homestead that some records say was previously used as an Inn - formed a small cultural precinct amid the many farms.

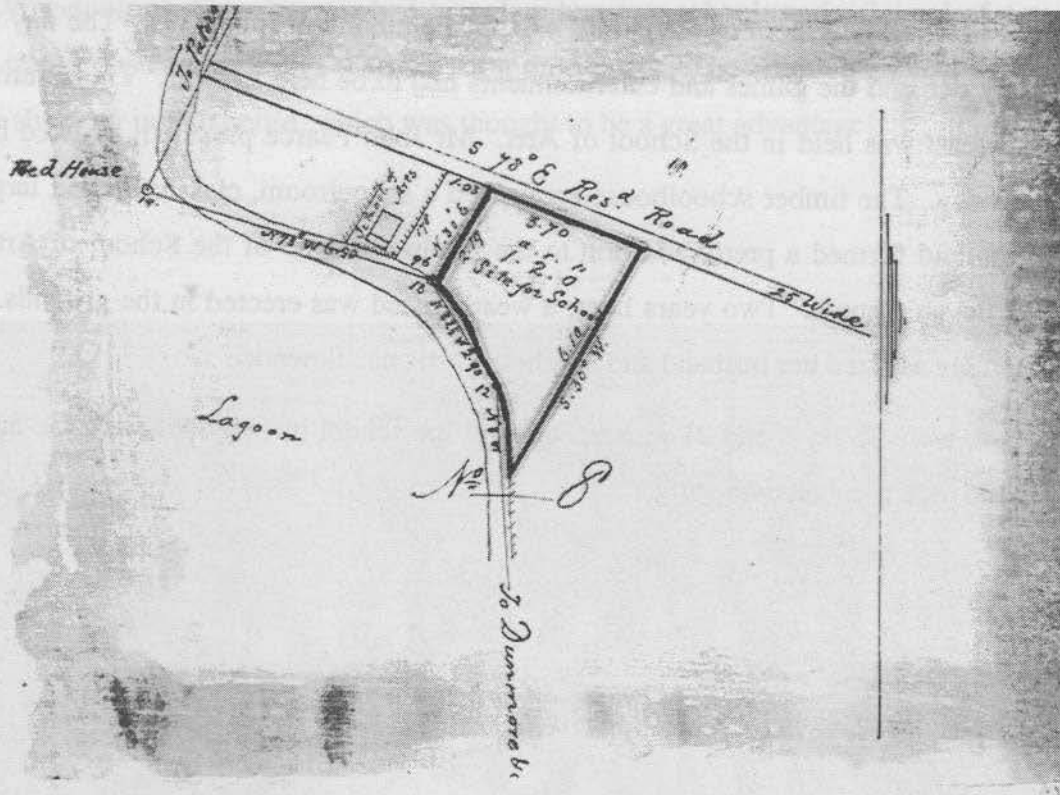
Meanwhile plans were afoot to reopen the Iona Public School. Farming families with children of school age lived and worked on the estates of Iona, Tressingfield, Stradbroke, Poole Farm, Albion Farm, Clifden, Woodville, Bellevue and Balclutha. The Pearce family owned several of these estates and John Pearce and the other proprietors led the effort to reopen the school. Mr Munday, the teacher at the Church of England School since 1869, was recommended as teacher for the reopened public school and accepted.

The need for a new site arose. No land was available near the Church of England Church. Again John Pearce agreed to provide some land. He offered the choice of three sites. One was west of the School of Arts, on the corner near the Red House, another was on the east of Mr Pomfrett's, and the third one was further east towards Woodville. The line of road was then different to what it is today and passed closer to the Red House before making a turn to the north.

Interestingly, Mr Pomfrett's building was already on land adjoining the School of Arts. Mr Pomfrett was a shoemaker and Mrs Pomfrett a candlemaker and they conducted business from their premises. Mr Pomfrett was also a handyman who undertook jobs for the School of Arts.

The site chosen for the new school building adjoined Mr Pomfrett's place on the east and plans were forthcoming for a new schoolroom and new teacher's residence. Meanwhile, the School of Arts was leased for a year so that the public school could begin classes in November 1877 when seventy children enrolled.

The old site was put up for sale in 1879. Thomas Carter bought it for £106. This money went part of the way towards paying for the new buildings.



This diagram shows the site chosen in 1877 for the new school. The old line of road passed close to the Red House (near where Albion Farmhouse is today). This line of road has been straightened quite a bit compared with its winding in 1877.

School fees in 1878 were sixpence a week for one child, five pence each per week for two children, four pence each for three children and three pence each for any additional children. It is hard to relate these fees to present day living costs. Working families in distressed circumstances often withdrew children from school on account of the cost.

The year 1878 also saw the building of a small weatherboard Wesleyan Church adjoining the School of Arts on land also donated by John Pearce although he was not a member of that religious group. Two hundred and fifty people attended the opening of this church. The local community appear to have been principally Anglicans and Wesleyans.

The new public school opened amid a happy ceremony in June 1879. The day was a rainy one and the games and entertainments had to be held indoors. The ceremonies and feast was held in the School of Arts. Mr John Pearce presided, assisted by Mr Munday. The timber schoolhouse comprised a schoolroom, classroom and large hat room and formed a pretty addition to the group made up of the School of Arts and Wesleyan Church. Two years later, a weathershed was erected in the grounds. Mrs Munday assisted her husband and taught the girls needlework.

There were 35 boys and 21 girls enrolled at the school in 1879 although the average attendance was just over forty.



The old school Iona Public School 1883. Behind the school, part of the teacher's residence can be seen. On the right are the teacher Mr Munday and Mrs Munday.

The Woodville community now had two churches, two schools and a School of Arts. The two groups of buildings were about a mile apart. The community had neither wine shop nor public house, which was thought to be a great advantage!



Iona School pupils about 1888. Mr Munday, left. Mrs Munday, right.  
Photo by courtesy of Fay Rumbel of Paterson

In the 1890s, more land was wanted for an enlarged playground. Part of Albion Farm had been sold to John Scharkie who, in 1891, offered two acres to the government for £70. A plan of the school grounds and the land offered for sale is on the following page.

The great flood of March 1893 was a terrible calamity for the district with countless happy and prosperous homes ruined in a seething sea of water, all crops destroyed and livestock swept away. Roads, and the approaches to the bridge, were greatly damaged. Of the many floods that troubled the district, this one was the worst so far.

The water at its height was a considerable depth in All Saints Church and also about 0.6 metre in the public school and teacher's residence; while the Iona Apiary, the pride and delight of Mr Munday, was a terrible wreck. Bee boxes, honeycombs,

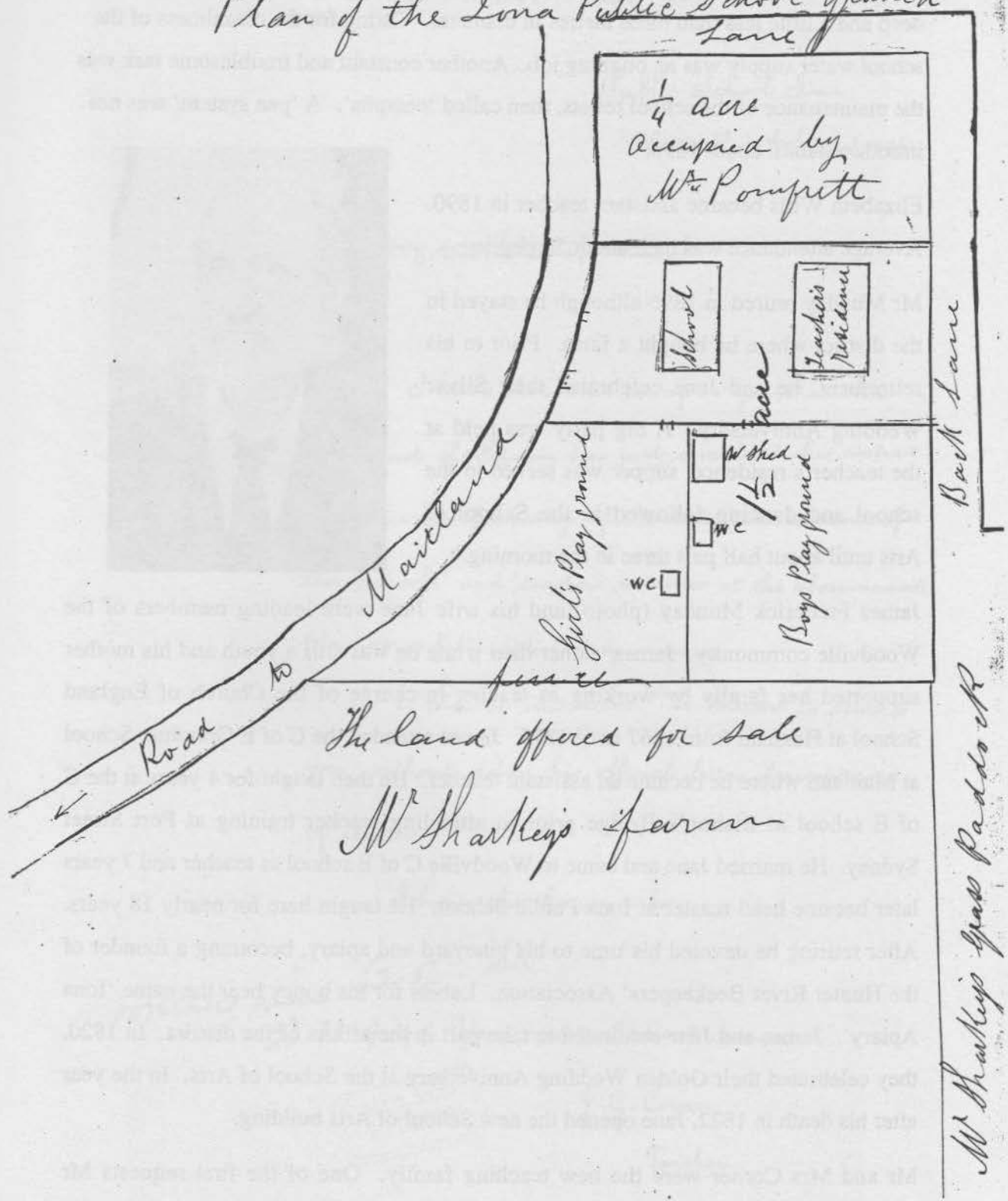
brood bees and frames floated about in the direst confusion. Out of 150 colonies of purebred Italian bees he only succeeded in saving about twenty. The loss was a heavy one to Mr Munday as he spared neither time nor pains to make his apiary one of the best in the district.



Two photos of Mr Munday's famous apiary, about 1890s.

Top: The rear of Mr Pomfrett's house is on the far left. Next is the lane and then the rear of the School of Arts. To the right of the School of Arts is the Methodist Chapel. The building with verandah on the right is probably the Manse where later, Les Darcy was born.  
Bottom: Another view of the apiary. The house in the centre is the school residence and the school is behind this. The building on the right is probably Mr Pomfrett's house.

Plan of the Lona Public School Grounds

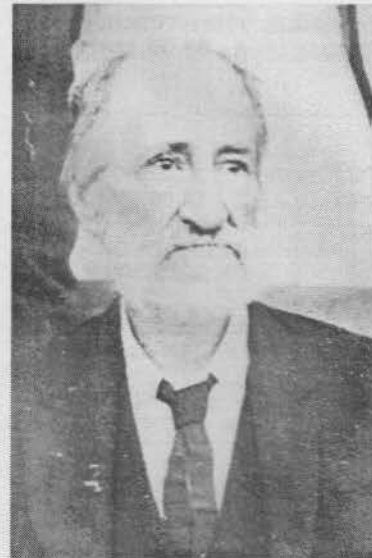


Plan of the school grounds and the area that enlarged the playground

The school grounds contained a large underground tank. The well was three metres deep and a little less than three metres in diameter. Caring for the cleanliness of the school water supply was an ongoing job. Another constant and troublesome task was the maintenance of the school toilets, then called 'cesspits'. A 'pan system' was not introduced until about 1896.

Elizabeth Wills became assistant teacher in 1890. Average attendance was then about 50 pupils.

Mr Munday retired in 1895 although he stayed in the district where he bought a farm. Prior to his retirement, he and Jane celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary. A big party was held at the teacher's residence, supper was served in the school and dancing followed in the School of Arts until about half past three in the morning.



James Frederick Munday (photo) and his wife Jane were leading members of the Woodville community. James' father died while he was still a youth and his mother supported her family by working as teacher-in-charge of the Church of England School at Hexham from 1867 until 1875. James attended the C of E Grammar School at Maitland where he became an assistant teacher. He then taught for 4 years at the C of E school at Bishop's Bridge prior to attending teacher training at Fort Street Sydney. He married Jane and came to Woodville C of E school as teacher and 7 years later became head master at Iona Public School. He taught here for nearly 18 years. After retiring he devoted his time to his vineyard and apiary, becoming a founder of the Hunter River Beekeepers' Association. Labels for his honey bear the name 'Iona Apiary'. James and Jane continued to take part in the affairs of the district. In 1820, they celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at the School of Arts. In the year after his death in 1822, Jane opened the new School of Arts building.

Mr and Mrs Corner were the new teaching family. One of the first requests Mr Corner made of the Education Department was for a new stove for the kitchen at the residence. He was able to get a modern stove for £5. Mr and Mrs Corner stayed until 1901. A copy of a letter written by Mr Corner is included so that today's pupils can appreciate his fine handwriting style.

Mr Corner's handwriting, 1896

Public School, Iona,

Woodville, 7<sup>th</sup> Septem<sup>r</sup>, 1896.

Reporting completion of contract

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that Mr. J. Stuart of Hinton has just completed his contract to repair the fastenings of the doors and windows of the school. and teacher's residence at the above-named place in a fully satisfactory manner.

I have instructed Mr. Stuart to send to you without delay his official letter of acceptance of tender.

I have the honor to be,

Yours most obedient servant,  
vouchers passed £2.57  
22. 23-9-96



J. G. Corner,  
Teacher.

F. Dwyer Esq.,  
District Inspector of Schools,  
East Maitland.



Iona School pupils in 1900. Mr Corner was teacher at the time this photo was taken  
 Note the hand pump on the well, lower right corner.  
 Photo, from the collection of Arthur Cook and provided by courtesy of Fay Rumbel.

In 1897, the Woodville School of Arts was the centre of much community activity. James Munday gave a lecture. The Temperance Society and Woodville Progress Association meet there regularly. Members borrowed regularly from the 550 library books. The hall was painted and repaired and new scenery made for the stage.

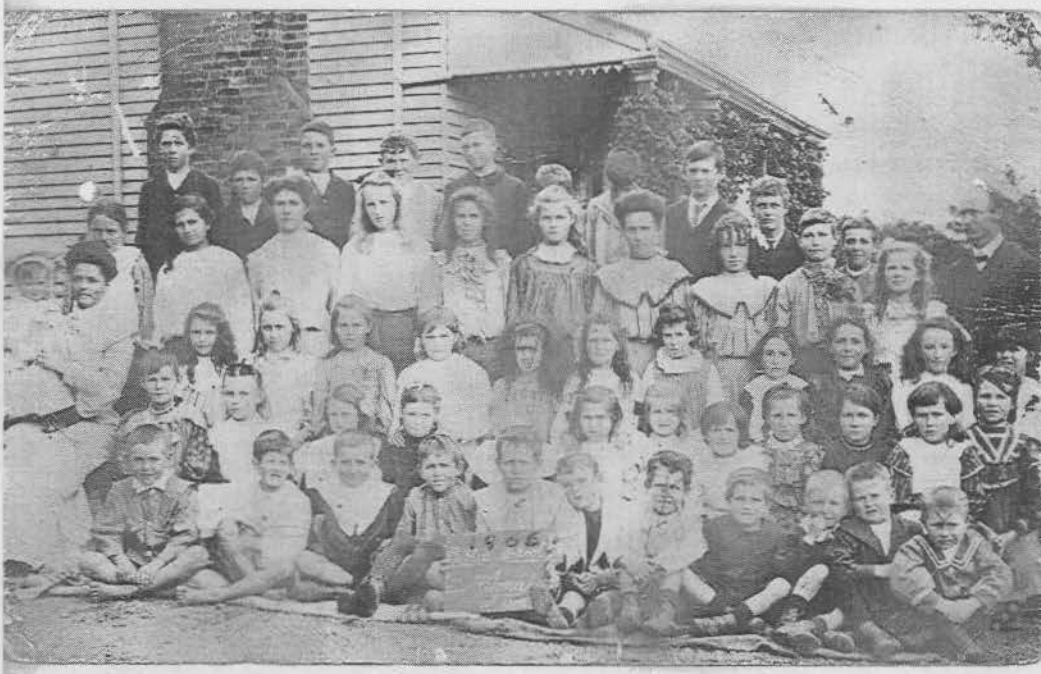
Mr John Gillespie was the teacher from 1901 to 1904, followed by F J Bridge. Elsie Lyne was assistant teacher from 1907.



Iona School pupils in 1905. The male teacher is Mr Bridge.  
 Photo by courtesy of Fay Rumbel of Paterson.

1907 was a difficult year for the Woodville and Iona school community. Infectious diseases swept through the district. In the winter months, 30 pupils were ill with whooping cough. In the spring, about 40 were ill with influenza. In the summer about 50 were incapacitated with measles. As the attendance at the best of times was about 50, this represented a great disturbance to teaching and much reduced attendances.

In 1909, Mr W B Hughes moved into the residence as Iona's new teacher and he requested a new stove for the kitchen! Mrs Hughes served as sewing mistress. Boys learnt crafts and woodwork while the girls learnt to sew. Cleaning the school was a problem as the Department allowed only one shilling a week to pay a cleaner and no one would do the work for so little money. Mr and Mrs Hughes had to do it themselves until a better arrangement could be worked out.



Iona School pupils in 1906. The male teacher is Mr Bridge.  
Photo by courtesy of Fay Rumbel of Paterson.

When Mrs Hughes had a baby in 1913, the sewing classes had to be postponed for a few months. That year, pupil numbers were increasing and Mr Hughes applied for a junior assistant. Miss A G Hopkins was appointed to this position.

Every year, on 'Empire Day', 23 May, the school held a picnic. The owner of Leeholme occasionally invited the school to hold their annual picnic in the grounds.



'Leeholme', John Lee's grand residence, was built in 1884  
Photo by courtesy of Mrs Munday



Iona School picnic at Leeholme, 1905.  
Photo by courtesy of Fay Rumbel.



Regrettably, Leecholme was demolished in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.  
Photo by courtesy of Mrs Munday.



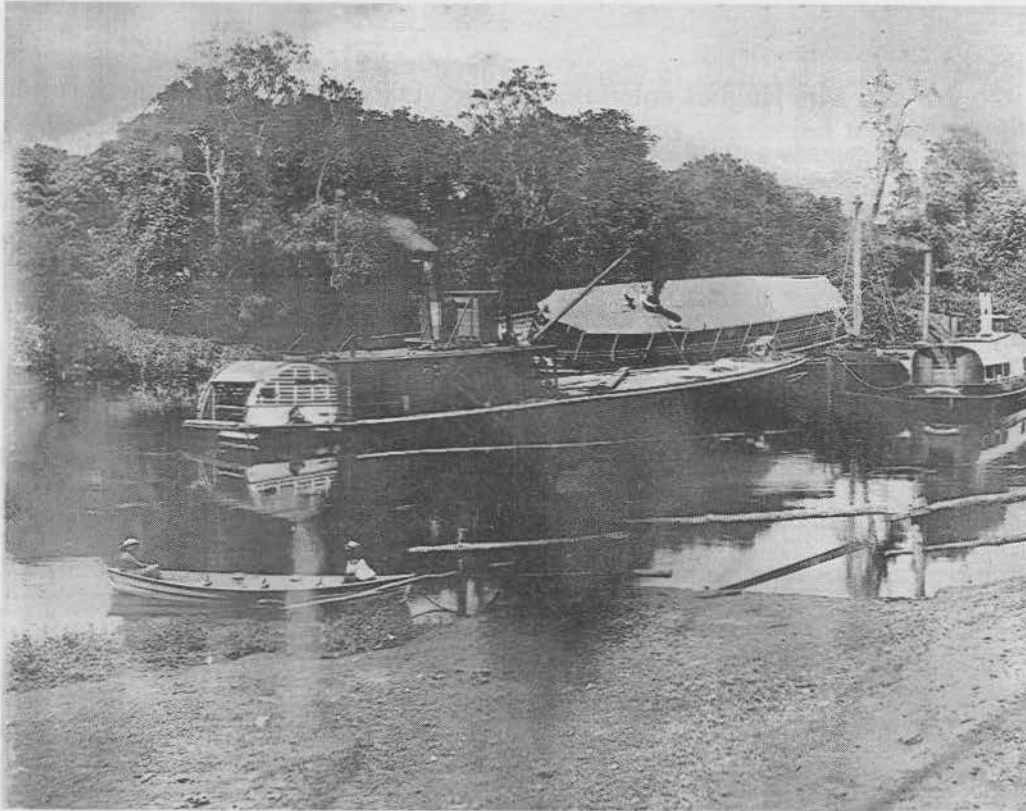
Iona School pupils provided this exhibition of rural produce at the Maitland Show in 1908.

Pupils and teachers at Iona School regularly experienced the tribulation and discomfort of floods, their buildings awash in an Inland Sea and their playgrounds ruined by mud and debris. But few children living so far from the coast could experience their very own shipwreck! Apparently, in 1918, SS GUTHRIE one of the river boats, hit a submerged rock and nearly tipped over and onto the bank. Imagine how the Iona School children would have flocked to the river just upstream from the bridge to see the extraordinary sight of the SS GUTHRIE stranded on the bank. And they would also have preferred to watch the efforts of salvage than attend school lessons, until all the excitement had passed.



SS GUTHRIE stranded on Nolan Rock, Woodville, 1918.

An interlude in this narrative about Iona School can serve to remind the reader of the continued importance of the Paterson River to the community that lived in proximity to its course. Delivery of goods and freight was dependent on river traffic until the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One vessel that had a long and endearing association with the Paterson River was the PS ANNA MARIA. This stern paddle wheel drogher was built in the early 1860s and from 1863 to the 1930s, was a regular working vessel on the Hunter rivers, especially the Paterson. Loads of cargo was carried on the deck. Most farmers had their own rowing boat and used the river for business and transport as well as recreation. A number of children would have been brought to school by boat.



Another photo of SS GUTHRIE stranded on the bank at Woodville. This photo shows the PS ANNA MARIA (the stern paddle wheeler) and at least one other river steamer helping free SS GUTHRIE from the bank. Also at the wreck site is a sleek oared boat carrying a couple of onlookers.

All the children who attended Iona Public School until the 1930s would have been familiar with, and possibly even had travelled on the PS ANNA MARIA shown in the next photo approaching the Woodville Bridge.



This photo of PS ANNA MARIA was taken about 1915.

In 1920, Mr and Mrs Hughes entertained some visitors at the Iona School residence and shortly afterwards a child of the visitors became ill with diphtheria. This caused great disturbance to teaching as Mr and Mrs Hughes and family had to be isolated from everyone for several weeks until the threat of the infection passed.

A new junior teacher, Mrs Niland, began at Iona School in 1923.

Major changes occurred in the vicinity of the school in the early 1900s. A new house replaced the old Albion Farm homestead. About 1920, the School of Arts committee bought some of Mr Pomfrett's land and some of the land belonging to the Methodist Church, which was later demolished. Paterson Road underwent realignment and an exchange of land was made between the School of Arts committee and the Port Stephens Council. In 1923, the old School of Arts was replaced with a new and larger building. Mrs Jane Munday performed the opening ceremony.. The grounds were later beautified with a planting of Cape Chestnut trees, electricity was connected in 1931 and later a porch was added to the side of the Hall.



Iona School pupils in 1929. Photo by courtesy of Cliff Hicks who has identified the children.

Back row: Bill Alford, Paul Wade, Colin Peattie, Cecil Hicks, Jack Robinson

2nd row: Lettie Lanham, Marge Graham, Doris Tacon, Alma Beggs, Jean Taylor, Nellie Watley, Hilton Hicks

3rd row: Colin Knox, Daphne Warby, (unknown), Della Warley, Mary Harden, Eva Lanham, Annie Franklin, Willie Lanham, Cliff Hicks, Ralph Crittenden, Keith Knox

Front row: Heather Knox, Joyce Hicks, Janet Taylor, Cyril Tacon, Bob Harden, Len Smart, two Rumbel boys.

When William Baldwin replaced the Hughes family in 1929, the residence underwent considerable repairs and in 1931, electric light was connected to the school and residence also. Mr and Mrs Baldwin formed a dramatic society and assisted the community to stage entertainments that included participation by the children as well as the adults. The School of Arts was ideally situated for many school and community activities.

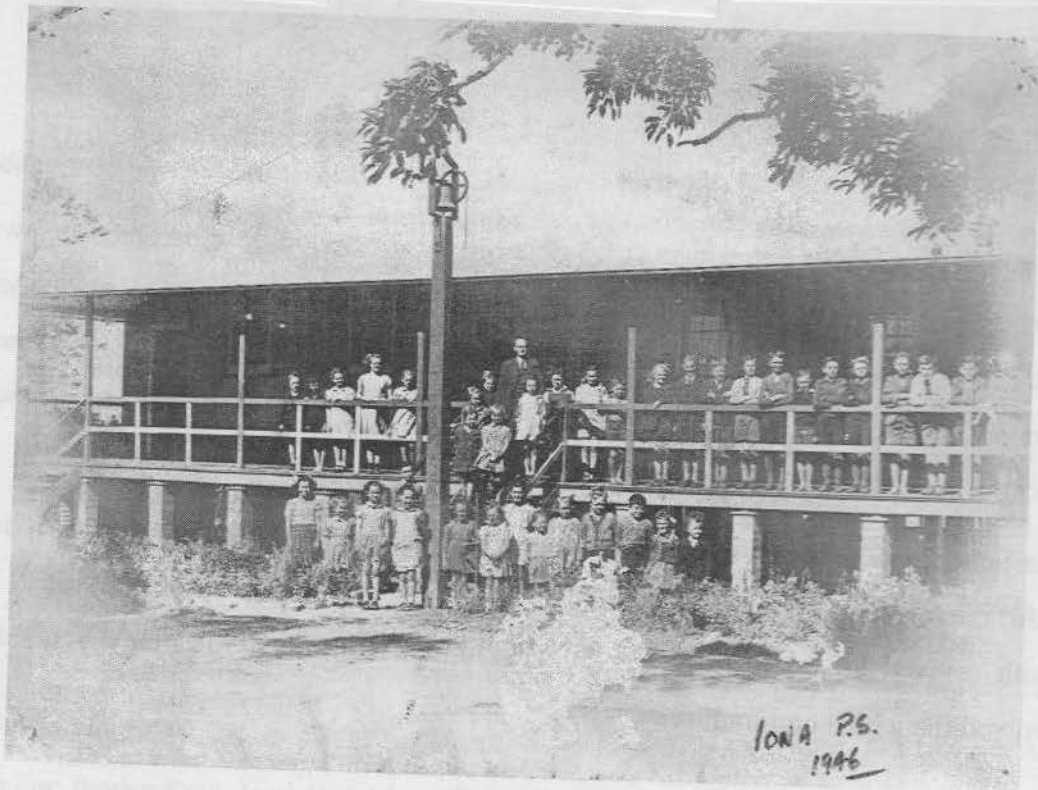
In 1933, Ernest Jones replaced William Baldwin. Mrs Jones was sewing mistress with regular time out from these duties to have several babies.



Iona School children in 1935. Ernest Jones, teacher. Photo by courtesy of Fay Rumbel.

In 1946, while Ernest Jones was still in charge, a new school (the present one) was built not far from the old one, which was demolished in 1948. The old residence was replaced by a newer building brought from the Gosford district. Mr W A Dawes succeeded Mr Jones, and he in turn was followed by Mr H S Smith, who was succeeded by Mr L V Gorton.

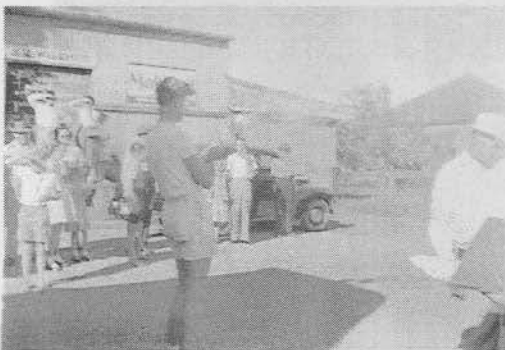
Iona School teachers and their wives have a long history of working with the School of Arts, involving the children as well as older people in a variety of activities. Mr Smith revived an enthusiasm for dancing, which continued for many years and involved the whole community.



The new school, opened in 1946. Ernest Jones, Teacher.

A Parents and Citizens Association was active in the 1940s and the records of the meetings of this organisation that have survived since the devastating 1955 flood, which destroyed so much memorabilia, provides details of some of the school's milestones since that time.

In 1956, Mr Smith was head master and the enrolment about 35 pupils and declining. However, one highlight of the year was the passage through Woodville of the Olympic Torch on its way to the Melbourne Games. These photos suggest that the event was fairly 'low-key'.



The Olympic Torch passes through Woodville on the way to the Melbourne Olympic Games 1956

In the post World War Two years, motor transport began to replace horse drawn vehicles and river craft of earlier days. Motor buses could take children to more remote destinations for Picnic Days or Empire Day Celebrations. The P&C members helped arrange these events. Arthur Cook was Secretary for about 14 years and several of the photos used in this Souvenir are from his collection. In 1956, the Iona children enjoyed an Empire Day bus picnic to Bar Beach. Other school events were a juvenile debutant ball, a concert and sports day. The 'Christmas Tree' is a long

tradition and this major event is held every year. The P&C raised funds for a 'phonograph' for the school and a new sewing machine by holding socials and dancing. Cliff Hicks who was P&C President for about 15 years, provided the music.

The Woodville and Iona communities, including the school, were anxious to get a water supply and petitioned the Hunter District Water Board for this service.

Mr Smith moved to Vacy School after nearly six years at Iona and Mr and Mrs Gorton came to live in the school residence in 1959. The school was connected to the telephone and the number was 'Largs 285'. A monthly 'Tuck Shop' was started by the mothers and parents helped in a beautification plan for the front of the school. The edges of the road between the Woodville shop and Leeholme were generally overgrown with weeds and made the walk to school unpleasant and hazardous for the many children who came that way. The Port Stephens Council was often asked to control the growth.



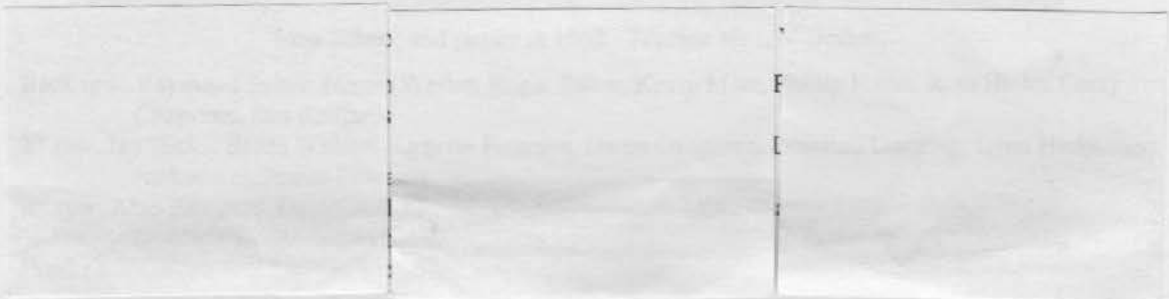
Blank area for a caption, possibly containing names of the children and the teacher.

Mr Gorton worked during his first year at Iona at compiling a history book about the district, which was a commendable and valuable initiative. Australian history was not promoted at this time, especially the history of localities and very few books were available. When the book was finished, copies were made on the school's duplicating machine and they sold for seven shillings and six pence. They could be bought at Miss Wilcher's shop.



In 1960, Iona school children had the annual picnic at Hinton Park, together with the children of other small district schools including Seaham, Largs, Hinton, Rosebrook, Beresfield and Mount Kanwary.

Tuck Shops were increased to fortnightly, the school and residence were painted and a 'radiogram' was purchased for the school. A few years later, the P&C provided a 'tape recorder' and the teacher and pupils enjoyed using this up-to-date technology.



For Empire Day in 1966, the children took a bus trip to the Oak Factory at Hexham and the Masonite Factory at Raymond Terrace. The parents began to agitate for a 35 miles per hour (just under 60 kms per hour) speed limit along the road in front of the school. This indicates that more people were then using motor vehicles, which they drove at a high speed.

Floods in the 1960s caused problems, as they usually do, but one big advance at this time was the installation of a 'septic toilet block', which would have been a great improvement on the old pan system.

Mr Gorton retired at the end of 1969 after 12 years at Iona and Mr Dingle took his place. In 1970, 'Empire Day' was renamed 'Commonwealth Day' and the children enjoyed a trip to Clarence Town and a tour of that district conducted by their former teacher Mr Gorton, who came from that locality. The following year the children visited Dungog and inspected the Knitting Factory and Historical Museum, then travelled to Chichester Dam.

School uniforms were decided upon in 1970 and the clothes chosen were a navy tunic and cardigan with a white blouse for the girls and a grey shirt and shorts for the boys. Iona School entered a float in the Captain Cook Bicentenary celebrations held at Raymond Terrace and won a prize.

Floods in 1970 and 1971 caused great damage to Woodville farms, the environment and the school and grounds. The parents had a big clean up effort to get the school and grounds right again. Mothers held cake stalls in Maitland to raise funds with which they bought a stereo record player for the school, and an overhead projector. The Education Department provided ceiling fans for the classrooms. The children began regular outings to the district schools carnival, often held at Gresford.



Iona School in 1973. Photo taken in the playground at rear of school.

Mr Godwin was head teacher in 1975 followed by Mr John Walker, who wanted to establish a vegetable garden at the school. Although a sewing teacher Mrs Peterson was available to teach the girls, there were too few girls to hold the classes.

The school uniforms were changed in 1975. Boys now wore a blue shirt and grey pants and socks and girls a blue checked dress with white socks. In winter, both boys and girls could wear a blue shirt and navy 'slacks'.

The school's ping pong table floated away in a flood in 1976.

In 1977, there were 29 children at Iona School. As the number was more than 26, a second teacher, Mrs Ann Clarke, was appointed until 1981. However, Iona Public School was losing pupils to other district schools because of transport difficulties. No service enabled children to access Iona School by bus and children living at a distance where there was a bus service, preferred to catch the bus to another school rather than walk to Iona, or be brought by private means. Parents campaigned for a bus service so that student numbers could be maintained but the appeal was not successful.

The P&C bought a new 'duplicator' and the Department provided new school furniture. Another flood covered the school grounds and the newly established gardens. Mrs Redman from Albion Farm, who had given a number of trees to the school, then had to see that the garden was replanted and restored. The President of the P&C Brian Alford, and others, also worked hard getting the school gardens in good order. The children started using the Tocal swimming pool for swimming lessons about this time.

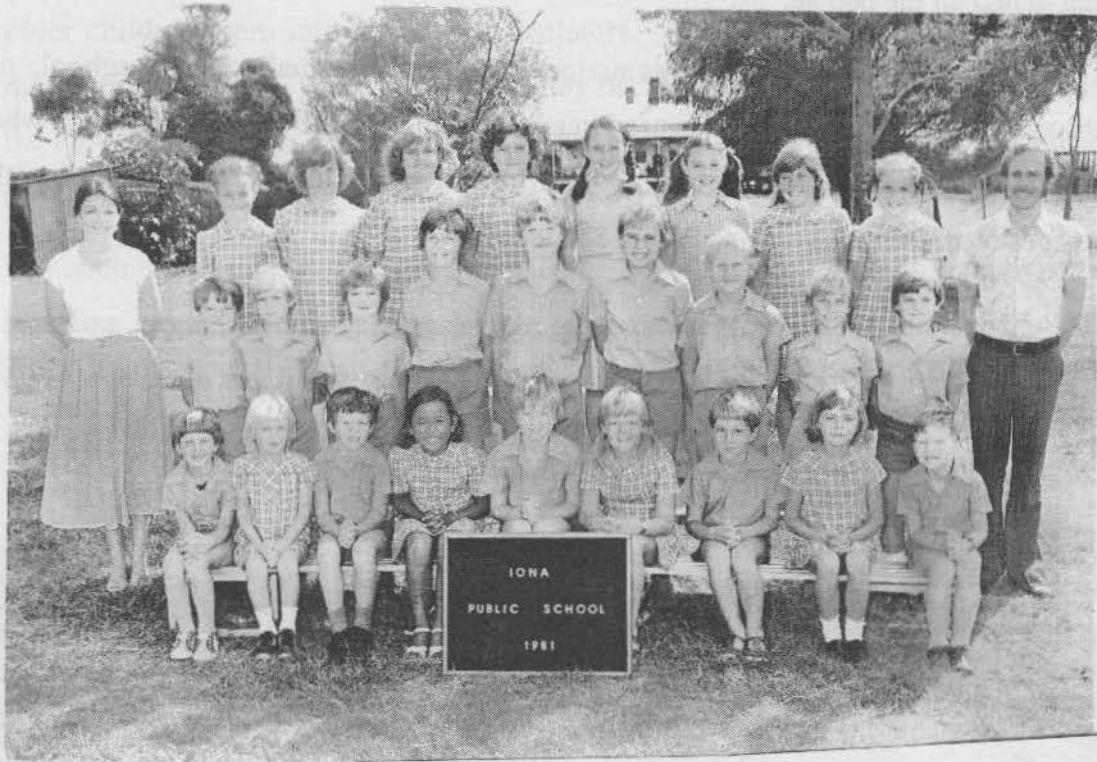
Mr Richard Warden became teacher in 1978 and the following year Mrs Mitchell replaced him briefly while he took some long service leave. From this time, there has been a lot of changes in the arrangement of education and teaching. For example, Mrs McDonald, a school councillor, paid occasional visits. Children of earlier years, and teachers, did not have such help. Teaching and clerical assistants and relief teachers became part of the school family.

Another change in the yearly program was the disappearance of the celebrations of 'Empire Day', and 'Commonwealth Day'. In the 1980s, 'Education Week' became something to celebrate and in 1982, every student planted a tree to commemorate the Week.

The school did not have a television set yet, only the loan of one, for the primary class. Not until 1981 was a colour TV provided and in the same years a pie oven for the school canteen was bought so that hot pies and sausage rolls could be on the lunch menu. Such an indulgence was unheard of in the early years! A second colour TV came to the school in 1983.

In the early 1980s the school enrolment was only 18 children and the future of Iona School did not look promising. Some necessary alterations to the building were put off due the uncertainty of the school continuing. Getting more pupils was imperative!

The number fell to 12 in 1982 and improved a little to 15 in 1984. By the late 1980s, the number was just over twenty. Getting a second teacher depended on the number of children being twenty-six or more. However, keeping one teacher was the priority in the 1980s!



The matter of 'zoning' was seen as a way to improve school enrolment. If zones were established and all children who lived within a zone attended the zone school, then a school such as Iona would be viable. However, zoning was not adopted and the existing bus services continued to take children to other schools.

A brochure was produced in an effort to encourage parents to send their children to Iona School. Later in the 1980s, parents discussed the advantages of Iona School and the reasons why it was important that it should remain open. The reasons were first,

that it served the purpose of a school very well, that is it was a place of education for children of the district. The school enabled the children living in the district to maintain friendships within their community. The school had an active and supportive Parents and Citizens Association and the enrolment, although small, was steady. Woodville-Iona was a distinct community with a Local Shop, Church, Church Hall and School of Arts Hall, all in use. The Public School was the one institution that united all the people.

The threat of closure, or amalgamation with another small district school, or absorption into a larger school, caused much concern in the 1980s amongst those who valued the strengths and opportunities afforded by a small district school with composite classes such as Iona Public School.



A Sports Day at Iona School.

Few large schools have such a lovely playing field as this one, in the beautiful Paterson Valley.

Bruce Hall was teacher from 1982 to 1989, with time off for long service leave. Beth Wilson was a relief teacher. Others who filled the different positions in the 1980s and 1990s were Mrs Randall, Helen Heitneyer (later Tuyl), Dierdre Heitneyer, Mrs

Nowlan, Julie Johansen, Elaine Taylor Debbie Bateman, Sue Fields, Gail Hamer, and clerical aid Mrs Annette Ellicott. Joan Hart was appointed Principal in 1997.

Hats became part of the school uniform in 1984 and 'tracksuit pants' for winter and 't-shirts' were introduced in 1989.

Children's excursions were now further afield, such as to Old Sydney Town. New technologies were entering the classroom, such as a 'computer corner' in 1984 and older children were introduced to calculators. A 'photocopier' replaced the old duplicating systems. When Mr Bob Burley became head teacher in 1991, he asked the P&C to provide an electric pencil sharpener and a microwave oven to supplement the already modern facilities. The P&C also provided air conditioning units.

The outdoors was not left behind in the technology field and a ride-on mower helped make the ground maintenance easier. In 1990 another tree planting program created an avenue at the rear of the grounds.



## *Iona School in the 1990s*

The decade of the 1990s brought many changes to Iona Public School. Another period of concern for the school's future arose as the enrolment was expected to fall to the critical number of 25 that would precipitate closure. How to find one pupil that would make 26 and so save the school! The pupil was found, the school continued and fortuitously the beautiful Paterson Valley began to attract new homes and more families. Enrolment climbed steadily to over 40 in 2000, consolidating the future prospects and allowing planning for 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling at Iona.

Until quite recently, a headmaster's residence was an essential part of a county school but by the early 1990s, this was no longer the case. For a while the residence was tenanted. Then, by 1997, the building was adapted for use as an office and library.

Care and concern for the environment have come to the fore in school programs and here Iona School has earned commendable recognition for effort. The school won the Junior Environment Award (for excellence in maintaining the school grounds) sponsored by Port Stephens Council and Tomago Aluminium. The junior section was for schools with less than 150 pupils and Iona, with less than 30 students at the time, succeeded in winning the prize of \$200!

Recently, Upper Division won a Community Art Competition.

School excursions have included visits to Point Wolstencroft, Wangat Lodge and Canberra, each taking several days and some combined with other schools.

New technology - the satellite dish on the roof, computers and internet connections and television - has changed the classroom and the way children learn, but there are still plenty of good books in the library and pens and paint brushes to convey thoughts and feelings onto paper.

Iona remains a delightful scenic rural and riverine area and is attracting new residents who are building new homes and enjoying the advantages of modern country living. Descendants of Iona's pioneering families still have farms in the district and their children are one of a number of generations that have had their primary education at Iona School. Together, these children are experiencing the advantages of a small school education. Enrolments in the 1990s have increased and in this sesqui-centenary year, the future of Iona Public School appears assured.