

Interview with Mrs Beth MILES who was Principal of Rathmines P.S. from 1980 to 1986, when she retired. Mrs Miles did not want to do a recorded interview but agreed to a telephone interview. 17.6.91

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When Mrs Miles came in 1980, the canteen was between rooms D and E, where the Infants Toilets are now. It was built by Mr Quinlan's father. It was so small that you could only fit 3 or 4 women in it. Their backs were practically against the back wall. It was impossible to work in. In 1980 a demountable, which was probably originally a small classroom, was placed at the bottom of the top carpark. The carpark was built at the same time. The mothers loved it because it was so large. When the multi-purpose unit was built the canteen went to Nulhaba, near Cessnock. They were desperate for a canteen because they didn't have any at all.

The hall was opened by the then Minister for Education, Rod Cavalier. He was very busy and the only way he could fit it in was to come by helicopter. He landed on the oval which was very exciting. After the ceremonies were finished, he stayed and played informal games on the oval with the children. He really seemed to enjoy himself and so did the children. He was also presented with a school sloppy-joe which he promised to wear around Parliament House to keep warm. The children were very excited.

When she came in 1980 the Lake Macquarie Library Bookmobile was coming every fortnight. It used to stop up the top of the school at the gate near room D. The classes went up one at a time to borrow. Rathmines children borrowed more books than any other school in the area. It stopped coming in 1985.

The Infant's Mistress's office next to room D was the library in 1980. It was so small, it was standing room only. The school was growing rapidly and it was so tiny. As the school grew, the classes couldn't fit in. There was only room for books. The librarian had to travel around from class to class with armfuls of books. Robin Williams was the librarian then. The library clerical

aide was Gloria McDougall. They both lived in Toronto. Gloria's office was the storeroom at the back of the office. It was so tiny, her desk took up most of the space. You could hear her in there tapping on her typewriter. The ventilation was very poor because there was only one small window, up high. Representations for a new library were made continually and the Department would come out and survey where they could put it from time to time.

There were 7 classrooms there in 1980. They went through to room F. This had increased to 12 by 1986 when she retired. They went through to room N.

Down behind the hall ran a council lane which ran between the playground and the land owned by the school which was all bushland. When it rained the water rushed down the alley, gouging out a gully which was quite deep. This land was acquired by the school in 1980 and the council put in huge pipes under the ground for drainage. The bushland was a nature area which Dallas Blatchford did a lot of work on. They had so many plans for this bushland area. At one stage netball courts were planned but Mike Caponas had so much to do. He did so much work outside school hours. For example, he laid the path between the admin. building and the library all by himself. He worked back late one Friday until after dark. He put in all the gardens.... the one outside the clinic. He developed a rose garden where the demountable canteen was.

The music in the school was very good - Joy Fox with her recorders and Dennis O'Hearn with the band. It was called the band even though it was only a small group of half a dozen or so. Dallas did so much work with the choir. Rathmines was always in the Music Festival with items presented by Joy and Dallas. Joy always did unusual and interesting items for the Choral Festival. At the opening of the hall her year 6 put on an item telling aspects and highlights of living in Rathmines, for example, the lake, sailing, the RAAF base. It was prepared by the children under the supervision of Joy.

They also had very good ceremonies for Anzac Day. A group from the school was sent to Wangi and Toronto on Anzac Day. Ceremonies were held at the school as well. The last couple of years the school ceremony was held at Catalina Park where the memorial is. Wearne and other ex-members of the RAAF base attended these.

The pictures of seaplanes up the back of the library were presented by an old gentleman. Look on the back to find his name. He donated the frames as well. They'd been in his family a long time. The frames were oak and over a hundred years old. He talked to the children about the planes when he presented them. The school houses were named after the planes by John Leishman.

Irvine Homer had donated his painting to the school. The original was too valuable to keep in the school so it was given on permanent loan to Newcastle Art Gallery. The school has access to it any time it wants. Look on the back of the print in the library for details. He also donated two lovely painted plates to the school. They were paintings of trees. Apparently he painted a lot on plates. These are also on loan to Newcastle Art Gallery. Look in the equipment register for details. His son, and I think two other children, attended the school for a while.

One exciting incident was a bushfire across the road. The news media were flying over in helicopters. The children were kept inside the classrooms with the blinds down according to safety regulations. There was a lot of smoke but no real danger. Some parents came and collected their children because they were worried about the "flames flashing through the trees.

We used to have the sports carnival in the local park near the lake. We went to Wangi when they developed the grounds there. Wangi Athletics Club lent equipment like mats and stands for high jumps. They also came along a few times before the carnival to coach the children.

When Mrs Miles came to the school, she cleaned the whole school up because there was an accumulation of rubbish. One of

the things she retrieved was a very old enrolment register. She wasn't sure, but she thought it was the original one from 1941. It was very old and the pages were torn, so she had it re-bound and re-covered. It should still be in the strong room. A lot of records seem to have disappeared & she didn't know what happened to them.

Mike Caponas lived at Morisset. As she said before, he did so much for the school. He made a puppet theatre for Joy Fox which was stored in the craft room. It was quite large, about 3 x 4 ft. Two or three children fitted behind it with their puppets. They gave no public performances but performed for other classes. They performed on the stage in the hall. They used an overhead projector at first, but later got a proper light, to make shadow puppets as well as hand puppets. The children made the puppets in craft. It took a lot of planning and practising.

Bushdancing was started by Dallas Blatchford. He used to play in a small group which played Bush Music outside the school. He loved Australian Bush Music. His group came up from Sydney and performed at one of the Bush Dances. They were very good. They had the Bush Dances and barbeques on the asphalt area outside the hall. Lights were put on the halls for this purpose.

The Cracker Nights started when I was there. Mike Conway, the P & C president or Jimmy Richards could give more information. Perhaps Peter Curry, another P & C president.

There was no proper fence around the school and no gates when she came. There were just wooden uprights with wire strung between. Because there were no gates, the locals used to ride their motorbikes through the school which caused some damage. She had a proper fence put all the way around the school, as well as gates which could be locked to stop the minor vandalism.

When Secret Corner Road was raised and tarred, the school experienced severe drainage problems between Rooms C & D. The Council & the Department co-operated to put in a path and steps up

to the road for the children to catch the bus.

A school sign was erected & 2 shrubs (bottlebrushes?) were planted on either side in memory of Thelma Gibson who dedicated so many years of service to the school. She didn't have one day off sick in 21 years. (or was it longer) She turned up for work, sick or not.

The P & C planted a lot of trees while she was there. All of this is recorded in the photo albums. They also put a lot of turf in. Each year, there were donations from the P & C, the Council and individuals from the community. A lot of land was reclaimed. The area on the other side of the adventure playground was terrible. The P & C built the banks of the oval which backs down to Rosemary Row. It took many working bees. The grounds were pretty wild, infested with enormous lantana bushes which were cut out. It represented a tremendous effort by the P & C. When she arrived the grounds were very rough and in need of repairs.

As the school grew, the Infants Toilets were put in & the Department put in a transpiration area. The Department spent a lot of money on the school. They also made the original grant for the nature area. The Department was very co-operative at all times & helped when they could. Of course there were other needy schools as well.

Around 1983 the rapid growth slowed down with the Recession. Building in the area slowed down. As well, two private schools opened in the area which took some students.

The sixth class used to go to Toronto High School but it became too overcrowded, so they were rezoned to Morisset in '81 or '82.

When Mrs Miles came, Marion Parker was only here 3 hours a day. The rest of the clerical work was done by the Principal. Marion was in the front office between rooms B & C. The Principal's office was the room behind that, now a storeroom. The Principal's table could just barely fit in. If there was a parent, they could just

barely sit, jammed between the desk and the cupboard. You couldn't close the door without a great deal of difficulty. The security bars on the window made it worse. You had to both sidle around the desk & change chairs to shut the door.

Interviewed by Anne Britt,  
Teacher Librarian