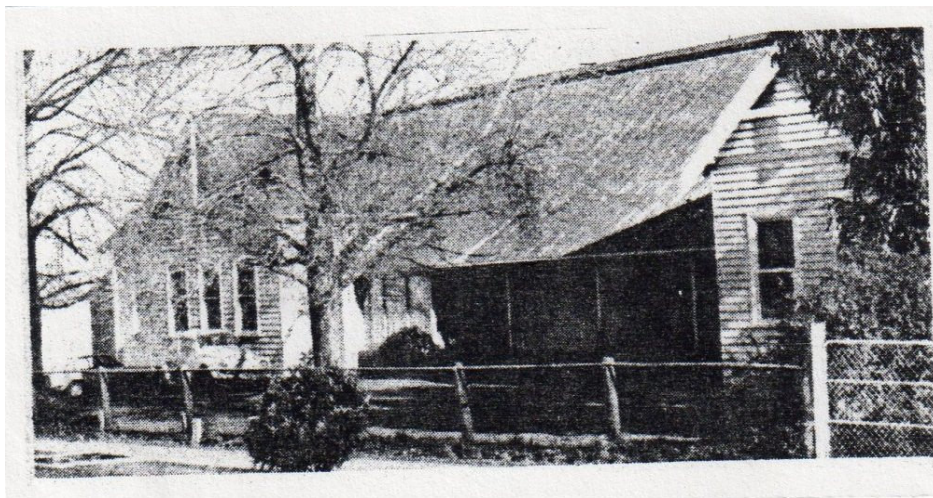


St Mary's Primary School

1912-1987



By

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Dandenong, c. 1987

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St Mary's School Song

Foreword

The story of St Mary's School is the story of love, courage and riches. Love – love of people for children; courage – to endure hardships and sorrows to bring Faith to the children of God; and riches – the greatest commodity in the world: children. Without the children there would have been no school. Hence it is a story that revolves round those who cared for children – the parish priests, the nuns, the lay-teachers, the committees, the parishioners, the gardeners, the workmen, the technicians, and the children of whom Jesus said, 'Suffer the little ones to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

As the story of St Mary's unfolds over the past 75 years, we see the spirit of Christ pervading over the people that made things happen – things that helped to mould the younger generation into worthy children of God.

Thousands of children have passed through the portals of St Mary's over the past 75 years under the mantel of the Presentation Nuns who had for their rallying cry the words of their founder, Nano Nagle: 'We must prefer the schools to all others'. Thousands of children have benefited by the influence of the parish priests, the catechists, the pedagogues and their fellow parishioners, who by their teaching and their example showed the children the way to eternal life.

Dandenong has certainly been privileged to have had these 'labourers in the vineyard', who, like St Paul, could sincerely say in 1987:

I have fought the good fight;
I have finished my course;
I have run the race;
I have kept the Faith.

And the Lord will answer to them all:

Well done, good and faithful servants;
Enter into the joy of the Lord.

To all those who have gone before and to all those who are keeping up the good work, from the children of St Mary's from 1912 to 1987:

Thank you.

'Aeterna non caduca'

George Thompson

Chapter One: The Beginnings

In 1911 the Shire of Dandenong, which included Carrum, Springvale and Noble Park, was described as 'an agricultural township and pastoral district on the Dandenong Creek' with an area of 60 square miles. The population of the whole shire was 4200. There were 980 dwellings. The population of Dandenong itself was 1500. The nature of the country was described as 'agricultural and pastoral and having fine timber land'. The state forests were reputed to be full of timber of immense growth. The leading industries were market gardens and dairy produce. There was one State School No 1403 (opened in 1874). Not far from Dandenong, at Eumemmerring, there used to be a Catholic school opened in 1858 by Father Patrick Niall. In 1872 this school was absorbed into the state education system, thus losing its Catholic status. The local children in Dandenong attended the local state school or the Eumemmerring School. Others on the fringes of the Shire of Dandenong attended the first Catholic school opened to Toomuc Creek (near Pakenham) in 1851 by the settlers. Dandenong was, in 1851, in the Roman Catholic Brighton Mission. There were also Catholic schools at Berwick (opened 1861) and at Springvale (opened 1867), and some stoic Catholic families sent their children to these schools in spite of the distance. In April 1883 the Dandenong Mission was formed. The *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* of 18 April 1883 reported: 'The long expected change in the Brighton Mission has at length taken place, The Mission has been dividend, Dandenong, with all surrounding districts constituting the new Mission.' The *Advocate* in August and September 1883 recorded that the new parish included the districts of Dandenong, Berwick, Pakenham, Cranbourne, Dromana and Phillip Island. Even the Quarantine Station at Queenscliff was part of the Mission.

When Father John Gleeson was appointed parish priest of Dandenong in August 1899 in the wake of Father Maurice Carroll, he was keen to establish a Catholic school in Dandenong. It took him a long time to set the machinery in motion to realise his ambition. He had frequent consultations with the Archbishop and with the Catholic parishioners in the district and in due course in 1910 he purchased two adjoining properties with frontages to Langhorne and McCrae streets (approximately two acres) from Mr Leo Matthews and Mrs Butler for the purpose of erecting a school and a convent. Father Gleeson was ambitious. He had heard of the reputation of the Presentation nuns who had schools in the Brighton Mission. He requested the Superior of the Presentation Convent, Windsor, Mother Ita Cagney, to send some nuns to Dandenong to open up a new Catholic school. With 'prayer and gentle persuasion' he convinced Mother Cagney of the necessity of having a school in Dandenong, which was

showing signs of a population boom at the turn of the century. At the time there were 2200 residents in Dandenong; a rise of 700 in a matter of months. Mother Cagney acquiesced to Father Gleeson's request and agreed to send three nuns to Dandenong.

A Catholic School in Dandenong

In 1911 Father Gleeson called for tenders to construct the school building and to refurbish the Butler house to be used as a convent for the nuns. By the end of the year the buildings were almost ready. On 12 February 1912 three nuns from Windsor left for their new place of abode in Dandenong. They were Sisters Patrick Considine, Fidelis Burgess and Angela Bourke. They had this to say about that memorable day:

On the early afternoon of February 12, 1912, we said au revoir to Windsor and set off by cab to Caulfield, accompanied by Mother Ita Cagney and Mother Paul Mulquin, where we caught the train to Dandenong. An hour earlier our furniture was sent to Dandenong by van. On our arrival at Dandenong there was no one to meet us. Sister Angela Bourke, however, knew the area reasonably well. She was a member of the well-known pioneering Bourke family at Pakenham and directed us to the convent. We set off by cab and arrived at our destination. The house was empty save for a tinny piano which Mother Paul (having a sense of humour) on her knees played 'Home Sweet Home' with variations. The others sat on the verandah, and when Mrs Butler who lived close by saw us, she kindly brought us some tea and scones. An hour and a half later, Father Gleeson the parish priest arrived. He took us across to the school, empty except for a few desks. About five o'clock the van arrived. We helped to unload and managed to get our goods inside. Father Gleeson then drove Mother Cagney and Sister Paul to the station. As it was getting dark we thought we would go to the presbytery for some milk for our tea. The lady, who was the minister's wife, gave us a large jug of milk – the house was the Manse, not the presbytery. When we came to lighting the lamps we had no opener to open the kero tins; again Mrs Butler came to our aid.

The nuns soon settled down, and after prayer, spent their first night at Dandenong.

The official opening and blessing of the school and convent on the following Sunday was a great moment for the Catholics of Dandenong. His Grace Archbishop Carr, officiating at the ceremony, said: 'This is the day the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad therein'. He further told the 300 people present that the opening of the Catholic school was the greatest event that had happened in Dandenong. He congratulated Father Gleeson and the Catholics of Dandenong on the establishment of the school. 'I have

looked forward for a long time to this', he said, 'and I have always thought there should be a Catholic school here.' Mr W. Keating, chairman of the school committee presented His Grace with an address of welcome on behalf of the parishioners. Father Gleeson thanked the Archbishop for his presence and for solemnly opening and blessing the school and convent. He also paid tribute to his energetic committee, headed by Mr Keating and Mr E.V. Kelly, for their support and wished them all well.

The nuns began their first day at school on the following day with an enrolment of 75 students. The school was in a weatherboard building consisting of two large classrooms separated by a folding door, a raised stage and two small rooms. The classrooms were bereft of furniture except for desks and seats and small tables for the nuns. Sister Patrick took charge of the senior students while Sister Angela looked after the juniors. Sister Fidelis looked after the house and visited the school occasionally. School started with a prayer and work was carried on under difficult conditions. But these pioneering nuns did their work – and did it well. As the days went by, the reputation of the nuns as sound educators and disciplinarians grew and before long children from the neighbouring state school enrolled at the Catholic school – known as St Mary's Convent School. And by the end of the year there were over 100 children at the school. Among the first pupils were the children of the Carrolls, Fields, Gearons, Greens, Harbrows, Keatings, Kennedys, McManus, McQuades, Potters and Quigleyas. There were also children from a non-Catholic family, the Merritts.

Chapter Two: The First Year

The opening of the Catholic school in Dandenong was received by the parishioners very warmly. They left the education (both religious and secular) of their children to the nuns and they did not regret it. The nuns lived up to their reputation and whatever hardships they endured, they always put the interests of the children first. Conditions were not easy in Dandenong at the time. Generally speaking, the Catholic population was not rich. Miss Sarah Carroll, one of the first pupils, said in 1973:

We hear of or remember the depression years of the 1930s, but I can assure you that the early years of these three Sisters in the parish were more austere than those of the depression years ... I guess many times those courageous Sisters went to bed hungry.

Miss Sarah Carroll, in her reminiscences, recalled that the school fees at first were one shilling for senior pupils and six pence per week for juniors. Not much for the nuns to live on when at first the pupils numbered less than 100! Realising that there would be times when the three Sisters found funds low, the early families often sent them food – scones, cake, cream, milk, etc – to replenish their larder.

As in all the country convents, it was the music pupils who – to quote one Sister who has now retired – ‘put a little jam on our bread’. At Dandenong, Sister Angela taught music to those who wished to learn and she brought in a few extra shillings to augment the convent coffers. Another initial pupil, Jim McCarter, said in 1973:

Sister Angela taught me the violin. She was also the English teacher and always wanted the right interpretation and accentuations during English lessons. I can hear her now, emphasising words in the poem ‘Waterloo’ as we sat in class on the ground, down near a large weather worn pine tree.

The one guinea per term fee for music supplemented the £10 (\$20) per month received in school money in those years. The school money was put into a wooden box on the corner of the mantelpiece and the butcher, the baker and the milkman were paid from that. The butcher would not have received much. Although in those days Catholics refrained from eating meat on all Fridays of the year (not only in the Lenten season, as is the custom now), by force of necessity the Sisters at Dandenong did not have meat on too many of the other six days. But at Christmas and Easter time the four ‘Carroll kids’ were each allotted a goose, out of which they had to pull the pin feathers. Sarah Carroll said: ‘When the geese were free of feathers and were cleaned, off set my sisters and I (one behind the other like Brown’s cows) to give the geese to the Sisters and Priests.’ She added, ‘And it was on our cab that the Sisters had an occasional picnic to Mordialloc with Brother John steering the one horse power (gypsy) along Brighton Road to the beach.’

One of the Keating boys, Mr Len Keating MBE, now retired, told me his recollections of his first day at school: 'My three brothers and I looked pretty smart in our striped suits (blue and white galatea all made by Mum) straw boater hats and celluloid collars. My brothers had large red ribbon bows, but I had a blue ribbon bow to match my eyes.' Len said that Sister Patrick Considine was born in County Clare, Ireland, and spoke with a rich brogue and was possessed of a brilliant intellect. 'In my own teaching career,' he said, 'I have been associated with hundreds of teachers, both in my capacity as a class teacher and as a principal and I have yet to know a teacher who could surpass Sister Patrick in the matter of dedication and capability.' He further stated, 'With a gang of young bandits, some of whom were fourteen and fifteen years old, Sister Patrick's task of maintaining discipline was not an easy one.'

In those days, of course, a teacher's cane was a must in every classroom. Len said,

This was similar to canes employed by cattlemen, and some inventive genius at the school devised a plan to get rid of them. At a convenient opportunity a small split was made in the cane and a wedge inserted. When the teacher hit the desk to restore order, the cane would split in two and it was some time before another could be obtained.

Of Sister Fidelis Len said, 'She looked after the house and visited the school on special occasions. The epitome of kindness, she was loved by every child in the school.'

These three Sisters were the spearhead of a host of dedicated Sisters who by their teaching skills, religious devotion and personalities, left their mark on St Mary's over the next 75 years.

Community Centre

The school soon became a centre for many parish activities – dances, cards, social evenings and farewells. When the pupils gave their concert there in June 1912, it was filled to overflowing by some 250 people. The stage manager was Thomas Carroll jnr. Other events held in 1912 were the Catholic Ball in September; a bazaar in October; and the second school concert in December. At this concert the following awards have been recorded: Christian Doctrine – Frank Field; Dux of Class – Harold Harbrow; Music – Mary Quigley; Composition – Mary McManus; Spelling – Eily Green; Dictation – Mary McQuade; Arithmetic – Gerard Carroll; Reading – John Carroll; Drawing – Vincent Potter; Tables – Leonard Keating; History – Ted Green; Dux of Class – Mary Carroll.

Thus ended the first year of St Mary's School's existence in Dandenong. It laid the foundation for the challenging and productive years that were to follow.

Chapter Three: St Mary's – School of Music

In May 1913 St Mary's School was the venue for a farewell function in honour of Mr and Mrs EV Kelly, two valued church workers who were leaving the district. In June Coadjutor Archbishop Dr Daniel Mannix visited the school after having administered confirmation at St Mary's Church the previous day. The Sisters and the school children gave His Grace a very warm welcome. After commending the Sisters for their work at the school he spoke to the children on the importance of a sound Catholic education and very graciously gave them a half holiday. The school concert held in December 1913 was a resounding success, and the reputation of St Mary's being a 'school of music' soon spread in the district. The annual school concert became the highlight of future years thanks to the talents of Sister Patrick and Sister Angela. In 1914 the concert was so popular that the need for enlarging the school building became apparent.

On St Patrick's Day, 1914, the children of St Mary's School took part in the picnic sports held on the old Eumemmerring Racecourse. This was so successful that it prompted the Sisters to continue the event every year for several years. These days were always drawcards and a source of funds for St Mary's School.

In August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany – a war that lasted till 11 November 1918. These were difficult and trying times for all. The emphasis was on patriotic functions to raise funds to send overseas to 'our lads' parcels of gifts and letters of encouragement. In Dandenong St Marys School joined in this war effort and brought down to a limited degree the holding of time-honoured church fixtures to help church and school finances. On St Patrick's night, 1915, a concert helped to reduce the convent school debt. In April parishioners gathered in the school to farewell Miss Kate Pickett, daughter of Mr and Mrs Joseph Pickett on the eve of her marriage. Miss Pickett was a great help to the Sisters with her piano playing at school concerts and social evenings at the school. She generally provided the music at the annual Catholic Ball.

In 1915 the enrolment at St Mary's increased to such an extent that Sister Margaret Mary McDonald, from Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, was sent to Dandenong to take Grade 5. Later, when the number on roll reached 200, Sister Philomena and Sister Josepha Shine joined the Dandenong community. The annual school concerts continued to be very popular in so much that in December 1916, the concert was held at the Town Hall to accommodate the children and the patrons. T Kelly was dux of the school that year.

Besides teaching the children the three R's, the head teacher Sister Patrick, who had an extraordinary flair for music, with Sister Angela's help, taught the children the rudiments of music. The Sisters formed a school choir which became well known in the district. In May 1917 the choir presented the cantata, 'Princess Ju Ju' at St Agatha's School, Cranbourne.

In 1918 Sister Aquinas and Sister Cecilia arrived at Dandenong. The numbers in the school increased considerably, so a lay teacher was provided – Miss McManus, who was most helpful.

It must be placed on record that at the time when Miss McManus was teaching at the school, her niece, Mary was boarded at the Convent and she was the school's first and only boarder. When, at times, there were only four nuns in the Convent, they were not allowed to have the Blessed Sacrament or Mass unless there were five in the house on the orders of the Archbishop, Dr Carr. Mary, of course, made the five and her presence in the Convent was welcomed by the Sisters. Mary had a good singing voice, and she usually starred as leading lady in school cantatas. She later became Mrs Hambrook.

In 1918, St Marys dropped its annual bazaar in order to give the Red Cross, which was doing such great work, a fair go. Many lads from St Mary's were then in uniform.

In February 1918 Father Gleeson, the founder of the school, was transferred to Flemington after 19 years at Dandenong. Two years earlier he had celebrated his Silver Jubilee as a priest and was guest of honour a large gathering in the Dandenong Town Hall on 20 June 1916 to mark the occasion. At his farewell in 1918 there were expressions of regret from every congregation in the parish, for all appreciated the significant achievements, the progress and the dedicated spiritual leadership for which Father Gleeson was responsible. He was succeeded by Father Frances Merner, thereby giving Dandenong its first Australian-born parish priest. In December that year, Father Gleeson was invited by St Mary's School to attend the annual school concert presided over by Sister Patrick.

In 1919, owing to the increase in pupil attendance, extensions to the school were made at a cost of £700. Events that took place at the school that year were a Sacred Concert, an adult Plain and Fancy Dress Ball and a juvenile Fancy Dress Ball, followed in quick succession by the annual school concert. On Australia Day in 1920 an all-Australian Concert was held at the school at which Father Merner sang the Australian Anthem.

In 1924, Sister Carmel joined the staff at St Mary's and she was a full-time music teacher. She taught music to small groups and single students from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm, after which she conducted lessons for the Dandenong High School students who came to her classes. The Dandenong High School opened in 1920.

It is evident, therefore, that besides teaching the children the normal school lessons, the Sisters at the time took part in extracurricular activities, music in particular, which deservedly gave the school the name St Mary's – School of Music. By engaging in duties above and beyond the call of duty, the Sisters were also responsible for reducing the school debt to a remarkable degree.

Chapter Four: The Years that Followed

Sister Josepha Shine, who came to Dandenong in 1915, was transferred to Elsternwick in 1921. In 1973 she celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of her profession. On being asked on that occasion of her reminiscences of Dandenong, she replied:

I came to Dandenong in 1915. I taught in the Junior Department up to Grade 3. Some of the people I remember are as follows: Katie and Mary McQuade (Hotel Keepers); the Carroll family (Mary, Sara, Annie, John, and Leo); Mr Dan Kelly and family and their three daughters two of whom were Agnes and Gertie; Kitty Shinners. For a while Mother Angela and myself taught Sunday School in the Parish Church on Sunday afternoon. Then it was decided as there was no Catholic School at Cranbourne we should go there. The Parish Priest arranged for a car to pick us up, take and bring us back.

When asked what particular incident she remembered, Sister Josepha said: 'to my mind, the thunder storm'. She then related the story of the thunder storm.

Once very humid hot day, with the atmosphere stifling we were all packed in the dear old wooden school. I decided to take my squad out in the open for some air and oral work. After some time the rain started, the sky grew darker, so I said to the children, 'Come, children, let us make for the shelter shed', which was only a few yards away from our first position which was near a tree.

Hardly had we got into the shed when a terrific clap of thunder sounded. This was followed by a very vivid flash of lightning. To this day I can remember the heat of that lightning in my face, and of course, the children felt it. It was nothing short of a miracle that we were saved. The tree nearby was splintered. You can imagine how terrified the children were but by the Sign of the Cross made repeatedly all became calm again. Mother Patrick who had watched the scene from the school room had her pupils on their knees saying the Angelus. She had a great devotion to this prayer especially in times of danger.

The next day in the local paper there appeared this heading: 'A Teacher and her Class of Pupils escaped being struck by Lightning.' Numbers came to see the splintered tree. It was the shock caused to Sister Josepha by this incident that prompted Mother Cagney, the Superior, to transfer Sister Josepha to Elsternwick.

Len Keating, one of the original pupils, spoke of the range of educational activities conducted by the Sisters during his time as school and afterwards. Catechism and the three R's, of course, took pride of place, he said. He recalled that while the juniors recited tables and wrote with a squeaking sound on slates that had a string and sponge attached to them, the seniors sat down with their copy books, feet together on the floor, left hand one inch above the copy, pen pointing over the right shoulder and laboriously

imitated the copperplate writing as was shown in the copy books. 'Our ultimate goal,' Len said, 'was to pass the Qualifying Certificate in Grade 6 and subsequently the Merit Certificate in Grade 8 in order to obtain satisfactory employment.'

The course of study covered a wide range of subjects and high standard was demanded. The boys also attended woodwork or sloyd classes at the neighbouring state school once a week, the teacher at the state school being Mr Slater at one time.

Sister Patrick followed a Defence Department book on Physical Exercises as a basis for physical training for the children, and she even gave demonstrations of knees bending with arms stretched to emphasise a point. There was also a Mr Johns who came once a week and gave Sister Patrick a hand in physical training.

Each day a period was set aside for reciting questions and answers from the catechism book and learning about the story of the Church. The school was inspected once a year by a school inspector, one of whom was Mr O'Driscoll.

It is said that the games at school followed certain 'seasons' decided on by shopkeepers, possibly in order to sell their goods. The girls had a skipping season, then hoops, and then knuckle bones called 'Jacks'. The boys had marbles, tops, kites, tip-cat and cherry bobs.

The school picnic was another function greatly enjoyed by all the school children. The nuns were not allowed by their rules to attend, so a group of parents generally looked after the children. Mordialloc was always chosen as the venue as there were facilities for swimming, boating and sun bathing. Organised games were 'dropping the hanky' and 'two and threes' played on the sand. Segregation of the sexes was the keynote at the school but on occasions like these the mingling of the sexes was a welcome change. The journey to Mordialloc was made in Alex Paydon's furniture vans, pulled by sturdy but very slow draught horses. The journey took about 90 minutes. On arrival the children were given a yeast bun and a bottle of soft drink.

At Mass on Sundays seats were reserved in front of the church for the children. The girls sat on one side of the aisle and the boys on the other. The nuns were not far behind. Dancing was taught at the school by Miss Bessie Huson. Sister Philomena gave lessons in violin to many boys in Dandenong. She was the sister of Monsignor O'Gorman of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney.

The school sports, which flourished in the 1920s and onwards, were first held in October 1914, recalled Miss Sarah Carroll (a 1912 pupil) in 1973. The track events began at the pine tree (of lightning fame) to the fence down toward the Power Street end of the grounds, Sarah said, 'Some "John Landys" were noted that first sports day. I recall these names the race winners - Jack Keating, Lottie Hogan, Harold Harbrow, Nell Kelly, Eileen O'Connor and Jack (Crane) Kelly.' She also recalled the kindness of Doctor Langley who lived in a large house where St Mary's Primary School is now. In times of

accidents, Sarah said, the Sisters sent for Doctor Langley who arrived promptly with his bag and attended the any injured child.

Chapter Five: The Old Order Changeth

Since the establishment of St Mary's Convent School, the Sisters had achieved a fine record of scholastic and music successes – and early in 1921 they were delighted when one of their pupils, Frank Field, who had gone to St Kevin's CBC, Melbourne, won a £200 Senior State Scholarship at the age of 16. It entitled him to a six year course at Newman College, Melbourne University, which eventually led him to a successful legal career. The 1968 'Who's Who in Australia' recorded this: 'Field, Hon. Francis, MA, LLB, Member Licensing Court (now Liquor Control Commission), Vic., since 1954; Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Instruction, Vic 1945–47, MLA for Dandenong 1937–47; son of WJ Field; b. Dec 23, 1904, N. Carlton, Vic; ed. St Kevin's CBC, Melb., Newman College; Minr. Public Instruction, Cain Government., Sept 14–16 1943; solicitor; F-O RAAF; m. June 23, 1934 Aileen M, d. JF O'Brien, Is 4d; recreations, gardening, golf; club, Kingswood Golf; address, 180 Beach Rd, Sandringham, Vic., 3191.'

Sarah Carroll said in 1973 that she recalled the name of one girl – Ulie Payne – who went far in the dancing world, while Len Keating, who said that parents and children obtained great satisfaction from the performances of budding actors and actresses, mentioned the name of Eva Todd, a former pupil in the early days, who achieved success as an actress in Hollywood as also the names of Bill Ward and Madge Fitzgerald who became professional dancers. Then there was the famous pianist Nancy Weir, who returned to Dandenong in 1954 to receive nine debutantes at the Parish Ball. Her father, Charles Weir, was licensee of the Royal Hotel at Dandenong. From St Mary's Convent School she attended the Presentation Convent, Windsor, as a boarder, later to embark on a career as a famous international pianist.

Sister Dunlop related that one of the pupils in the 1913 pupils' register was Len Keating in the Grade 3 list. She said: 'Len Keating was awarded the MBE in the Honours' List in 1972 for his services to education. He was for many years headmaster in many primary schools of the Victorian Education Department. On his retirement from the Education Department he taught at St Johns' Regional School as Form Master of Form 1 till 1980.' It was said of him: 'He excelled at the art of teaching and was beloved by his pupils and respected by his colleagues.' Then there was Jim McArthur, Victorian Railways surveyor, boundary rider, jackeroo, manager of sheep and cattle stations, writer to the *Bulletin* and *Walkabout*, reporter, author and editor of the Labour Paper in Brisbane till his retirement in 1963. Sarah Carroll (also called Sally) remained a great friend of the Presentation nuns. She joined the Education Department and later taught at St Gerard's school, North Dandenong. Sister Dunlop said of her: 'She was held in great affection by her pupils and her fellow staff members at St Gerard's. She continued the Carroll tradition of warm-hearted generosity to all who knew her.'

There are many other former pupils of St Mary's who through their initial instruction by the Sisters in their formative years did achieve their life's ambitions, but more than all,

led lives of exemplary human beings, but whose achievements were carried out in a quiet and unobtrusive manner.

It was on record that with the progress of education in Dandenong, there was also progress in the district and its administration. In 1913 the Country Roads Board was formed, ushering in the bitumen era, giving great impetus to improved main and arterial roads. In 1914 there was electricity in Dandenong generated at the power house on the corner of Clow and Stuart streets. The Telephone Exchange was, of course, already established in 1908 with 19 subscribers at the end of the year. PJ McQuade's Albion Hotel held number one.

In 1924 living conditions became crowded at the Convent at 71 Langhorne Street, as the original community of three grew to five Sisters in 1924. There were Sisters Patrick, Fidelis, Carmel Kierce, Theresa and Aquinas. In addition to this, Father Merner, the parish priest, early in 1924 requested Mother Ita Cagney, who was on a visit to Dandenong, for a staff of Sisters to commence a new school in Noble Park. Her reply to him was: 'Father, you will have no Sisters until you have a house to put them into.' Sister Carmel who was there in 1924 said later that 'arrangements were then made to build a new Convent at 69 Langhorne Street, which was completed by the end of the year.' Mr McQuade Snr supervised the building work of Mr JJ Marslen who was architect and builder.

Archbishop D Mannix laid the foundation stone of the new Convent on 16 November 1924. The Convent, built at a cost of £3700 'was a brick building with seven bedrooms, a chapel off the first verandah, a community room to the right of the front of the building and a parlour to the left of the front door. The only rooms facing the back of the house were the kitchen, refectory and the bathroom. There was a small back verandah which ran both sides of the house to join the first verandah.' So wrote Sister Joseph Dunlop in her memories in 1974. When Archbishop Mannix blessed and opened the Convent he paid a warm tribute to the Sisters and Christian Brothers generally. Shire President Cr WB Tharle was present at the function.

Sister Carmel also recalled the first telephone call made to the Convent (Dandenong 40) from the Presentation Convent, Windsor, late in October 1924. It was to announce the death of Sister Aloysius Irwin, a member of that community. Changes had certainly taken place since 1912.

Chapter Six: The Years Flow On

During his eight year stay as parish priest of Dandenong, Father Merner continued the work of his predecessor Father Gleeson in giving the parishioners of Dandenong the best in religious and secular education. Under his jurisdiction renovations were made to St Mary's school to accommodate the increasing number of students and staff. In 1925 Father Merner celebrated his 25th jubilee as a priest, and on that occasion the school children entertained him at a concert at which Mr L Lalor read a beautiful address and Master Leo McCarthy presented him with gifts on behalf of the children. It must be placed on record that Father Merner was the first priest in Dandenong to use motor transport – an old Buick according to some old-timers. In 1926, however, Father Merner died in Buffalo (USA) while on an overseas trip on the advice of his doctor. His remains were brought back to Dandenong where on 6 August 1926 a Requiem Mass was said at St Mary's Church at which the students of St Mary's school attended. His successor was Father Thomas J Little from Ferntree Gully.

With the Sisters settled down in their new home and the school primed to hold the near 200 pupils, the Inspector's report in 1926 was very favourable. It read: 'the school continues to give the students a high standard of education and staffing is adequate.' The St Mary's Tennis Club, which opened in 1923, was a great boon to the senior students of the school who used the courts when available to indulge in this popular sport. Football, of course, was also played by the boys who had an occasional unofficial match with the boys from the local state school.

Transfers of Sisters from Dandenong Convent were made according to the direction of Mother Superior. In 1929 Sister Patrick, the first principal, was made Mistress of Novices at the Mother House at Elsternwick. In 1930 she was appointed Superior of Windsor, and later Superior of Ferntree Gully. Sister Angela Bourke left Dandenong in 1918 for St Columba's Elwood, a new school opened that year. In 1941 she was the first superior of the Community opened at South Yarra with five other Sisters, including Sister Josepha Shine, who left Dandenong in 1921. Sister Philomena O'Gorman, who was in Dandenong from 1915 to 1920 was appointed back to Dandenong in 1929 to take the place of Sister Patrick. In 1930 Sister Macnise Dowling was transferred from St Anthony's, Glenhuntly, to Dandenong. With her in the school were Sisters Philomena, Fidelis, Leo, Carmel and John Vianney.

Recently the writer spoke to Sister Macnise and asked her of her recollections of St Mary's when she came to Dandenong in 1930. She said that the school had a good reputation as far as learning and discipline were concerned. She remembered the concerts, the dances and balls held to raise funds for the school, the St Patrick's Day picnic sports, and the traditional Pakenham Picnic Races held on New Year's Day in aid of the Catholic Church and schools. 'The point to point races,' she said, 'were held on DJ Bourke's paddock (now the Pakenham Racecourse) and were run by the Catholic

community. Funds raised helped to pay the teachers' salaries.' She remembered Eileen Jones who taught at St Mary's and who was the sister of Father Frank Jones who later became parish priest of Corryong, Victoria.

Sister Macnise spoke in glowing terms of Sister Carmel Kierce who was in Dandenong from 1924 to 1947. Sister Carmel was a music specialist and played the piano and violin. 'With Sister Teresa on the violin and the help of Sisters Patrick and Angela Bourke,' said Sister Macnise, 'Sister Carmel made a good team of instructors being responsible for the long list of music successes over the years. The concerts they put on in Dandenong were well attended. Many came from afar to hear the students play the classics such as Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana, the Tales from Vienna Woods, and the like.'

In November 1933, it was recorded that the original Dandenong Mission had been divided into six parishes. The enrolment at St Mary's school had topped the 200 mark and the surrounds of St Mary's and the presbytery had been transformed into a place of elegance. Sister Carmel recalled in 1974 how lovely the school looked. She paid tribute to the children who attended the school and praised the support and loyalty of the parents. She remembered the 1933 St Patrick's Day sports, which was attended by a large crowd including former Curates Fathers Ashe and Lynch (from Yea). Sister Macnise said that Sister Carmel left Dandenong in January 1947 but came back in 1961. Sister Josepha Dunlop recorded this in 1974: 'Dandenong will always owe Sister Carmel much for what she gave the community over a long period of time in loyalty, dedication, and fruitful service, and for those many music pupils who always speak of her with such affection.'

In 1935 Mother Dominic replaced Sister Philomena as principal of St Mary's. One ambition of hers was to erect a chapel at the Convent. This was realised the following year when the chapel was built by Mr WA O'Donnell.

When the Order's Silver Jubilee at Dandenong came round in 1937, Mother Dominic suggested the erection of a commemorative grotto, and it was not long before Ted Green was building one, with another past pupil, Bernie Leigh, supplying the stones. This new feature was blessed on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 2 February 1937.

In 1945 four new classrooms, an office and a brick shelter were added to the school. By 1951 the attendance had risen to 415, and as the population explosion really 'took off' in the fifties, more classrooms were built.

When in 1935 the Dandenong Sewerage Authority was created, this amenity was made use of by the school authorities for the convent and school in the years that followed. In 1942 the Dandenong and District Hospital was established thus bringing modern medical facilities to the nuns and the school when needed.

After the war ended in 1945, there was a steady flow of migrants to Australia, and Dandenong was getting its share of new-comers. Migrant children began attending the

local schools. St Mary's handled the situation very well and, with tolerance and understanding, these children assimilated with little difficulty into the Australian way of life.

Chapter Seven: Post War Activities

In 1941 there were several changes at the Presentation Convent that removed several much-loved members of the community from the school and the parish. After having been in charge for six years, Reverend Mother Dominic, who had made an important contribution to the school, was transferred to Heathcote. Her successor, Reverend Mother Anthony, from St Patrick's Pakenham soon endeared herself to the school and the community. Sister Vianney, who had given ten years excellent service at Dandenong, was transferred to Windsor.

Mother Anthony steered the destinies of the school during the early years of World War II. She was in 1947 followed by Sisters John Murray, Celestine and Francis.

In 1949, 32 students from St Mary's made their First Communion when Father Michael O'Sullivan was parish priest. He succeeded Father Thomas J Little in January 1942.

Father O'Sullivan was a man of vision, and as early as 1953 he purchased a choice 4 ½ acre site in McCrae Street, opposite the original St Mary's School for £11,000. The industrial revolution that hit Dandenong with its accompanying rising population, prompted Father O'Sullivan to make this provision for the future expansion of Catholic education in Dandenong. The attractive property contained the burnt-out brick shell of 'Roseneath', Dr FE Langley's fine old home, built many years before by former Member of Parliament, the late Sir Samuel Gillott. It was bounded on three sides by McCrae, New and Power streets, and today houses, not only St Mary's Primary School, but also the \$1 million St Mary's Community Centre, with its associated facilities.

In 1954 there was a Dandenong link with Father William Rowell, one of the newly ordained priests (Franciscan Order) as St Patrick's Cathedral in August. After attending St Mary's school he went on to the Christian Brothers College, Geelong and St Paschall's, Box Hill. After his ordination he returned to Dandenong to say his third Mass. He is now a Bishop in New Guinea, with headquarters at Lumi (Aitape).

With the influx of migrants and with the population of the Dandenong Shire rising to 27,755, St Mary's school enrolment rose to 470. The school was getting crowded, but with the opening and blessing of the Brigidine Sisters' Killester Convent at Springvale in January 1955 there was some relief at St Mary's. Quite a number of the senior girls from St Mary's went on to this college. In 1956 the parishes of Dandenong North, Berwick and Noble Park were created and consideration was given to opening schools in these new parishes.

Although Father O'Sullivan, by the purchase of 4 ½ acres in the heart of Dandenong, had set the stage for big developments in Catholic education in Dandenong, he had been content in the main to concentrate on putting the finances of the parish on a firm

footing, rather than branch out into ambitious expansion. His was a term of consolidation.

When Father O'Sullivan left Dandenong in 1956 after being parish priest of Dandenong for 14 years he was not a well man. But, as many of his parishioners said, 'he administered his duties energetically and with a cheerfulness and kindliness that endeared him to all'. He died in May 1958, at the age of 60. After a solemn Requiem Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral, his remains were brought to Dandenong and laid to rest in the Dandenong Cemetery.

Chapter Eight: A New Era in Catholic Education at Dandenong

1957 was the turning point in Catholic education at Dandenong. The enrolment at St Mary's school was 750 with Sister Imelda Lynch as principal. She followed Sister Virgilius Kelly, who in turn succeeded Sister Francis in that position. At a meeting convened to form a school auxiliary, the attendance at St Mary's school – many from migrant families – was reported on and it was noted that existing classrooms were inadequate. The Auxiliary was formed, with Mrs Leo Carroll and Mrs MJ White the inaugural president and secretary respectively. This body of volunteer workers was responsible for raising funds for the school. It also staffed the school tuck shop. In 1958 Mrs L Kennedy became president and Mrs J Hogan secretary.

In 1957, too, the Sisters assumed the added responsibility of staffing the new school at St Gerard's, Dandenong North. More Sisters were appointed to the Dandenong Convent to meet the educational needs of the students. The old Convent at 71 Langhorne Street, which had been vacated and rented to tenants in 1924, in favour of 69 Langhorne Street, the new Convent, was once again used by the Sisters to accommodate the new arrivals. As a matter of historical interest, it must be placed on record that the house at 71 Langhorne Street, which became the Convent in 1912 was owned by Mrs Butler (formerly Mary Thaile), who lived with her husband there until the nuns bought it. Mrs Butler was not a Catholic, but she remained a great friend to the Sisters until the day she died. The Sisters called this old Convent 'St Michael's'.

In 1958 three new classrooms were built in New Street, on land purchased earlier by Father O'Sullivan. This was the forerunner of the present two-storey St Mary's Primary School. Sister Imelda Lynch now had five other Sisters with her, as well as lay teachers, to staff the school. Each year, as the numbers increased, more and more lay teachers taught with the Sisters.

The School's Provident Fund, which was formed around this time, was a great boon to the parish. 'No praise of the School's Provident Fund can be too high,' it was reported. 'But for the Fund it would have been impossible for us to make proper provision for the education of the children.' The Fund provided \$20,000 for the first stage of the present St Mary's school when the enrolment had risen to 920, and has since helped finance many of the subsequent school buildings in the parish to some \$320,000.

The wish to erect a new and larger church at St Mary's was fulfilled in August 1957 when architect Robert O Ellis was instructed to design a new church on contemporary lines to seat 900, complete with a choir balcony.

Providing secondary education to the Catholic children of Dandenong was imperative. In 1957 the Provincial of the De La Salle Order in Sydney, Brother Jerome, was persuaded to send a Brother to St Mary's School, Dandenong, to start a secondary school. On 4 February 1958, Brother Amedy Molloy, the Provincial's choice, travelling

each day from Malvern, began St Mary's Boys School for the first time with a total of 52 boys taken from St Mary's School. He was assisted by a retired teacher, Mr Frank Maher, who taught grade 6, while Brother Amedy taught a combined class of grades 7 and 8. Brother Amedy recalled this memorable event in 1985 when he said: 'Our first lessons were held in two prefab rooms in the old St Mary's school situated in McCrae Street, opposite the present primary school making the primary school rather overcrowded. It was to relieve this situation that, after a few months, a large galvanised iron shed, ex-Army stock, was purchased. This was partitioned into two rooms and placed on an old tennis court on what was then known as Langley's property, the site of the present St Mary's school.' In the meantime, the principal of St Mary's School, Sister Imelda Lynch, was encouraged to conduct classes up to grade 8 for the girls, as some of the girls were attending the newly established Killester College at Springvale for their secondary education.

'On August 28, 1958,' Brother Amedy said, 'we moved into a new three-roomed, brick building fronting New Street, built for the purpose of being a secondary school. This pleased Sister Imelda who placed the very large grade five class taught by Mr Morrissey in the "tin shed" vacated by us'.

The number on roll at the time at St Mary's was 683 – no less than 350 being children of New Australians, representing about twenty nations. The secondary section of St Mary's adopted the name of St Mary's Girls Secondary School.

The problem of secondary education was temporarily solved. In the quest for much-needed funds, the annual St Mary's School Fete was expanded to two days, with Mrs Leo Carroll secretary and Mrs I Jackman treasurer. Held in November 1958, it raised over £800.

Chapter Nine: No Looking Back

On 14 March 1959, the Shire of Dandenong was proclaimed a city. It had topped the required annual revenue of not less than £30,000 to have claim to this title. The population was 23,000. The Municipal Directory recorded this: 'Dandenong – prosperous, industrial, residential and market town on the Dandenong Creek ... with State, high and technical schools, Catholic primary and secondary schools'. That was impressive. St Mary's primary and St Mary's Girls secondary schools had almost 700 pupils with Sister Imelda Lynch in charge of the two schools. Brother Amedy was principal of the boys' school in New Street, subsequently called St John's School.

I asked Brother Amedy in 1985 why he chose the name of St John. 'Was it in honour of St John Baptist Del La Salle, the Founder of the De La Salle Brothers?' I enquired. 'No. Not St John Baptist De La Salle. St John the Evangelist, the adopted son of the Blessed Virgin Mary,' replied Brother Amedy. 'Aren't we all adopted sons?'

On 15 March 1959, the day after Dandenong was declared a city, the new St Mary's Church was opened and blessed by His Grace, Archbishop DJ Simonds in the presence of over 2000 people. The curates at the time were Father Patrick Fitzpatrick and Father Anthony Guelen. The latter was to take charge of the Dandenong parish in 1985.

In November 1959 preparations were made to add a second storey to the building at the New Street to cater for increased enrolments.

When Sister Gabriel Cobern succeeded Sister Imelda Lunch in 1962 as principal of St Mary's primary school and St Mary's Girls secondary school, she took a keen interest in extending senior girls' curriculum. Proficiency exams (also referred to as sub-Intermediate Year 9) were first catered for in 1965. Sister Kathleen Conry recorded this in 1973: 'Two years went by with Sister Gabriel at the helm. It was decided that St Mary's (which then included both primary and junior secondary grades) would start a Form 5 class with the help of a "swap" system of staff with the De La Salle Brothers from St John's who were then situated across the road. Our first Form 5 class was about 16 in all. It was during this year that the seeds for future development in this area were sown. What were these "seed" subjects? Science, Maths and Geography mainly.' In 1966 the Intermediate Class was introduced to the girls.

In July 1964 English was introduced into the Mass for the readings and responses, and under Sister Gabriel's guidance, the children of St Mary's took an active part in the celebration of the Mass on Sundays. In 1966 Mass was celebrated with the priest facing the people.

During these years the idea of having a big boys' college and an equally big girls' college in Dandenong was nurtured. Land was needed to put up buildings for these projects and land available in Caroline Street was the answer. The parish had also bought some land

in Brady Road, but as it proved unsatisfactory a location for a boys' college, it was later sold to land developers.

To continue Sister Kathleen's story, she wrote: 'At the end of 1967 St John's school moved to their new quarters in Caroline Street, leaving behind grades 5 and 6 boys who automatically became part of the St Mary's Primary School.' This was made possible, of course, when the new St John's College was built in 1967. On 26 November 1967 the college was officially blessed and opened by His Grace, Archbishop James Knox. Sister Kathleen said that with the new grades in the primary school, St Mary's school was bursting its walls with the crowded classes from Prep to Form 5. To relieve the situation, the school was forced to bring in another 'shed'. 'I believe,' said Sister Kathleen, 'it used to be the original Doveton Post Office.'

Sister Gabriel Cobern told me recently: 'I have happy memories of my stay at Dandenong from 1962 to 1967. There were many migrant children at the school and I admired their desire to learn. St Mary's has been enriched by the new arrivals who brought with them their cultures, new ways of life and their solid faith. The children fitted in well with the rest of the school.'

In 1968 Sister Nance Morgan took over the reins of St Mary's Girls Secondary School. There were 300 senior girls in attendance. The primary school was moved to the building at New Street vacated by the Brothers when they opened up St John's College in Caroline Street. The St Marys Girls Secondary School was based at the old St Mary's school at McCrae Street and in 1970 adopted the name St Angela's in honour of Sister Angela Bourke, who was then the only surviving member of the founding Sisters at Dandenong. By then the attendance had grown to 390. Sister Declan was appointee principal of St Mary's Primary School.

In 1969 the number of Sisters in Dandenong increased to such an extent that it was necessary to purchase the house on 75 Langhorne Street where three Sisters moved in on 15 October 1969. Number 75 originally belonged to Mrs Butler who sold it to the Hansens. In that year, too, many Sisters took advantage of the permission given by the Chapter to change their religious names for their Baptismal ones.

Chapter Ten: St Mary's in the Seventies

The sixties proved to be a decade of activity at St Mary's School. It lost some of its boys to St John's College, while its grade six girls were given an opportunity to further their studies to Intermediate standard. Attendance at the primary school, the girls' secondary school, and St John's College soared, mainly due to the population explosion at Dandenong caused by a large migrant intake. Finance was becoming a problem. The situation of the Catholic schools was becoming intolerable, so much so that in July 1961 a large public meeting of 1500 persons met in Dandenong to call on the government to 'give a fair deal' to non-government schools. A few months later there occurred the dramatic closure of all Catholic schools in the Goulburn diocese while at St Gerard's, North Dandenong, the preparatory class was closed as a protest against 'the intolerable conditions which exist within the Dandenong schools'. The situation of Catholic education in the diocese was still serious in the mid-sixties, but new initiatives appeared when Archbishop Simonds announced the establishment of an Education Advisory Council. Archbishop Simonds wrote at the time: 'The financial burden is very great and anxiety about the future is considerable'. The establishment of the Schools' Provident Fund was an important event.

In spite of the financial difficulties, the plan to build a college in Caroline Street went ahead. This was completed in November 1967 and subsequently occupied in the 1968 academic year. The college was designated St John's College. It catered for boys from the parishes of Dandenong, Dandenong North, Noble Park and Doveton. These parishes were responsible for repaying the loan of \$264,000 obtained from the diocese schools' provident fund. A grant from the Commonwealth assisted the repayment of the loan by about \$46,000 which was provided to help offset the cost of the science rooms. St Mary's two schools also had their share of worries. There was no public fund to shoulder the basic cost factor of \$80,000 annually; the parishioners had to meet this commitment.

In 1968 St Mary's primary division moved to New Street, leaving St Mary's Girls Secondary School sole occupiers of the 1912 St Mary's school at McCrae Street. There were about 300 students at this school and there was an increasing amount of co-operation between the two schools in the sharing of staff and resources. Sister Kathleen Conry recorded this in 1973: 'At last we were able to spread ourselves and share out our luxurious tin sheds. Sister Leila so very aptly called her Craft room the "wool-shed". The adjoining shed (apparently the first Doveton Catholic Church) became a multi-purpose academy with Art as its main purpose and a TV viewing room running second in importance'.

In 1970 the decision was made to amalgamate St John's and St Angela's into a single college to be called the Dandenong Catholic Regional College. However, a board meeting

of 14 December 1970 decided 'after heated discussion' to retain the name of St John's Regional College for the combined venture of 1971.

In 1974 there were three schools on the one site – Forms 1–4 Boys, Forms 1–4 Girls, and Forms 5–6 Co-educational. It must be noted, however, that the first mixed Matriculation class was held in 1968 and continued until 1974 when the new educational structure was put into operation. 1973, therefore, was the last year that St Angela's, as such, existed. The old school at McCrae Street was then used by St Mary's parish for storing goods and equipment and for running white elephant stalls periodically.

Father Gerard Coghlan commenced as parish priest in October 1969. In 1970 he sponsored a Sacrificial Giving Campaign to improve the parish finances and subsidise the schools' funds. In that year Sister Julian McKenna took the place of Sister Declan as principal of St Mary's Primary School. She held that position till 1974 when she was succeeded by Sister Ann Halpin until 1976.

To ease the school population problem and to provide specialist classes and equipment in keeping with modern education trends, Father Coghlan opened up a new wing at St Mary's school. In 1974 the celebration of the centenary of the Presentation Sisters took place and Monsignor Brian Walsh was appointed parish priest of Dandenong.

With the establishment of school grants by the Commonwealth and the State Governments in the 1970s the 'financial burden' spoken of by Archbishop Simonds earlier was eased considerably. Due to pressure from the Catholics and the hierarchy led by Archbishop Knox, the Australian Government agreed to subsidise Catholic education to some extent.

In 1974 the following grants to St Mary's School are recorded: Commonwealth: \$27,419; State: \$29,050; St Mary's also received a migrant grant of \$1817 that year.

With these beneficiaries, the school embarked on a program of instruction to suit all the school children including extracurricular activities such as: bilingual and bicultural programs (conducted by Mrs L Primaud); Environmental Maths program (conducted by Mr Quinn and Mr Crilly); Community Involvement program (conducted by Mrs P Slattery); and an Experimental Activity Infant program (conducted by Mrs Faye Chandley).

The Primary School Board was formed in 1974 with the objective to render every assistance to the school administration and to monitor the school fees. However, it was stipulated that 'no child will be deprived of Catholic Education because of money'. Sister Ann, the principal, introduced School Masses which proved popular. She also encouraged tennis coaching to the senior children, competently undertaken by Mrs Dot Stanley and Mrs Bernice Fitzgerald. The first meeting of the Pastoral Council took place on 28 June 1974.

Sister Ann involved the community in her educational program for the children by organising lectures and demonstrations by Nursing Sisters, Ambulance Officers, Dental Practitioners and members of the Police Force.

In 1975 a major restructuring of the Catholic Education Board (formed in June 1969) took place, which became 'a more effective forum for views to be expressed on Catholic Education; to enable better lines of communication to be developed between local Parish Education Boards and the Melbourne Catholic Education Board; and to provide for more appropriate representation from teachers'.

At St Mary's school special English classes for the 169 children requiring special assistance were taken by Mrs Hanley, and a teacher-aide, Mrs M Wans, appointed at first one day a week and later extended to five afternoons a week. The school was accepted into the local State School's Sports Association. Co-ordinators were Mrs Forsythe and Mrs Laughnan.

Chapter Eleven: Administrative Changes

1975 saw Sister Joan Beech as Superior of the nuns at Dandenong, an office she held since 1947. Tragically, however, she died in office on 16 September 1978 after a short illness. That year was the final year of Sister Ann Halpin as principal of St Mary's. Her two final achievements in 1975 were the formulation of a School Policy and that obtaining of a Library Grant of \$1837. In 1976 the nuns occupied the new residence at 79 Langhorne Street, which they named Dunmoven. Sister Macnise celebrated her Golden Jubilee as a Presentation Nun. The previous year Sister Macnise was appointed back to Dandenong after her expiry of time as principal of St Kieran's school, Moe. She was earlier at Dandenong from 1930 to 1935.

In 1977 St John's College became fully co-educational, which gave the exit students of St Mary's at grade 6 level an opportunity of continuing their Catholic education at Dandenong to matriculation standard. That year Sister Jane Oldman replaced Sister Ann Halpin as principal of St Mary's.

14 August 1977 was a great day for St Mary's parish when Cardinal Knox officially opened the St Mary's Parish Centre.

After the death of Sister Joan Beech on 16 September 1978, Sister Macnise Dowling was appointed Superior of the Convent until the end of the year, when Sister Mary Kavanagh took her place.

At the end of the second school term in 1978, Sister Jane Oldman relinquished her post as principal of St Mary's and Sister Patricia Hickman took her place in the third term. She was the last Presentation Nun to be principal of St Mary's School since its foundation in 1912.

In January 1979 the administration of St Mary's School was handed over to a lay person for the first time in the history of the school. The person was Mr Peter Slate. He carried on the Catholic tradition of education, ably initiated by the nuns for 67 years. The number on roll at the time was 419. Mrs Carmel McGrath was vice-principal.

Early during his principalship, Mr Slate revised and updated the school policy and introduced the Credit Co-operative Banking at the school. The school authorities in Dandenong added two new classrooms, a library and a resource centre to the school shortly after. Mr Slate is also credited with introducing computers into the school. Catechetics was given a boost in 1979 with the appointment of Sister Helen Carboon to the staff. Besides being a classroom teacher, she was also the religion co-ordinator, a position she held until December 1986. One other Sister, Sister Macnise, was also at the school on a part-time basis helping the children the required special assistance.

Peter Slate recorded this at the end of his first year as principal: 'I wish to record my appreciation for the support, tolerance, and goodwill afforded my by all. Monsignor

Walsh is thanked particularly for the confidence he has shown and the autonomy he has encouraged in the operation of the school. As ecclesiastical head of the Parish he has “trusted his arm” in my appointment. I appreciate this “act of faith” and will continue to support his efforts as long as mine are required’.

When the Endeavour Hills’ school opened in February 1981, the attendance at St Mary’s dropped from 500 to 310, giving the teachers and pupils more room to utilise the amenities that were on hand for a sound and modern education program.

It is on record that at this time the Grade 6 camp to Phillip Island was on the list of school activities. Peter Slate wrote in the 18 March 1981 newsletter: ‘last week the two grade 6 teachers, Sr Helen and Mr Mark Florence trundled off to Phillip Island with 57 Grade 6 children ... we swam, we did exercises, and after lunch we moved off in various directions to a multitude of activities ... On Thursday, came the challenge of a 2 ¼ hours strenuous uphill climb around Cape Woolamai. At night we were treated to the Penguin Parade. Friday turned out to be disastrous as regards weather, however, with everyone pitching in, we had a great afternoon – playing games, having a sing-a-long and doing the limbo. We finished our 3 days with Mass and tea ... the meals were great; the kitchen staff were cheerful ... the children were friendly and polite. The parents who helped and supported us were terrific. To one and all – Thanks’.

Peter Slate continued as principal of St Mary’s school until the beginning of 1983 when he submitted his resignation to Monsignor Walsh. Mark Florence, the senior teacher at the school was acting principal till the end of the term. Mrs Faye Chandley, another senior teacher, applied for the position of principal and she occupied the position from the beginning of the second term.

It must be placed on record that during Peter Slate’s term of office his influence in the school was remarkable. His teaching philosophy was expressed in the newsletter of 9 February 1982: ‘This school is a dominant influence in your child’s life – it can be a great help in raising your children, in giving them basic skills, vital character training and most importantly, this school can introduce your child to a creative and national philosophy through the Good News of the Gospels’.

Mrs Chandley’s position as principal was ratified that year and she has continued as such up to the present. Under her jurisdiction the school has continued to co-operate as a source of instruction in the field of Religion and Academics.

Although since 1979 the nuns had no direct jurisdiction over St Mary’s school, their influence over the catholic education of the children of the parish continues. Sister Helen Carboon was the last full time teaching Sister at the primary school, a position she vacated in December 1986. As catechetics co-ordinator she followed the tradition of her predecessors in Dandenong, who, as early as 1912, engaged in a program of religious instruction for children attending non-Catholic schools. Even at weekends they visited the other parishes and brought to the children the message of the Gospel. Sister Helen

did the same in the parish of Dandenong and her influence over the children has been remarkable. Sister Macnise was part-time teacher at the school until 1987.

In 1982 the Sisters of the Dandenong Community issued the following Mission Statement which speaks for itself: 'We, Sisters of the Dandenong Community, serve the Church by our interest, support and encouragement of each other in community and by serving in the Parish areas of Dandenong, North Dandenong, Doveton, Narre Warren North, and Keysborough, through Secondary and Primary teaching, Catechetics, care of families, visitation, Youth work, special ministry to Nursing Homes – by organising, enabling, encouraging school staffs; by being available to parents and students, from these and other parishes in the region; through our commitment to the Gospel we seek to lead these to an awareness of their self-worth and their potential as children of God. In all of these we try to give priority to those most in need – those who have a struggle to survive because they are spiritually or materially poor.'

Chapter Twelve: St Mary's Today

1983 was the centenary of the parish of Dandenong, previously part of the Brighton Mission and in 1883 constituting the Dandenong Mission, the forerunner of the Parish of Dandenong. The 'Centenary History' published in 1983 recorded this: 'Looking back over the past 100 years, we at St Mary's have been obviously blessed by the quality and dedication of our spiritual leaders. Were it not so, St Mary's would not today be the strong religious family that this year enters on its second century. With God's blessing much has already been achieved' (Foreword). Since the time Dandenong existed, the priests in charge had intentions of opening a school, but the paucity of numbers among the children and distance precluded any such intention. There were, in the whole of the Dandenong Roads Board area in 1883, only 300 people and the establishment of a school was not warranted. However, when in 1912, Father John Gleeson, the parish priest, opened St Mary's school, his vision of the future was justified; for in 1983, when Monsignor Brian Walsh was parish priest of Dandenong, the number of children attending school/s rose from 75 to almost 2000 in the school's 75 years of existence.

When the last Sister principal handed over the reins of the school to a lay person in 1979 an era of religious administration had passed; but fittingly, in December 1986, Father Guelen, the incumbent parish priest, told the Grade 6 students at their graduation dinner that 'a tribute must be paid to the Presentation Nuns for their dedicated work over the past 75 years' and added 'by their example and love for children they prepared the way for St Mary's to be efficiently conducted by the laity'. Mrs Faye Chandley, the present principal, with the co-operation of her loyal staff, continues the tradition established by the nuns, in so much that today, as in 1912, students from the state system seek admission to St Mary's Catholic School.

The principal, Mrs Chandley, extended in 1984 the teaching of the three R's to other subjects designed to give the children of the parish an education suited to the modern age of electronics and international social attributes. Music has always been the forte at St Mary's ever since its inception. Even today music takes pride of place on the school's yearly program as evidenced by its regular participation in local music festivities.

The computer programme introduced by Peter Slate still continues to function and is a popular activity with the senior children. In 1985 Mrs Chandley made available to the students the latest in Maths Education by the introduction of calcumatics – the teaching of maths using the LCD calculator. Classes were taken by a former Education Department principal, Mr George Thompson, who visited the school at first once a week and then twice a week. Starting off with grades 5 and 6 in 1985, it was extended to grade 4 in 1986 and to grade 3 in 1987. An empirical study of the programme has shown the enormous benefit of this form of maths teaching to the children in as much as it has helped them to understand mathematical concepts through visual understanding.

When in August 1985 Monsignor Brian Walsh was appointed National Director of the Papal visit to Australia, Father Anthony Guelen was assigned to the parish of Dandenong as parish priest. Under his guidance, Mrs Chandley extended the school's extracurricular activities such as domestic science, Book Week, library practice, music workshops, swimming, sports, mathematics seminars and school fetes. Highlights of the year were, of course, the traditional school concert and the grade 6 graduation.

The school was renamed St Mary's Primary School early in 1980. Mrs Chandley also reintroduced the school badge, which lay defunct since the St Mary's senior girls joined up with St John's Regional College complex. The Motto 'Aeterna non caduca' is now the Primary School Motto – meaning 'Not transient but eternal'.

End of the road

The last link the school had with the Presentation Sisters was severed when Sister Macnise retired from active service from the school on 16 September 1987. She taught at St Mary's from 1930 to 1935 and again from 1975 to 1987. In 1985 she won the Telecom Award of Australia run by the *Dandenong Journal* for her service in the education of children. Mrs Chandley said on that occasion: 'Sister Macnise is a most fascinating lady. She is such a gentle, loving person. She does so many things for the others in a quiet, unassuming way. We all love her.'

Sister Macnise came to Australia from her home town in Ireland, County Kerrie, Tralee, in 1923 to join the Presentation Nuns at Windsor. She is the daughter of William Dowling and Nora O'Connor. She taught at several schools in Victoria and was principal of St Mary's school, Hampton, St Anthony's, Glenhuntly and St Kieran's school, Moe. In all her teaching career she has seen the transformation of teaching aids from blackboard and chalk to cuisenaire rods, wireless, TV and videos. She said, 'My teaching life has been happy and fulfilling, and I have had lots of fun'. When she left St Mary's for the last time by car, the students and teachers of St Mary's Primary School lined the street to bid her a fond farewell. They waved, threw streamers and chanted 'For she's a jolly good fellow' to a surprised Sister Macnise. 'Oh dear,' she said, I tried to leave quietly without a fuss. I left a note saying goodbye on the blackboard at school and thought that would be the end of it'. Sister Macnise: Thanks.

And so with the last of the Sisters leaving St Mary's, the old convent school had to be pulled down to make room for 'houses for the elderly'. That was the end of the road for the first St Mary's school built in 1912. In the last week of September 1987, there was a final silence on the grounds where once children's voices echoed with joys of laughter.

Epilogue

In concluding the story of St Mary's school let me quote the following from the Centenary History of the Dandenong Parish, 1883–1983:

Today's impressive Catholic education system in and around the Parish of St Mary's is a far cry from the first humble 'wattle and daub' Catholic school that Fr Patrick opened at Eumemmerring in 1858 with Daniel Cusack as its first teacher. We in this parish should thank God for the blessing of the Presentation Sisters. Their dedicated and selfless lives have surely contributed immeasurably to the life and growth of the Church in this district. We should be grateful, too, to the lay teachers who are making such an important contribution alongside the Sisters and Brothers.

St Mary's School ... Ad Multos Annos

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References and background information have been obtained from:

- *A Parish Carved from the Bush* (1983), Greg Dickson
- *Adventures in Faith* (Presentation Sisters), Kathleen Dunlop Kane
- Municipal Directories made available by Dandenong City Council
- City of Dandenong – Handbook 1978/79
- 'Bro. Amedy: This is Your Life' – G Thompson
- Past copies of *The Eagle* supplied by St John's Regional College Library
- Nano Nagle – William B Creede, C.Ss.R, Ballarat

St Mary's School Song

We'll rally now around our flag that sparkles blue and gold;
To it we'll pledge our loyalty with all our love untold.
When dangers, trials, or worry do fill our hearts with fear,
On this our school we'll place our trust – our own St Mary's dear.

Dear St Mary's! To us forever be
A shining light to guide us onward to victory.
We'll strive for peace and freedom, for justice in this world,
We'll march along together beneath our flag unfurled.

We'll rally now around our flag that sparkles blue and gold;
To it we'll pledge our loyalty with all our love untold.
When dangers, trials, or worry do fill our hearts with fear,
On this our school we'll place our trust – our own St Mary's dear.