

6

The School Council

It is hard to trace the first cause of anything, as it is an idea that someone has, which is gradually accepted by others. The first wish for a Presbyterian Church School in Geelong might have been that of a minister or parent but, when the time was suitable, there emerged one man, Mr John Pettitt, who convened the first meeting and who gave many years of service to the young school as Chairman of the council.

The first record of the proposed establishment of Morongo appeared in the minutes of the Presbytery of Geelong in 1913.

Mr Pettitt's notice of motion was then considered and his motion seconded by Dr McPhee. It was decided that the following council be appointed, with power to add to their number, to consider the possibilities in connection with the proposal for the establishment of a Presbyterian Ladies' College in Geelong, the council to consist of the four City Ministers, Messrs C. Shannon, D. F. Griffiths, H. B. Gibb, J. A. Laird, F. J. Leary, W. C. Robertson, W. Anderson, Dr. McPhee and J. Pettitt. Mr Pettitt, Convener.

Extracted from the Presbytery Minutes, 29.4.1913,
by Me, Robert M. Fergus, Clerk.

The first meeting of the council was held in the Guild Hall, Geelong, on the 27th June, 1913. The minutes read as follows:

The Chairman referred to the want of a Presbyterian Ladies' College and the desirability of having one established without delay. After a general conversation on the subject, it was decided on the motion of the chairman, seconded by Dr McPhee, 'That it is desirable that a Presbyterian Ladies' College be established in Geelong'.

The convener intimated that with a view to this meeting, enquiries for information had been sent to Dr McFarland, Master of Ormond College, Mr S. Littlejohn, Principal of Scotch College, Melbourne, and Mr Wm. Gray, Principal of P.L.C., East Melbourne. Their replies, which were very full, were read. The information was gratefully welcomed by the committee and, on the motion of Mr Shannon, seconded by Mr Leary, the letters were received and the three Principals cordially thanked for their information. The secretary was requested to ascertain their minds especially in regard to which would be better, a lady or a gentleman as Principal.

After comparing the information to hand, it was suggested that a start might be made with the College in rented premises, before undertaking the building of a college for ourselves.

It was agreed that members should make enquiries as to land and buildings suitable for a college.

On the motion of Mr Shannon, Seconded by Mr Griffiths, the meeting was adjourned till 7.45 p.m. Friday 4th July, 1913. Closed with Benediction.

John Pettitt. 4.7.13.

At the next meeting, reports were given on a number of sites and from these, Griffiths' paddock, Mr McMillan's house and land and Harvey's property were to be inspected. Mr McMillan declined to sell, Griffiths' paddock was now for sale by public auction and Harvey's property proved unsuitable. The committee decided to buy Griffiths' paddock for £6,000 and to form a company issued with a share capital not less than £15,000, divisible into shares of about £50 each.

The Geelong City Council then offered the Grammar School, which it owned, and this was considered, as well as 'Bell Park Estate', 'The Heights', and Mrs White's paddock, 'St Helens', 'Raith', Dr Moreton's and some properties in Belmont. However, at the next meeting, the Rev. C. Neville reported that he had interviewed Miss Harris, Principal of the Newtown Ladies' College, who was considering giving up her school and who desired that the Presbyterian Church should take it over.

A valuation of goodwill was estimated at £150, equipment at £108 and buildings at £1275. Later, the property 'Roslyn' was offered for £3,000 and three cottages adjoining Roslyn with a frontage to Elizabeth Street, were offered for £1050.

An Advisory Board assisted the committee in the selection of a principal and comprised Miss Hamilton, Toorak College, Dr J. P. Wilson, Mr W. Gray, Principal P.L.C. Melbourne. Several applications were considered but the Board's choice was distinctly in favour of Miss Gertrude Pratt, M.A., Principal of Girton College, Bendigo. She was written to and she accepted the position, the appointment being for a period of five years.

So by means of two or three meetings and much work in between, the school had begun. Thoughts then began to turn from property to environment as these suggestions noted for future consideration shows:

1. That ladies be appointed to future councils.
2. That we give the Principal a free hand and suggest that she keep her hand upon everything in the College.
3. That we introduce the Presbyterian element into the college at the commencement by the appointment of a Chaplain who shall give Scripture lessons every day
4. That the name of the college in addition to Geelong P.G.C., and Preparatory School be 'St Margarets'.
5. That we should take great care in the selection of a suitable housekeeper. She should be well educated, of good social standing, musical, of bright disposition . . .
6. That there was in existence an Old Collegians' Association in connection with Miss Harris's School. This Association might be the basis for a P.L.C. Old Collegians' Association in Geelong.

Details of early financial struggles do not belong to a brief account such as this, though there is some interest in the comparison of prices in the twenties with those of today.

The council struggled to raise the money to buy new land for the future school and the Rev. C. Neville had a good response locally, while the Rev. Farquhar Chisholm made a prolonged effort to raise funds throughout Victoria.

News of the future purchase soon spread and it seems that anyone with a spare paddock offered it to the school, and, judging from some of the prices quoted, some of these offers were not entirely philanthropic. All offers had to be considered, and numerous inspections must have been time-consuming for the council. Eventually, the land at Herne Hill proved most suitable, but the decision was delayed until some members of council pressed for the purchase of the land. Finally the documents were drawn up for signing on 17th December, 1923.

Despite the somewhat eulogistic account of the site given at speech night in 1923, it appears that not everyone was happy with this move. A scapegoat was produced—the fall out dust from ‘a nearby industry’ and fears grew for the health of the pupils. Some attempt was made to provide a factual basis for the fears and two men from Melbourne University were brought to Geelong to test air pollution but, in fact, the whole scheme was at a standstill. Then, out of the blue, on 23rd February, 1926, at the meeting of the Building and Sites committee, the Reverend Mr Chisholm reported that he had secured from Senator J. F. Guthrie an option for a fortnight for Morongo. The cost was £30,000 payable 25 per cent in cash, the balance payable in ten years at six per cent. The total area of the property was 103 acres. His idea was that 80 acres to the east of the homestead should be sold as building blocks in the future and so the council would recoup the money expended. Morongo was inspected that afternoon. The Building and Sites committee were unanimously favourable, provided it could be financed, and the committee stressed the desirability of retaining the whole of Morongo. Alterations were expected to cost a further £15,000 so a campaign was planned to approach all likely donors. The proper course would have been to raise the money before purchasing the property but the council was in a dilemma. It had to decide quickly in the matter as the land was desired by a syndicate for subdivision at the same figure. In addition, it was believed that the Roman Catholic Church would gladly buy it, for it was the outstanding site in the district. However, until substantial endowments were forthcoming, the council was assuming a burden that would be difficult to carry.

On 1st March, 1926, the Education Board sent the Moderator General, Right Rev. James Crookston, Rev. W. Borland and Mr L. K. McNab to inspect Morongo and to advise the council in the matter of purchase. A special meeting of the council followed the inspection. The minutes record the following:

Rev. W. Borland, Convener of the Education Board, congratulated the council on the position it was in. The original site at Herne Hill was an admirable one, though he quite agreed that it was an extremely difficult matter to conquer the public opinion that condemned it. Morongo was, in his opinion, superior in every way.

He believed that if the college could be established there, it would be the finest Girls' School in the State and likely to prove a credit to the council and Church. He saw no reason why the college could not be endowed if the proposition were carefully financed.

The Geelong Presbytery also expressed its approval of the purchase of Morongo and so the decision to buy was made. Members of the council and friends advanced the monies necessary to pay the deposit and Mrs Guthrie rebated \$2,000 as a gift. The pupils rapidly increased in number until in 1929, the enrolment was nearly 200 with 67 boarders.

The depression years were yet to come and with them came a period of crisis for Morongo. It would be all too easy to dismiss these years as a period of slight difficulty and so create a delusion of a school that has progressed from strength to strength. To do this would be to deny the school council the recognition of its finest effort. The following extract was written by a council member (unfortunately unknown) when a source of finance was being sought to avert the closing of the school. The desperation of the financial situation is all too obvious.

By 1931, the depression was in full force, and the pupils decreased in number. The avenues for outside financial help were closed and the council experienced great difficulty in paying its way. Every possible economy was practised. Every member of staff had his or her salary reduced, and in succeeding years when increases were due to the staff, they still worked efficiently and loyally on reduced remuneration. Boarders dropped to 35 and there was also a substantial drop in the number of day girls. Country people could not afford to send many of the girls who were destined to be educated at Morongo.

One thing is quite certain—that Morongo started with wonderful prospects and, had not the depression come, it would have been exceedingly successful today. The council's interest is about £50 per week. In the last three years, members of the council have, at great personal sacrifice to themselves, given large sums of money in order to maintain the school.

During the last two years, Mrs Guthrie's interest has been gradually getting into arrears until today, there is £1500 overdue. The interest on the second mortgage has been paid on due date. All other expenses, rates and taxes have been paid.

Even this year, members of council have paid nearly £300 towards the interest while others, to whom large sums are due, have refunded their interest. Nobody could have been more generous than the council, who, in addition to giving a great amount of their time to the establishment and carrying on of the college, have given to the point of sacrifice in the matter of money.

Members of council have stated that their resources are so depleted that they cannot give any further substantial help at the present time. It is inconceivable that the college should close, but the council cannot face the immediate future alone. At present, they are defaulters to the tune of £1500. It would be impossible to sell any of the land to advantage now as real estate is a drug on the market. To continue the school, it will be essential for £2,000 to be made by way of grant and the active cooperation of the Church in the matter of securing more pupils for the coming year.

Unless some help can be given in this way, the council will be faced with the alternative of abandoning the college, as it cannot possibly continue to provide the money to make up deficits.

If the present difficult period can be met, there is no doubt that the financial position will be definitely improved in the future.

In the council notes for the Lucernian of 1934, the Centenary year of Victoria, the writer makes these comments:

When Morongo's centenary is celebrated and the first hundred years of its history is written, the chronicler will undoubtedly feature the amazing vision and sacrifice of the council who have controlled it to the present time.

As all its friends know, Morongo, in common with most other schools, fell upon evil days in the matter of finance and, for the past four years, it has required much courage and determination by the council who, with princely personal generosity have enabled the school to weather the storm.

Happily the worst is over and calmer waters are being encountered. Through a rearrangement of school indebtedness, finalised in October, the council has been relieved of £5,500 of its debt. This was partly possible by a splendid donation of £2500 by members of the council.

The whole story of the council's support reads like a romance and Presbyterians generally, and the Church in particular, should be proud of their achievement in soundly establishing Morongo in times of grave difficulty.

The silver lining can be seen clearly and there is no doubt about the future of the school.

The writer was not a member of the council or such a statement could not have been written, but it is one with which all those interested in Morongo will agree.

From here on, the school prospered, slowly and then steadily. The tone of the council reports reflect the change from depression to the boom years of the fifties. Statements such as:

The council asks all former pupils and indeed present pupils as well, to lose no opportunity of securing new girls for Morongo.

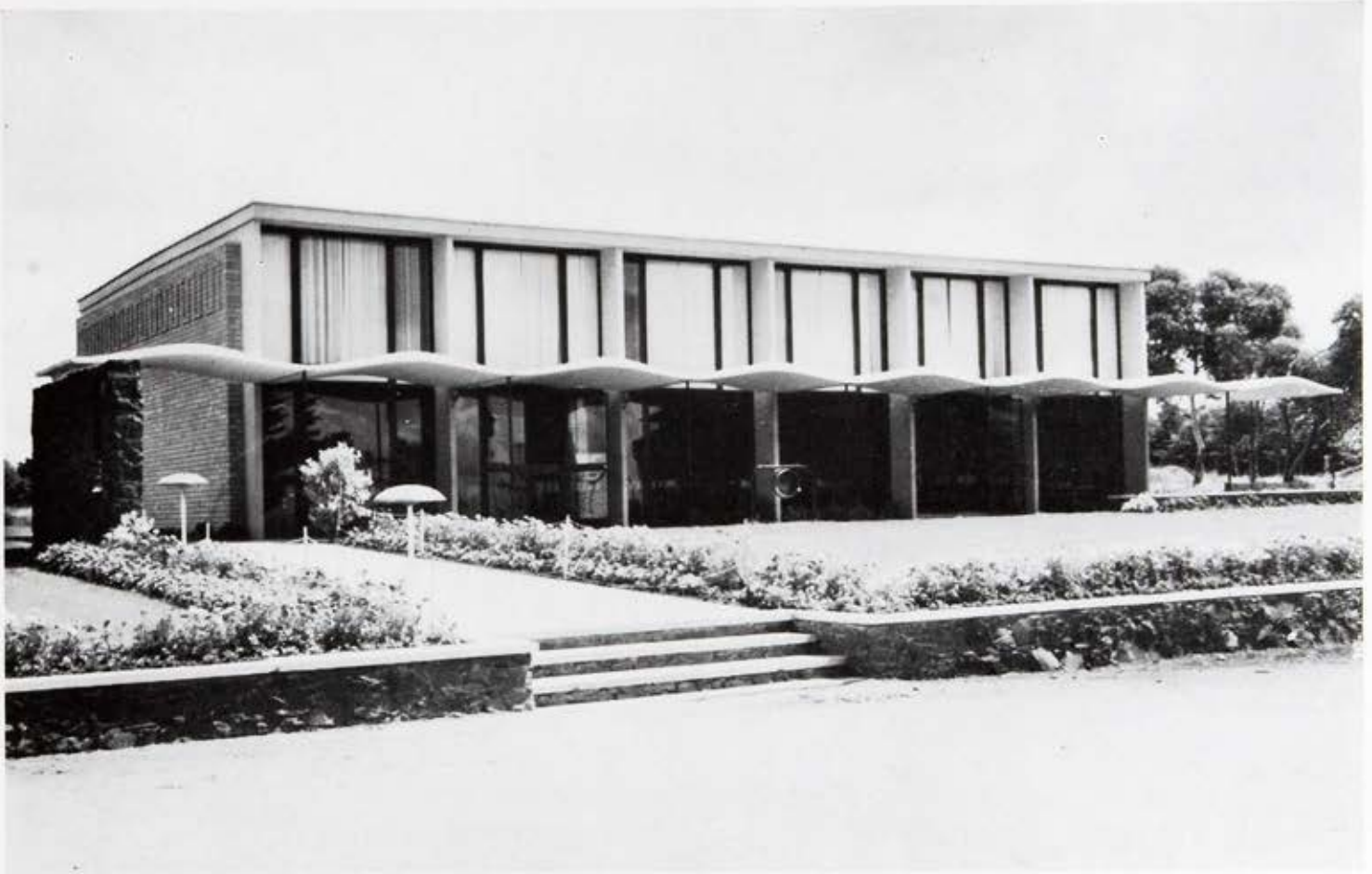
The writer feels justified in appealing to all interested in Morongo to support the council in every possible way, in enlisting their active cooperation in securing additional pupils.

change to:

At each council meeting, Miss Shaw announces that, since the last meeting, she has had to refuse enrolments for an incredible number of years ahead.

Of course, no school with plans for the modernisation of old buildings, the erection of new buildings and the provision of today's teaching aids is without its share of financial headache. No doubt today's council has its worries, but perhaps these are best left to 'the chronicler—when Morongo's centenary is celebrated', as are the praises due to the generous public-spirited men of today's council.

The following list comprises the improvements made to Morongo since 1926,



The Founders Dining Hall—1960

The Library—1962





The Lucy Shaw House—1968

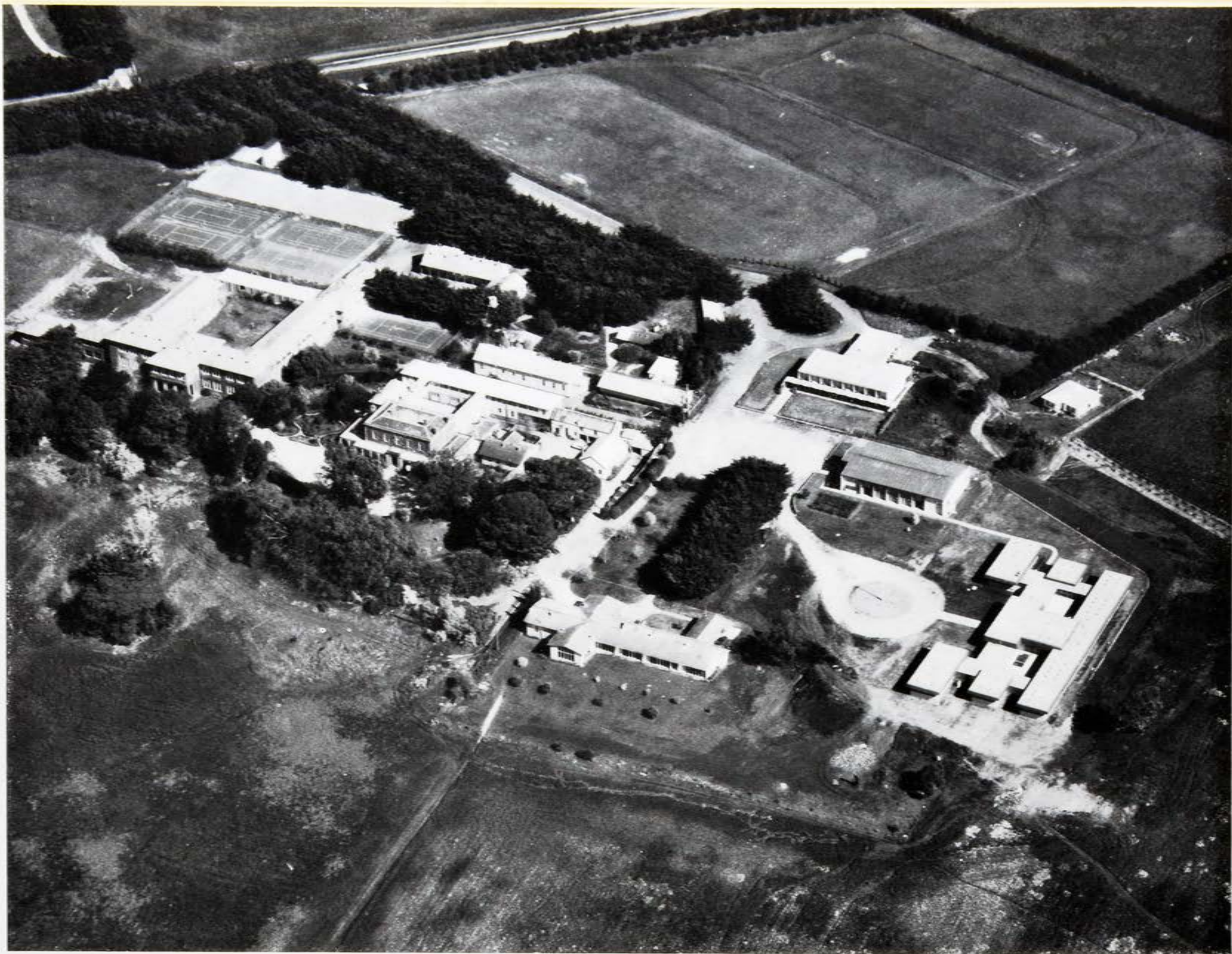




Biology Laboratory—1968

Class Room—1968





Aerial view of the School

and shows the continual work of the School council. A glance through it shows those lean years and the years of war and post-war restrictions. The photographs accompanying this chapter may be restricted to the aesthetically pleasing buildings such as the Gertrude Pratt Hall, but to the Old Collegian who first occupied 'Dudley' or 'The Chalet' their mention may be just as important.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| 1926 | New School block. | 1953 | New oval. Sun room for Hospital. |
| 1927 | | 1954 | |
| 1928 | New road. 500 cypress trees. | 1955 | Extra classroom, boarders' sitting room. |
| 1929 | Additional cubicles. | 1956 | |
| 1930 | Golf links resown. | 1957 | New water service. |
| 1931 | | 1958 | |
| 1932 | | 1959 | Gertrude Pratt Hall, four classrooms, extensions to Chalet. Old hall equipped as gymnasium. Small bus purchased. |
| 1933 | | 1960 | Dining Hall and Kitchen block, old dining room converted into dormitory and flat. |
| 1934 | | 1961 | Gift of Staff House in Newtown from Mrs G. H. Moreton. |
| 1935 | Nursery section in Elizabeth Street. | 1962 | Library extensions. Gas heating in school. |
| 1936 | | 1963 | Original old hall and wooden rooms removed to plantation. New cloak and shower rooms. Top oval. |
| 1937 | Improved sports oval, water storage, renovating Lodge. | 1964 | Science block, classrooms, staff rooms, extension of Bursar's office, book room, house for domestic staff. Shack converted to dormitories. |
| 1938 | 'Dudley' built under 'cubes'. Larger kitchens. | 1965 | Class room. New bus. |
| 1939 | | 1966 | Third oval. Trees planted along Ballarat Road. |
| 1940 | | 1967 | Lucy Shaw House for Senior Boarders. |
| 1941 | | 1968 | Three new classrooms and a Biology Laboratory. Lucy Shaw House opened by Moderator. Basket Ball Courts sealed. New bus. |
| 1942 | | | |
| 1943 | | | |
| 1944 | Classrooms, music room under cubicles, Day girls' locker room, new staff rooms, hospital unit, hall bought and removed to Morongo. | | |
| 1945 | | | |
| 1946 | Man's room, resurfaced main drive, sealed back drive. | | |
| 1947 | Chalet bought and re-erected, laundry improved, old hall converted to two classrooms. | | |
| 1948 | | | |
| 1949 | | | |
| 1950 | | | |
| 1951 | | | |
| 1952 | Junior School opened. | | |