

# History of Thomastown Primary School

The Thomastown area was settled in the 1840s, it was predominately settled by the Wesleyans and the Lutherans.



In Victoria in 1848 there were two systems of schooling.

The National School Board—these schools were not affiliated with a specific religion.

The Denominational School Board—these schools were run and organized by a specific church and they taught their own religion.

The land where Thomastown Primary School is situated today was sold on 24th November 1848.

In 1853 Francis Thomas, a Wesleyan offered one acre of this land to the church, the front half for the building of a school house which was also to be used for church services on Sunday, and the rear for a cemetery. The church paid 100 pounds for the land. So the Wesleyans applied to the Denominational Schools Board for a grant towards the building of a schoolhouse. It was granted, so in November 1854 the school was completed. It was a timber building with an iron roof.

On January 1st 1855 the first official headmaster was appointed by the board.

The school was called Keilbundora Wesleyan School, and was a co-educational school, with 23 boys and 22 girls enrolled. The schools were given government aid and the pupils had to pay fees. However it was not compulsory to attend school in Victoria, and many children were expected to work on the farms and help the family take their produce to market. The Thomastown area at this time was primarily market gardens and farming.

There was no planning as to where schools were built and some children had no school in their area at all. There was no transport and children had to walk or ride a horse to school. The government was subsidizing both of the school systems and it was expensive and ineffective. After much debate and lobbying, The Common School Board of Education was formed in September 1862.

As a result of this, all existing schools were put in alphabetical order and numbered. Some schools were closed and others were opened in areas that had no schools. Each school had a representative on this Board.

National Schools were automatically accepted into the system, but Denominational Schools had to provide four hours per day of secular education (two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon). The subjects to be taught for those four hours were reading, writing and arithmetic; in order to qualify for aid under the Common Schools Act.

The school complied and was accepted into the system. The name of the school was changed to Thomastown School No. 631.

The Common School report of December 1863 showed that 23 boys, 14 girls and 8 destitute children were enrolled and the curriculum being taught was the 3 Rs.

In Victoria in 1872, The Secular Education Act was passed.

A central system of education was established known as the Minister for Public Instruction, latter to be known as the Education Department. This system was to be financed by taxes.

The act stated that aid to denominational schools was to stop. It was compulsory for children from six years of age to fifteen years of age to attend school for sixty days each half year and that education was to be provided free. If children did not attend school, their parents could be fined or gaoled.

The passing of this act caused many Denominational schools to close. As a result the Education Department was approached by Reverend Dubourg in May 1873 to buy the school and half an acre of land. The school was purchased on the 28th October 1875.

When the new head teacher, Mr. J. Drummond, arrived, he wrote to the department complaining of the bad state the school was in and stating that it needed extensive repairs. A building inspector, who was sent by the department, reported that it was inadvisable to attempt to repair the building and that a new brick building be built as soon as possible.

The new building was completed in May 1877, but there were still problems: the chimney smoked, there was no path to walk on, the water tank leaked and the water was unfit for drinking due to the number of sparrows that nested on the roof. Parents signed a petition in July 1886 for the connection of Yan Yean water to the school, but the department refused saying it was too costly.



Photo: 1883

During the depression years of 1891-1894 there was no money for school repairs, maintenance, or teacher training; and the department was suggesting the closure of Thomastown school. The head teacher at Epping school No. 1477 wrote to the department to have Thomastown closed and the children sent to his school. Fortunately there were 22 students enrolled at Thomastown with 5 more to be enrolled, and the fact that

Epping was 3 miles away, it was considered too far for the children to walk.

In December 1900 just before Federation, a special committee was formed at the school known as the "State School Flag Committee", to purchase a flag pole and flag. This was the beginning of fund raising at the school. From this time school assemblies were conducted on Monday mornings outside in front of the flag pole. A ceremony to raise the flag was performed, and the boys saluted the flag and recited the oath:

" I love god and my country:

I honour the flag:

I will serve the King:

And cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the laws. Then the national anthem was played (God save the King). This continued into the 1950s & 60s but the anthem was then God save the Queen. Elizabeth 2nd was on the throne.

When the first World War began in 1914, water was still not connected to the school and it was still regarded as too expensive. No maintenance was done on the school building and it was in need of repair. It was also too small now, and the school needed to be extended.

The school curriculum was now more interesting: singing, poetry, physical education, drawing and nature study had been introduced. The children would go on a walk around the area and on returning to the classroom would write and draw about the animals and plants they had observed. Children did not wear school uniforms, lessons were written with chalk on a slate board. The furniture in the classroom were wooden desks that faced a blackboard at the front of the room.

Finally in July 1925 the students moved into the Mechanics Hall in Spring street, until September that year, so renovations to the school building could be completed. On May 15th 1929, water was finally supplied to the school. The MMBW meter was connected on 17th October 1933 (53 years since the 1st petition).

During the years of the 2nd World War, schools were busy raising money for the Red Cross and The War Relief Fund. Air raid shelters were built in most schools and Thomastown Primary school's shelter was dug in 1942 by parents and locals. The children knitted scarves and socks to be sent to soldiers overseas.

Electricity was connected to the school in 1945.

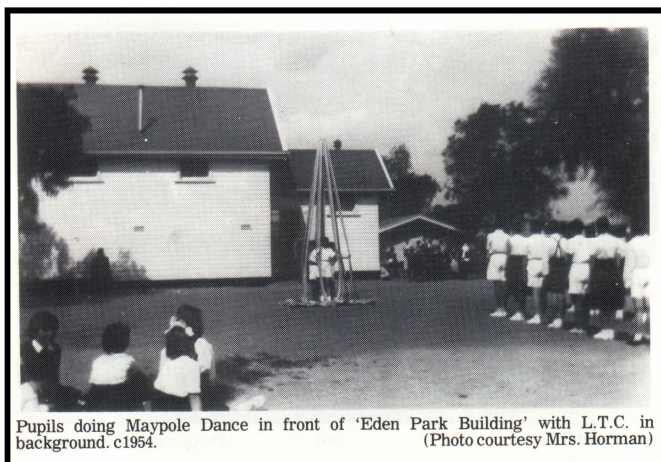
Children now used pencils and paper to do their lessons and as they went to the higher grades they used pens with nibs that had to be dipped into inkwells which were lowered into the top of the desks. When they finished writing, they would have to press blotting paper over the writing to dry it. Children used a school reader that they were given at the beginning of the year and they used it till the end of the year. In most schools, this was the only text book they had.

Free milk was given to primary school children to help keep teeth and bones healthy.

Lunch was usually a sandwich wrapped in a paper bag, or they went home for lunch.

There was not much play equipment in schools, so most games played were gender driven; marbles, football and cricket for boys, and hopscotch, skipping, ring-a-ring-a-rose and jacks for girls.

After the war suburban development grew rapidly and in 1950, 51 students were enrolled at the school. This meant that the little



Pupils doing Maypole Dance in front of 'Eden Park Building' with L.T.C. in background. c.1954.  
(Photo courtesy Mrs. Horman)

red brick building was very overcrowded.

In 1953, 139 students were enrolled at Thomastown, so children had to be transported to Clifton Hill to attend school. The parents were concerned about this, and so asked the Education Department if the Eden Park school building (which had not been used since 1943 when the school was closed) be erected on the Thomastown school grounds. Also in this year the Education Department purchased 6 acres of land to enlarge the school grounds. The result was that at the start of the 1954 school year, the Eden Park building and a timber building that consisted of 2 classrooms, an office, and a staffroom were ready for use by staff and students. The new building was officially opened on the 16th October 1954 by the Education Minister Mr. A.E. Shepherd M.L.A.

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In 1963—9 classrooms, 2 staffrooms, and a staff toilet had been added to the new building. Student enrollment was 548.

In 1964—545 students were enrolled and 40 students were deferred due to lack of room.

In 1969—a new library was officially opened, and 3 portable classrooms also added, because student enrollment was now 663.

In 1971—student enrollment had reached 752. The new school now had 16 classrooms and 2 portables.

From 1972—1976 Student enrollments remained at about 500 so the brick school building, the Eden Park building and the new school building were all in use.

**Significant dates:**

1951—First mothers club was organized at the school. It's function was to operate the school canteen and fund raise.

1965—Thomastown East P.S. opened

1966—The school football team was formed, they played matches against other schools during half time at VFL games at Carlton.

1968—The Education Department purchased the land in front of the cemetery to allow access from Stewart Street. It is used as a car park today.( Picture on opposite page shows the car park )

1970—Lalor Park P.S. opened.

1972—Lalor East & Thomastown West P.S. opened.

1974—Lalor West P.S. opened.

1976—Mothers club ceased due to lack of support.

1977—Thomastown School Council was formed. The Eden Park school building was destroyed by fire, but the

rest of the school was untouched.

1978—The school offices were relocated to the centre of the school opposite the library. On the morning of July 13th 1978 all the school records were relocated to these new offices. That evening the school was destroyed by fire, believed to be arson. Within a week , 13 portable classrooms were erected and classes recommenced.

The school council formed a fund raising committee, the mothers club reformed and fund raising forged ahead.

In June 1980 the Education Department confirmed a new school would be built at Thomastown. The building was to consist of a main core of offices, a staff room, a multi purpose room, a library and canteen. With ten classrooms and store rooms it was expected to be completed in 1981.



1982—The new school building was ready for commencement of the school year. It was officially opened on 23rd March 1985, by Dr. Norman Curry, Director General of Education.

The school colours before the fire were gold and purple, and the school as yet did not have an emblem. As can be seen in the picture below, the wearing of a uniform was not compulsory. Some children did and some didn't. These pictures were taken in 1973.

Since 1985 the school enrollment has remained stable. It has been around 200 plus until 2003 when it was 197 and in 2004 it was 179. Today we have an enrollment of 205.

This is because many of the people who settled here after the war are still living here. So the population in the area has now aged. The size of the average family has also decreased and the new schools that were built to alleviate the burden on Thomastown primary are still in operation today. They opened in the 1970s as previously stated.

The schools being 1. Thomastown West No. 4999

2. Lalor North No. 5035

3. Lalor East No. 4976

4. Lalor West No. 5074.

During the 1950s Thomastown was home to a variety of mainly European nationalities. As a result, during the 1970s the Education Department organized a Migrant Education Centre at the school in the evenings to teach adults to read and write. We also employed specialized teachers for the children while they were at school.

The adult classes ended 1979 –80 as other schools or centres were set up for Greek migrants in community settings.

Now in 2005 The Education Department employs a specialist language teacher to teach our new immigrants who have settled into the Thomastown area.

The school building and grounds have remained fairly much the same over the years since the 1980s. Trees and plants have been planted and grown. In the school grounds there is now playground equipment and a rotunda for the hot days of summer.

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It wasn't until 1996 that wearing a school uniform became compulsory. It has changed in design a little over the years and is still being added to now. But it has remained the same in so much as you wear black pants, a black windcheater and a light blue polo shirt, with the school logo printed on. It is also compulsory to wear a wide brimmed hat in term 1 & 4 for UV protection.

In 2001 a new building was completed. The result was a very modern, comfortable, functional building with bright and open classrooms. The rooms have heating, air conditioning, net-worked computers, withdrawal room and internal phone communication.



**Inside a new classroom.**

Desks have been replaced with tables and chairs that can be moved and rearranged as needed, depending on what is being taught and how it is being taught. Blackboards replaced by whiteboards. Children aren't expected to sit in one place for a long time.



**The new school building was officially opened by Mr. P. Batchelor (Federal Minister for Transport, Major Projects & Ports) on Friday 24.10.2003.**