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of Quality Education
SILKWOOD STATE SCHOOL

SILKWOOD STATE SCHOOL – the Beginning

The first approach for a school at Silkwood was made by the Liverpool Creek Settlers' Association. In a letter dated Wednesday 17th April 1912, to the Under Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Brisbane. The Secretary, Mr M.J. McNamee, said the area had about fourteen children of school age, and sought information about formal application for a Provisional School. Then on Monday 6th May 1912, the Association again wrote to the Department of Public Instruction, referring by name to a proposed Liverpool Creek – Maria Creek School. This letter pointed out that there were then eighteen school-age children of parents permanently resident in the area that surveyors were engaged in the survey of the route of the North Coast Line, that the erection of central sugar mill was anticipated, and that lack of a school has led families to leave the area and others to refuse to settle.

Initial agitation for a school obviously proved fruitless, because a further letter dated Tuesday 4th November, 1913 requested that the district be included in the program of an itinerant teacher. On the bottom of this letter is an initialled comment dated Monday 8th December 1913, by a departmental officer:

“This district is on the coast, south of Mourilyan, and could not be visited by any of the present I.T.’s without undue loss of time in crossing the range. Perhaps something could be done for the district in the way of a Saturday School. I recommend ask the Secretary to give the names of families who would like to be visited, with the numbers of children, and their approximate distances from the nearest school.”

The Association sent the information requested which, although not dated, was obviously supplied in 1914. At Liverpool Creek there were families with eleven school-age children, their distances varying from sixteen to nineteen miles from the nearest school; at Maria Creek families having six school-age children, all twenty-four miles from the nearest school; and at Clump Point families with five school-age children, these being distant twenty-eight and thirty miles from the nearest school. Perhaps, when the State Government in 1914 began building a new central sugar mill at South Johnstone, rather than in its area, the Liverpool Creek Settlers' Association lost some of its original impetus.



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In any case, by 1915, it was a meeting of parents, and not the Association, that took up cudgels for a school at Silkwood. Writing to the Minister for Education on Sunday 14th February 1915, Mr A.J. Daveson, for the parents' meeting indicated that, "our member Mr Lennon who understands our district, to get a school" was being lobbied.

Political representation by parents for a school bore immediate fruit, as is evident from this report which also suggests Japoon was earlier in this field than Silkwood:

Innisfail
April 5th, 1915.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that on March 31st, I visited the Liverpool Creek district to inquire into the establishment of a school. I was instructed to make a report without waiting for the usual papers, as I was in possession of the papers dealing with a proposed school at Japoon.

The Liverpool Creek-Japoon district lies about twenty-two miles south-south-west of Innisfail and comprises the 'jungly' valleys in the basins of Liverpool and Maria Creeks. Access to these at present is by boat from Innisfail to Maria Creek, thence by the tram way which runs for thirteen miles up the main valley. The district has been sparsely settled because of the difficulty of getting produce markets. Bananas and timber have been the chief exports, the district being very rich in silky oak. The bananas are grown by Chinese.

The South Johnstone Central Mill, now in course of erection, has given an impetus to settlement. Concurrently with the Mill, the Government is constructing a tramline to connect the Maria Creek tram with the tramline recently purchased by the government between Innisfail and the South Johnstone site. This will give direct communication with Innisfail and with the South Johnstone Mill, and already land is being cleared of scrub and cane is being planted. The district will probably increase in population.

About twenty children of school age are in the neighbourhood. Eighteen of these are within walking distance. The other two live at Maria Creek Sawmill and will attend as often as possible travelling on the tram which runs daily up the valley. It is estimated that another ten pupils will be on the spot by the time the school is ready. Few of the children have attended school previously, though ten or twelve years of age.

(There was further correspondence on where the school was to be situated and the cost of purchasing the land. There was no indication of accommodation for the teacher and this did become a bone of contention in the future.)



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The letter finished with the names and ages of the children who would be attending the school.

The Silkwood State School opened for lessons on Monday 28th August 1916 with Head Teacher, Miss Hannah Hogan from Mackay who boarded the A.J. Daveson family on the southern bank of Liverpool Creek.

From the first Silkwood State School Admission Register, surnames give an indication of a cosmopolitan population even then. The list of the eleven original pupils for the first day reads: -

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Arthur William HEATON | 2. Muriel Grace DAVESON |
| 3. Betsy CUTHILL | 4. Mary CUTHILL |
| 5. James Phillip TOGNOLA | 6. Lucia BASSO |
| 7. Marina BASSO | 8. Peter BASS |
| 9. William DAVESON | 10. Alfred DAVESON |
| 11. Eta JOVER. | |

During the following fortnight ten more pupils were admitted: -

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 12. Theresa PENSAK | 13. Antonio BASSO |
| 14. Walter BOUSTEAD | 15. Annie BOUSTEAD |
| 16. Dorothy May McGAHAN | 17. Thomas Henry McGAHAN |
| 18. Lillian Kate McGAHAN | 19. Elizabeth Maud MITCHELL |
| 20. Nancy CUTHILL | 21. John Louis TOGNOLA |

The end of 1916 saw the total enrolment rise to twenty-four:-

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 22. Florence Ann WILKINSON | 23. Alice Mildred WILKINSON |
| 24. Doris Lilian WILKINSON | |



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The school grew steadily on its original site which was situated on Portion 75 which seems to be have been about a quarter of a mile past the present Imarisio residence.

Although a county map of parishes shows Portion 75, on three acres on which the school site was located, straddling both the road and the tramline, sketch maps made during the time indicate that the school was on the northern side of the road and tramway and did not really occupy three acres.

There was some discussion about this position. In those days there was a road which forded the creek at Heaton's Crossing meeting the tramline to Japoon in a right-angled T intersection where what came to be known as the "School Loop," is located in the tramline. For settlers in the vicinity of Heaton's, this road gave access to Hook Lee's Store, Henry Daveson's butcher shop, and also the School.

SILKWOOD STATE SCHOOL – the Move to a new Site

By Sunday, the 10th March 1918, when the district suffered its most furious cyclone to date, the Silkwood State School had been in operation for less than two years. Few structures survived the force of the gale. A telegram stamped "DETAINED BY INTERRUPTION" was sent to the Department in Brisbane by Miss Hogan, on Saturday 16th March. Miss Hogan was instructed to confer with the School Committee to see if temporary arrangements for carrying on could be made. In view of the extent of cyclonic devastation, it is evident that the resumption of school lessons could not be made. There were no lessons at Silkwood until Monday 16th September 1918 when Mr Kreuger took up duty. The District inspector of Schools, Mr Fowler also reported that Mr Kreuger had re-commenced school under a private house.

Although Crown approval through the Governor-in-Council was given on Thursday 9th May, 1918 for an expenditure of £595/0/0 on a new state school at Silkwood to replace that destroyed in the cyclone, it does not seem to have been very long before dissension concerning the site of the new building surfaced in the Silkwood community. On Saturday 26th October 1918, Mr Fowler wrote to the Department of Public Instruction to report on the outcome of an inquiry he had conducted concerning the site for the erection of a new school at Silkwood:

"I have the honour to report that I have held an inquiry at Silkwood on the afternoon of the 25th of October and heard what was to be said by those who are in favour of erecting the Silkwood State School on the old site, and those



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who wish to have the school erected on another site about a mile from the old site. I have seen both sites.

I recommend that the Silkwood School be re-erected on the proposed new site on the south side of Liverpool Creek. There are 41 pupils on the South Side of Liverpool Creek of school age and 16 under school age. There are 17 pupils of the North Side of Liverpool Creek of school age and 18 under school age.”

Haggling by the Department of Public Instruction over the conditions for obtaining the proposed new school site caused further delay in construction; and the division of responsibility through several government departments probably exacerbated this situation. Meanwhile instruction continued under the residence of one of the School Committee. From a letter written on Thursday 3rd April 1919 by Miss Bertha Muriel Smith, the unsuitable nature of the temporary, teaching premises is very evident; and there seems to be a lack of communication between upstairs and downstairs.

“I have the honour to report that school is being carried on here in the most objectionable circumstances.

Also, that I was under the impression that the erection of a school building was under consideration. As a result, we made shift in every way, and the children prepared for the new school year etc. By giving an entertainment, at the closing of school in December, which realized funds for the purchase of a Singer Sewing Machine, Library and Cabinets for Museum.

Our present conditions besides being very disappointing are most unpleasant in many ways --- for instance when scrubbing takes place overhead, we are greeted with a shower of filthy water, which flows through the cracks of the floor, and all books, maps etc have at once to be placed in the press after which is a cleaning process. The whole thing is deplorable, and I have felt obliged to condemn it.

The space provide is insufficient for the number of children attending – forty-two which is expected to rise to fifty very soon.”

By the time working plans and specifications of the new Silkwood School were completed by the Department of Public Instruction on Monday 19th May 1919, a detailed estimate of cost which included a concrete floor under the school and furniture etc., revealed that the expenditure of £798/0/0 would now be necessary. Obviously, work was undertaken without



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further delay because the new building on the new site was in use by Monday 30th August 1920 when an Inspector reported that the building was inadequate for the sixty-six pupils then enrolled. It was suggested that a suitable veranda be enclosed as temporary classroom accommodation.

No doubt further increases in enrolment occurred because by Wednesday 22nd June 1921, Mr William Harold Amundsen, Head Teacher, was complaining of lack of classroom space. An assistant teacher, Mr Reginald Joseph Hussey, was appointed to Silkwood by 1921; and by the end of the year approval had been granted for the erection of additions to the school. This work was commenced in 1922, and the completed building ready for occupancy on Wednesday 4th July 1923.

SILKWOOD STATE SCHOOL - Between the Wars and After

During the early 1920's when representations were regularly being made for additional classroom space at Silkwood, it also became evident that the working conditions at school were not the teacher's only problem. The school staff had much to contend with personally with teacher accommodation a major problem.

It finally came to head in October 1922 when the family with whom the Head Teacher and his Assistant lived, refused to board them any longer. After much discussion and threats from the teachers to remove themselves to Mourilyan until accommodation could be found for them.

At last, on Friday 17th August 1923, the Governor-in-Council approved erection of a Teacher's Residence for the Silkwood State School. A memorandum dated Tuesday 8th April 1924 reported that the residence at Silkwood had finally been built for a total amount of £828/14/9. After more than twelve eventful years, the prolonged saga of a school for Silkwood and a residence for teachers had come to an end.

Enrolments between the wars saw a steady growth in school numbers and also the addition of an extra building on Monday 5th February 1934.

Numbers were as follows:-	1929 - 65	1933 - 100
	1930 - 72	1934 - 103
	1931 - 89	1935 - 132
	1932 - 92	1936 - 165



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The growth of the school according to the local District Inspector was as result of “the great amount of road construction in the Silkwood district, so opening up the country for the development of the dairying and timber industries.”

The last major additions to school buildings, another classroom and a teacher’s room were also put into train at this time. These were in the course of construction at the outbreak of the Second World War. Obviously, support for Australia’s war effort prevented the spending of limited government funds on further school extensions.

According to Mrs Veronica Moriarty (nee Heaton), her father, Bill Heaton, was on the Silkwood School Committee when attempts for the school’s re-location to a site almost midway between Silkwood and Silkwood East were in progress as late as 1946.

However, at the beginning of 1948, when the Catholic Churchy opened in Silkwood the St John the Apostle and Evangelist Convent School conducted by the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, agitating for separate district state primary schools received its coup de grace. The Silkwood State School lost a significant number of its enrolment, such that buildings and playground space were now adequate for immediate and future requirements only needing regular maintenance. It was not until, the late 1970’s the age of the buildings and more modern teaching methods necessitated total school re-construction which also included a pre-school.

ORIGINAL FULL VERSION OF HISTORY written by Mr Bill McRobbie IN SILKWOOD STATE SCHOOL’s 75th anniversary book. Above version extracted and condensed by Mr Jim Ferguson.



L to R: Emil Duran, Bob Poustie, Gula Agapitos, Annie Tsakissiris, Ruth Johnson, Despa (Sam) Taifalos, Ray Heaton, Ray Thompson.