

## Centenary of Women's Suffrage: Education

**The City of Whitehorse is acknowledging the Centenary of Women's Suffrage in Victoria in 2008 with a monthly feature, provided by the Box Hill and Whitehorse Historical Societies, looking back at the achievements of Whitehorse women.**

During the 1800s and early 1900s, women with no means of financial support found themselves in a daunting situation as employment opportunities were limited and poorly paid. For women, one of the few options was to operate their own private school or to teach.

Until 1872 when the Victorian government introduced compulsory State primary-level schooling, education was provided at State-subsidised schools, in private schools or by tutors or governesses. Hundreds of small private schools operated. Prior to the introduction of the Teachers and Schools Registration Act 1905, non-government teachers and schools were not required to be registered. State secondary education was not addressed until 1905 and prior to that was obtained privately.

There was always a demand for ladies' colleges where girls could receive academic education as well as learn a range of 'accomplishments' which included singing, deportment, needlework, painting, dancing, music and languages. The balance between education and 'accomplishments' varied greatly between colleges. Many of the private schools and ladies' colleges operated from the homes of their owner-principals who were often assisted by their daughters and sisters. Some of the owner-principals were good business women who developed their schools into a saleable asset.

The female-operated private schools along with the church-affiliated ladies colleges, paved the way for the higher education of women.

### PRIVATE-VENTURE SCHOOLS

#### BANFF LADIES' COLLEGE (c1892-1914)

In 1891 Mrs Newton sold the goodwill of the school she had run in Ashted Road, Box Hill to Miss Louisa Taylor and her sisters Fanny, Rose, and Constance, who then leased 'Banff' in Albion Road and gave that name to their school. The school was located here until 1908 when it was moved to Rutland Road. It closed in 1914.



*Banff Ladies' College (c1892-1914). This photograph was taken about 1907.*

#### CHALGROVE SCHOOL (1950-1964)

This small school was opened by Miss Georgina Prior in Whitehorse Road, Box Hill and was conducted in a weatherboard building behind her home.

#### DUNDAS LADIES' COLLEGE (c1895-c1902)

Mrs Helen Sergeant was left with a large family to support following the death of her husband and she opened the Dundas Ladies' College in her family home in Whitehorse Road. She was assisted by her daughter, Adelaide.



*Dundas Ladies' College (c1895-c1902).*

#### GLADSTONE COLLEGE (1928-1941)

Mrs Hannah McCook and her husband, Rev. William McCook, opened their school in Doncaster (now Dorking) Road.

#### HORTON GIRLS' SCHOOL (1903-1946)

Miss Florence Lavers established Horton Girls' School in Oxford Street, Box Hill and she remained as principal until 1916. She was followed by Miss Olga Hay, Misses



*This photograph was taken about 1910.*

Clarice and Lilian Everard, Misses Mary and Alice Swindley, Miss Marjorie Bland, Miss Marjorie Bishop and Miss Florence Cherry.

#### ORMISTON GIRLS' SCHOOL (1848-1964)

Misses Anna and Elizabeth Singleton moved from East Melbourne to Mont Albert in 1900. They retired in 1912 and Miss Winifred Merriman became principal, followed by Miss May Russell and Miss Lydia Small, Miss Edith Dunnon and Miss Dorothy McDonald. The school was sold to Camberwell Girls' Grammar in 1964.



*Miss Winifred Merriman, Principal, Ormiston Girls' School, 1912-1923. Courtesy Ormiston Archive.*

### OTHER SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS

#### BOX HILL GIRLS' TECHNICAL SCHOOL (1924-1971)

The school opened in 1924 with Miss Ruth Evans as principal and was located in Whitehorse Road, Box Hill. It became Whitehorse Technical College in 1971 and is now part of Box Hill TAFE.



*Box Hill Girls' Technical School (1924-1971).*

#### OUR LADY OF SION COLLEGE (founded 1928)

A Catholic secondary college for girls founded by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, it is located in Whitehorse Road, Box Hill and celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2008.

#### PRESBYTERIAN LADIES' COLLEGE (founded 1875)

Originally located in East Melbourne and established by the Presbyterian Church, the College moved to Station Street, Burwood, when 'Hethersett' was purchased in 1938.

#### BOX HILL GRAMMAR SCHOOL/ KINGSWOOD COLLEGE (founded 1890)

Formerly New College, a school for boys, and renamed Box Hill Grammar School c1928, it was co-educational between 1933 and 1963. The name Kingswood College was adopted in 1965 and girls were again enrolled from 1977.

*Acknowledgement: Collated by Box Hill Historical Society using material from their archives.*

### THE BLACKBURN OPEN AIR SCHOOL

In 1912, Mr W.L. Keast, who was then MLA for Dandenong, convened a committee to raise money for an 'Open Air School'. Two of his committee members had seen similar schools in England and America, and believed benefits could be gained if malnourished and anaemic children spent time in the open air away from the pollution of the city.

Mrs Keast, as treasurer, wrote more than 700 letters asking for donations to get the project started and more than £300 was raised. In 1913 a deputation met Sir Alexander Peacock, then Minister for Education, and asked his department to accept the money and run the school, which it did. The department began to search for a healthy district close to a railway line. The railway authorities also came to the party, allowing concession fares for pupils.

The Blackburn Open Air School opened on June 1, 1915 with accommodation for 25 pupils aged nine to 12 years. Most were fee-paying pupils, but about a quarter of the pupils came from needy families and so the fees were waived.

Various women's groups in Nunawading assisted with amenities and the Nunawading Council gave aid. Only two head teachers ever worked at the school. Alice M. Trant was the original teacher employed in 1915, and when she retired in 1943, Mrs Dorothy Hamilton replaced her and continued until 1963, when the school closed.



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### KATHLEEN MAIE GREGORY AND THE FOREST HILL RESIDENTIAL KINDERGARTEN

In 1926, the principal of the Melbourne kindergarten teachers' training college, Mary Gutterage, inspired a



group of her graduates to raise money for a holiday home for needy children. The property they purchased in Forest Hill consisted of a 60-year old farmhouse with one bedroom.

The centre's first director, Miss Lothian, was appointed in 1927. Her assistant director was 26-year-old Kathleen Maie Gregory, who eventually became the director of the kindergarten for 45 years. The first 10 children arrived on March 28, 1927.

The staff took turns assisting with the cooking of the meals and sleeping in the night nursery. They grew vegetables, kept hens, ducks and sheep. The program always included time in the open air such as time to observe and love nature, like a bird's nest or a native orchid.

Additions were made for the cottage to accommodate 15 children but it was cramped, so efforts to raise £4000 for a new house commenced. The charities board came to the rescue. In the new home there was accommodation for 20 children. The most needy from several kindergartens were included. In 1937, during a polio epidemic the bedrooms became wards, and kindergarten staff worked with nursing staff to care for paralysed children.

Kathleen Maie Gregory retired in 1974 when she was 72. She had completed 47 years at the kindergarten and had mothered thousands of children. The community publicly honoured Kathleen in 1970 when she received the Social Service Award. In 1974 she was presented with the Girl Guide's Service Award and was honoured with an MBE from the Queen.