

Reminiscences

EARLY SCHOOL STORIES

by

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Many schools where our early settlers were educated have long ago disappeared — the playgrounds where children romped and played, the bush again reclaimed.

My memory recalls a story my mother often told about her school days in the early 1890s. At that time she was a pupil at the Mount Kembla Public School and occasionally during school hours the Headmaster, Mr Hamilton took his class to the hills behind the school to gather wild flowers and catch butterflies. This practice annoyed her father who specified his daughter was sent to school to be educated, not chase after butterflies. These incidents resulted in her being taken away from Kembla school for 12 months and with other children she went to Goondarrin School. This school was situated over the escarpment between Mount Kembla and O'Brien's Gap.

During this era, families were living over the Range and along the Goondarrin and Kentish Creeks. Most of their living was obtained from fruit, farm produce and timber, while a few early miners' dwellings were dotted along the escarpment. Little is remembered in this day and age about this early school, although there are folk living around the district whose parents attended.

Society member Hannah Nethery had a school prize presented to her father, Hercules Brown, while a pupil there in 1890, his teacher being a Mr Tindell. The Brown family owned an orchard along Goondarrin Creek. It would be of interest if someone could recall more history about this early school—the year it started and how long it existed. My mother enjoyed her schooling at Goondarrin, although she was pleased to return to Kembla as it was a long walk each day over the rough mountain track. Incidentally, Mr Hamilton, the headmaster of Kembla school, became a well-known government botanist, so the excursions collecting wild flowers and butterflies proved an advantage for his future profession.

A much later incident still remembered by old hands is about two brothers who were sent from Kembla across the Nebo Hills to attend the Mount Keira school—a long journey for two lads. One day on the homeward journey Teddy James jumped over a creek onto a large black snake. With the snake biting his foot, he ran screaming for some distance before being able to shake the angry snake off. His elder brother Cecil put Teddy on his back and ran for home, but the time lapse in getting treatment was too great and his life could not be saved. Eleven-year old Edwin Frederick James died in Wollongong Hospital on 5th December 1908, and was laid to rest just inside the gate of the historical Mount Kembla cemetery. Wollongong's well-known physician Dr Harry Lee was heard to quote in the eventide of his profession that little Teddy James was the only snake-bite patient he had lost and how sad he felt about the loss after so many years.