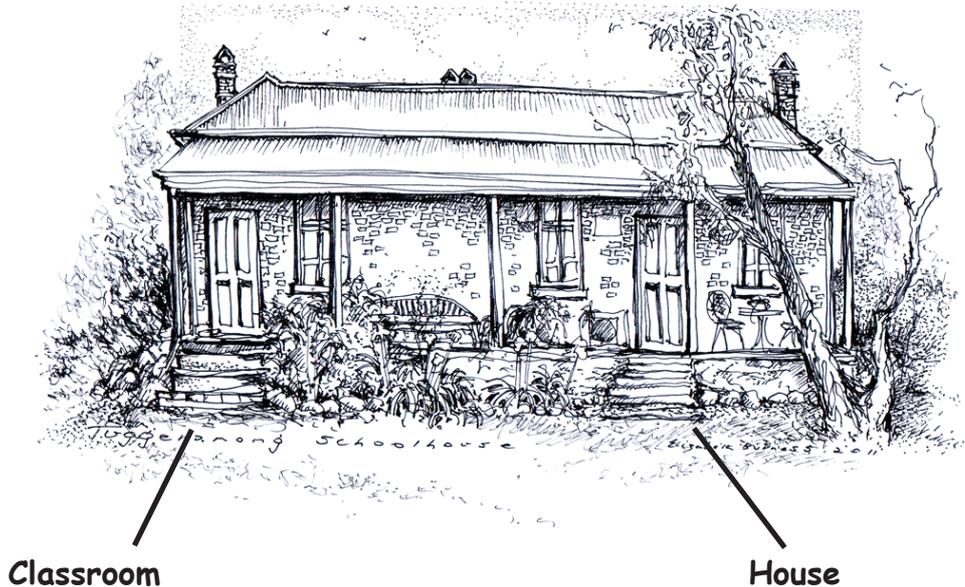


Tuggeranong Schoolhouse

Pre-Visit Material Download

Media kit for Junior Primary School Students



Kathleen McGee was born in 1893 and was the eldest of the seven McGee children. She arrived at the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse with her school teacher father, Francis McGee, her mother, Mary Anne (nee Morrison), her three year old brother, Darcy, one year old brother Phillip and brand new baby brother Michael, in November 1898.

The following stories and illustrations describe what it may have been like for Kathleen, known as Kath, when she arrived at the classroom, and what her life in the adjoining four roomed cottage, with attached kitchen, may have been like.

A discussion, or class work, comparing and contrasting a lifestyle common more than one hundred years ago to modern times, would prepare junior students for a visit to the spaces lived in and worked in by a real child from the past.

KATH MCGEE'S NEW SCHOOL

Kath McGee stepped carefully over the worn step into the classroom at the Tuggeranong School.

She looked around at the other students in the classroom who had entered first and quietly sat at their desks. Some of them were teenagers while a few others were only five years old like she was. It was her first day at this school.

That morning, she had dressed herself carefully in her cleanest white chemise which was like a singlet or tee shirt. Then she put on her best bloomers which were like long underpants. They were red with white spots. She put on her shiny black boots and then her pink dress. Finally she put on her best clean pinafore.

Her mother dressed her two little brothers Darcy and Phil who were only three and one. She put some of Kath's old dresses on them because that was the fashion at the time. When they were big enough to go to school, they would wear long shorts, nice jackets, long black socks and heavy black boots

Kath shyly walked to an empty front desk and sat down. The teacher gave her a slate, which was like a little blackboard, and a slate pencil, which was a bit like hard chalk. The teacher showed her how to write letters and little curly shapes. She had to copy the letters like A, B and C, many times until she could put them together to make words like CAT, MAT and BAT.

What an adventure, she had started writing and soon she would be able to recognise words so that she could start reading!

One of the boys was asked to read a story aloud. His name was Gregory and he read the story well. It was a short story about a hawk. There were many hawks around the old school and Kath could see them sometimes from the schoolhouse window. The words were sounded out by all the young students and there were other little stories as well.

Sometimes however, Gregory would not do what he was told, and he had to hold out his hand and the teacher hit him twice with a light cane. Later, before she turned six, Kath was told to stop talking. She didn't so the teacher also hit her on the hand with the light cane. It hurt so Kath decided it was best to do what she was told!

Kath learnt to count and to write her numbers as well as her letters. She could hear the older students doing their work. A big girl showed her the blackboard and what work she would be doing. The work for the older children was also on the board. She looked forward to when she could look at the clock on the wall and tell the time so she would know what was coming next.

Kath was tired after her morning at school and she was looking forward to her lunch. Like the other students she would be having bread and dripping. Dripping was the fat from the roast meat the family had for dinner, and it tasted salty and delicious spread on thick slices of bread!
Kath hoped she may be able to have some cheese and maybe an apple. Maybe

Mum had had time to make the cheese and pick the apples from the trees.

Kath left the classroom with the other students through the door and onto the verandah. The teacher left through a door on the other side of the classroom as he went home to have his lunch too. The students took their lunch from their leather satchels, their small suitcases or their tin billy's.

The other students went down the steps and found shady spots in the yard to eat their lunch. After they had eaten they would play games such as tag, leap frog, hoops, skipping and hopscotch. Sometimes they played marbles until the teacher returned from his lunch, rang the bell and marched the students back into the classroom.

But Kath did not join the other children. She went around the back of the school to the cottage next door, went in the back door to the room which was a kitchen, a dining room and a the family room all rolled into one room.

There she found her mother, her two little brothers and her brand new little brother Michael. But seated at the table, eating his lunch was Mr McGee, her father, and, also, the teacher!

KATH MCGEE AT HOME

SLEEPING

Kath sleepily opened her eyes. She was only five years old. Next to her, in the bed, was her brother, three year old Darcy. They had just moved to the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse after living at a tiny place not far away called Bulga Creek.

Kath found it uncomfortable sharing her bed with Darcy. He was being trained to sit on a chamber pot, or potty, to go to the toilet. But sometimes he forgot, and wet the bed!

GOING TO THE TOILET

It was a long way to go to the old brick toilet at the far end of the yard, so everyone, including Mum and Dad, had a chamber pot in their bedroom.

It was warm and cosy snuggled up in bed, and Kath did not like the thought of getting out of bed to prepare for school. Later when there were four more brothers and a sister, there would be up to four children sleeping in the children's bedroom, sometimes all in the same bed!

Thank Goodness Kath's father, the teacher, was able to get another wooden building built onto the existing brick one. The new kitchen had a stove for cooking on, rather than just the open fire. It also had another small bedroom for Kath and her sister Mary, to sleep in, leaving all the boys, except the baby, to share the second bedroom.

Brand new babies slept in the main bedroom with Mum and Dad, sometimes in bed with them, and often in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe or the chest of drawers! When they were big enough they could sleep in a cot, by themselves!

HAVING A BATH

In winter, when it was cold, Kath did not look forward to having a bath. There was no bathroom at the cottage when Kath and her brothers and sisters were little. It was much later when they had married or left home that a bathroom was built, and even later, that electricity was added to the house.

The tin hip bath was filled with water from a bucket, and hot water was boiled in a kettle on the stove, or over the open fire. The bath was in front of the fire, either in the kitchen or the sitting room (family room), so that it was not too far to carry the hot water in the kettle.

Nearly everyone, especially the children, used the same bathwater. Kath was not too pleased when her brothers had been playing with mudpies, and they got the first bath! Mum and Dad generally had their baths when the children were tucked up in bed, and asleep, by at least 8 o'clock at night!

EATING

Because of the new kitchen, breakfast could be eaten near the huge warm stove, but often other meals and snacks could be eaten in the sitting room (family or dining room). Porridge, eggs and bacon and toast were very popular with the McGee children for breakfast. Kath as the eldest child would often help feed the little ones.

The evening meal was very important as the family gathered to chat about what they had done that day. Different types of meat were eaten with at least three types of vegetables. Very often the family ate their sheep in the form of lamb chops, or roast mutton.

They had potatoes with nearly every meal and most of the fruit, like apples, pears and peaches, and vegetables like carrots, peas, beans or parsnips, were grown in their own garden. Soup was very popular because Mum could throw all sorts of things in the big soup pot, particularly potatoes, and add more water, if there was not enough soup to go round such a big family.

The family very rarely went to Queanbeyan to do their shopping as they produced nearly everything themselves - even a lot of their clothes were made by Kath's Mum on the sewing machine. When the children were young there was no such place as Canberra! The year they all had their school photo taken, 1908, was the same year the Australian Government decided to create the National Capital of Australia - Canberra! So they were no longer part of NSW - they were Canberrans!

FUN, GAMES - AND WORK!

As the children, all seven of them, got older, they were very good at games like cricket, tennis, quoits, hoops, skittles, spinning tops, marbles, ball games and for the girls, dolls. They were also very good at reading books, drawing, doing puzzles like crosswords and jigsaw puzzles.

They also had to help with the chores on the farm. They milked the cows, they herded the sheep and they collected the eggs from the chickens. They also looked after the horse because it was the only form of transport the family had. They could all ride the horse, but it could also be used for pulling the sulky, which was like a small cart or wagon the family could ride in.

But the family also kept bees in beehives - sometimes up to sixty boxes full of bees - and honey! The children learnt to extract the honey from the honeycomb, put it in glass jars, and then they sold it! They also helped pick the fruit from the fruit trees - apples, pears, peaches, plums and grapes from the many grapevines on the property.

But behind the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse there is a huge hill. It is called Simpson's Hill and it is still pretty much the way it always was. There are no houses on it, just bushes and trees. Bushfires have burnt it over the years, but it is still much as it was over one hundred years ago when the McGee children climbed it, and set their traps.

What did they hope to catch? They did not want the kangaroos, the wallabies, the wombats, or the koalas, nor did they want the lizards or snakes! No, the McGee children and other children who later lived at the cottage, caught - rabbits! They were skinned to make rugs and coats and they were also eaten in pies, stews or roasted in a pot on the fire, or later, in the oven of the big stove in the kitchen.

But one of the McGee children was different. Sure, he could do all the things his brothers and sisters could do. But James, known as Jim, thought about other things as well. Jim was very good at maths and, encouraged by his father, he was able to read about electricity, even though they did not have it connected at the Schoolhouse. For lighting they used candles and kerosene lamps.

Jim was particularly interested in the latest technology like radio. Later, he even built an aerial to put on the roof. He used three bicycle wheels for his aerial! Jim went to University in England to keep studying about technology. He even became the Professor! But there was one thing Jim was particularly interested in - television! Jim helped to invent it!

How strange to think that all the outdoor activities Kath and her brothers and sister enjoyed are not as popular today. Where are the modern children nowadays? Why, of course, they are all indoors watching - television!



The Talking Walls Of: The Tuggeranong Schoolhouse

'Oooh! We do look nice', agreed the walls of the cottage rooms. 'We are all painted white, even our ceilings are freshly painted white. Our new green roof does look wonderful as well,' they all agreed. They thought it was much better than the first wooden tiles, (called 'shingles'), and much better than the old rusted iron roof it replaced.

'Our bricks are doing well', again they all agreed, 'especially since they are one hundred and thirty years old. The views from our windows are pretty much the same as they always have been - lots of space, and plenty of trees! So we look terrific in our picturesque setting'.

A tiny voice was heard from way down the yard, 'When will it be my turn?' it said.

The kitchen, who was the room closest said, 'Oh, it's only the old toilet - it hasn't been fixed up like the rest of us, and, it hasn't been used for over thirty years, so it has been forgotten.'

'Please don't forget me,' said the old toilet, 'I was very important in the old days - the family in the cottage used me, as well as the school children.'

'Well, you aren't really needed now,' said the two new modern toilets, 'we can look after the visitors now!'

The bathroom said, 'Well, I have a new bath and shower in me now, as well as a new toilet! 'I'm much more useful than I was after 1899, when I was a small storage room.' The small kitchen said, 'Isn't it strange, I was originally a tiny bedroom!'

The public toilet said, 'Well I have a little wash basin in me now, but I was originally the very first bathroom way back in the 1920's!'

'Well,' agreed the four rooms of the cottage, 'You are lucky that you have some pieces of useful furniture in you - we were empty except for our fireplaces and mantelpieces.'

'Kitchen', they said, 'You are lucky you have two wood burning stoves in you.'

'Yes', said the kitchen, 'I was a busy, warm place for many of the families who lived here.'

'So was I,' said the sitting room, (family room), 'In the very early days, I was the kitchen as well. It was lucky that the teacher Mr McGee was able to get the new kitchen, bedroom and storage room in 1899. I remember how hard it was for Mrs McGee with her four little children, and a servant, to live, and work in only four rooms. The previous two teachers had no children living here.'

'Yes,' they all agreed, 'it was very difficult, especially since all the family's belongings had to be stored in the four rooms as well!'

The walls all agreed that they were very empty after having been freshly painted, and were fully restored. The small voice of the old toilet could be heard in the distance. 'At least you all look clean,' it said, 'nobody cares about me, especially since I haven't been used for so many years.'

'Yes,' the other rooms said, 'we have been recently used, we have had people living in us, but which story of the families who have lived here should we tell?'

'Well,' said the walls of the front bedroom, 'I think it should be the story of the McGee family because Mr McGee and his family lived here the longest, and they had the most children - Why, some of the children were born in my space, and even some of the grandchildren!'

'Yes,' said the walls of the children's bedroom, 'I remember when there were so many of the McGee children sleeping in my space - there were five boys eventually and one of them became known internationally for helping invent television!'

'But what about me,' wailed the faint voice of the old toilet. 'Maybe there is something from the families buried out here around me. After all, the last families found some things under your floors when you were renovated. Maybe some things were also lost out here?' continued the toilet.

One room had not joined the conversation. It was the classroom. Suddenly it said, 'I share walls with you two bedrooms. You seem to forget that without me all of you would not exist. We were all built for the NSW Education Department. Mr McGee did teach for the longest time in me, and he also had the largest number of children of his own in the cottage.'

Certainly, while we all look very nice freshly painted, I am only a classroom and you rooms in the cottage make only a house. With the stories of the families and some furniture and artefacts, a house will become a home. Luckily we are now filled with furniture, artefacts and clothing of roughly one hundred years ago, just the time the McGee family were comfortably settled into the cottage and Mr McGee was firmly established as a teacher in the attached classroom.

We enjoy having visitors wandering through our rooms admiring the clean looking walls and the handsome woodwork, and finding out about the families, particularly the McGee's.'

Visitors also wander up the back of the property to look at the old toilet, patiently waiting for some attention, and if they are lucky, they can admire its sleepy resident possum. Who knows, maybe some future archaeologists will give the old toilet the attention it craves, and dig up something from the past which will help tell the story of the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse Museum.

Make your own children from the past.

Little girls

Little girls in the past often had long hair tied with ribbons. Their underwear would be a shift also known as chemise on their upper body. Sometimes they wore petticoats.

Their underpants would have been long pantaloons, which later became bloomers, or drawers. They wore socks and basic shoes, which were similar to boots. They would have a dress covered by a pinafore to keep their dresses clean.

Little boys

Little boys in the past often had short hair covered by a cap or a straw hat.

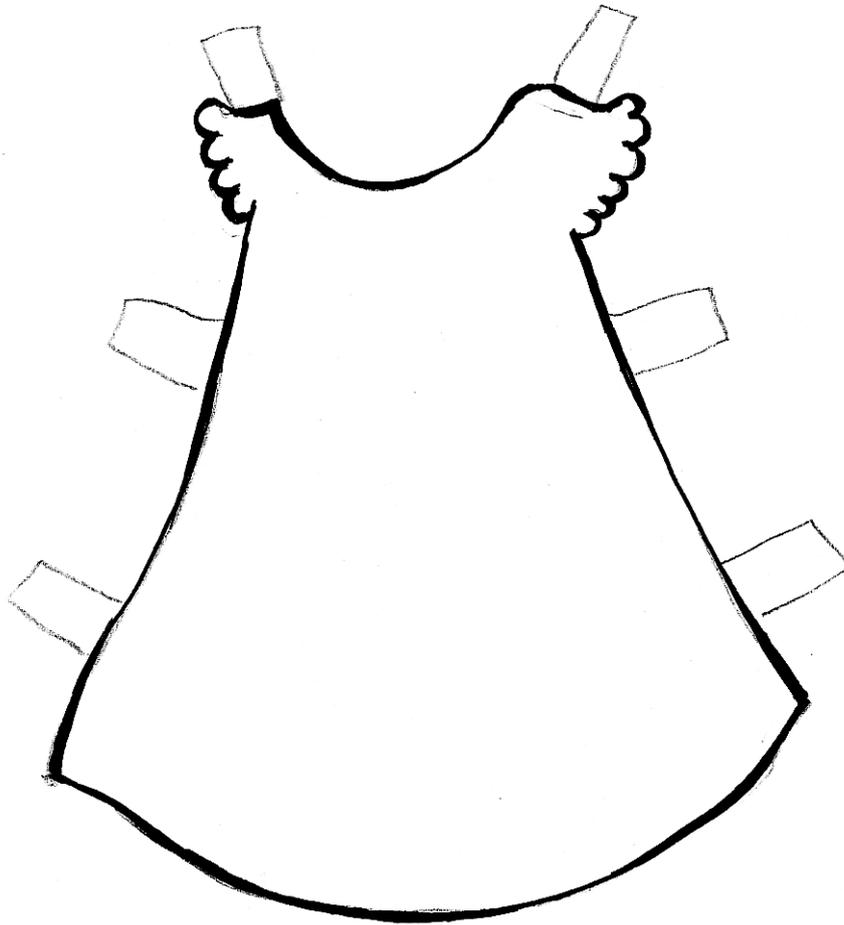
Their clothing would consist of a tee shirt type singlet on their upper bodies often made of wool.

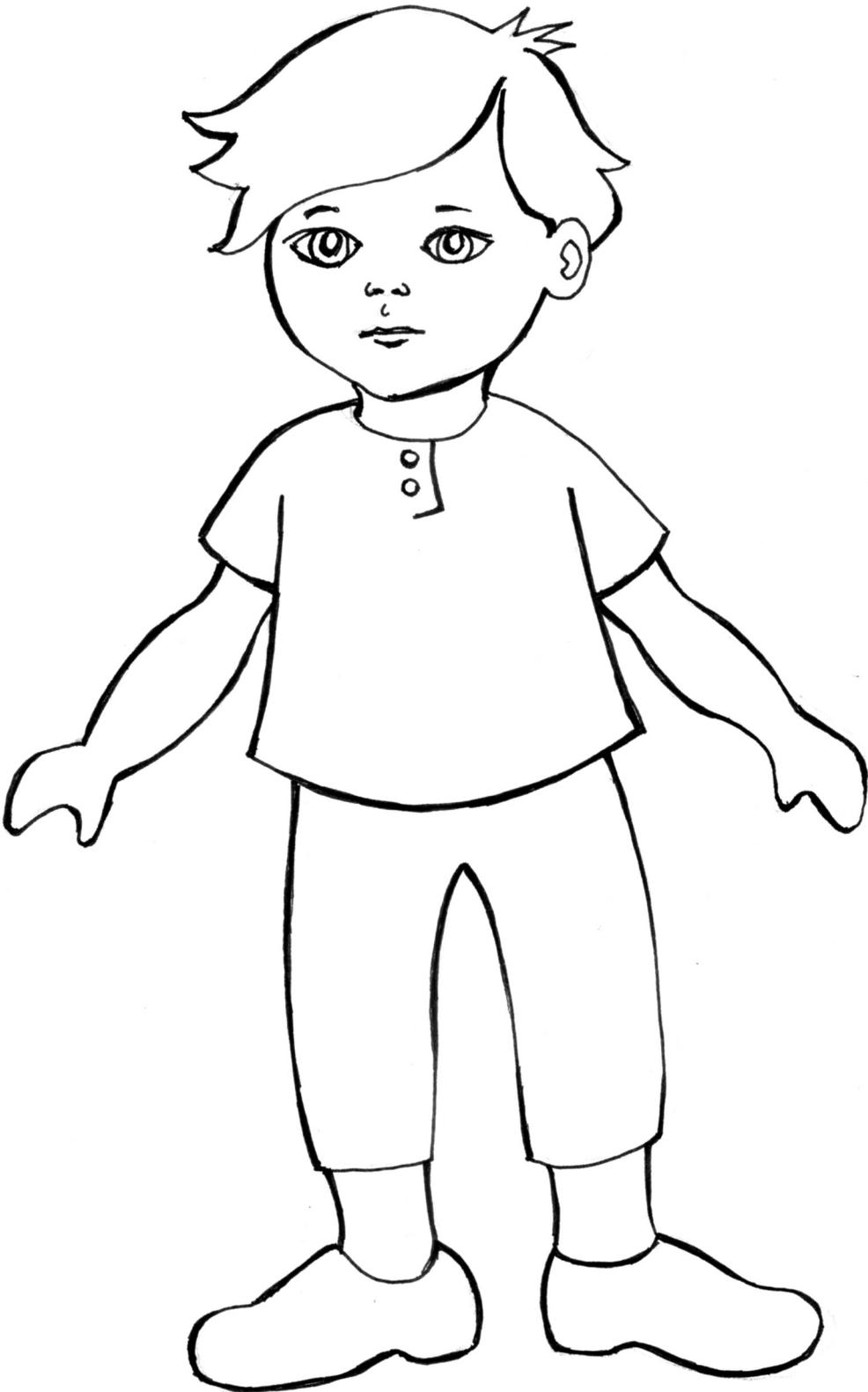
Their under pants would have been plain drawers tied around their waist with a string. They wore socks and shoes, which were similar to boots.

They would have a jacket and pants, which were like long shorts, and sometimes a shirt. Very, very little boys often wore pinafores like the girls to keep their clothes clean.



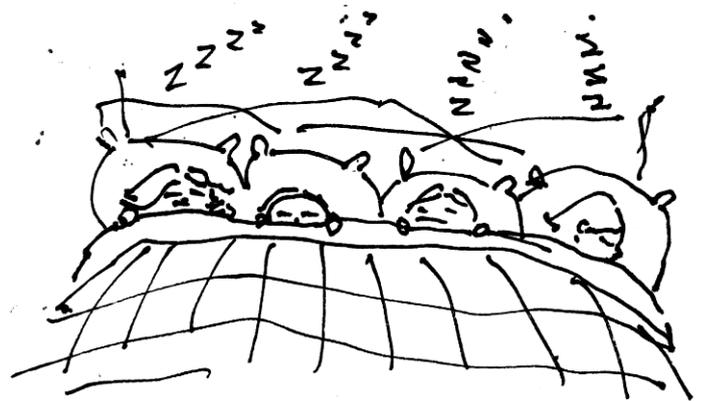
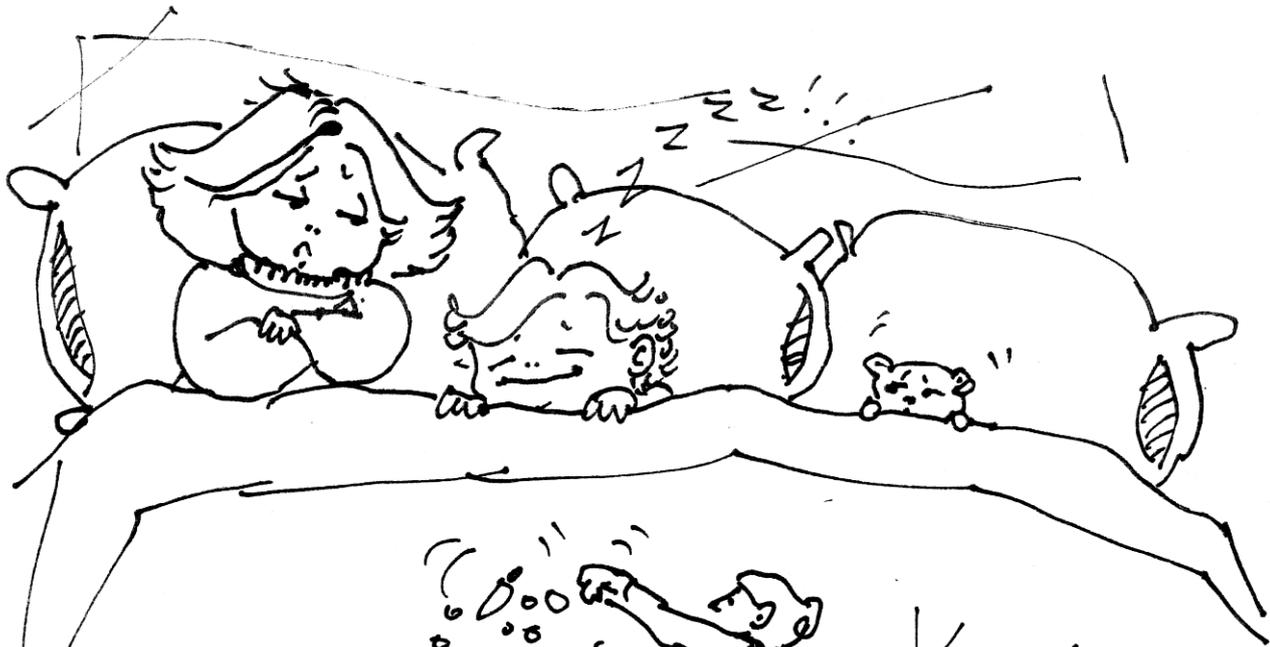




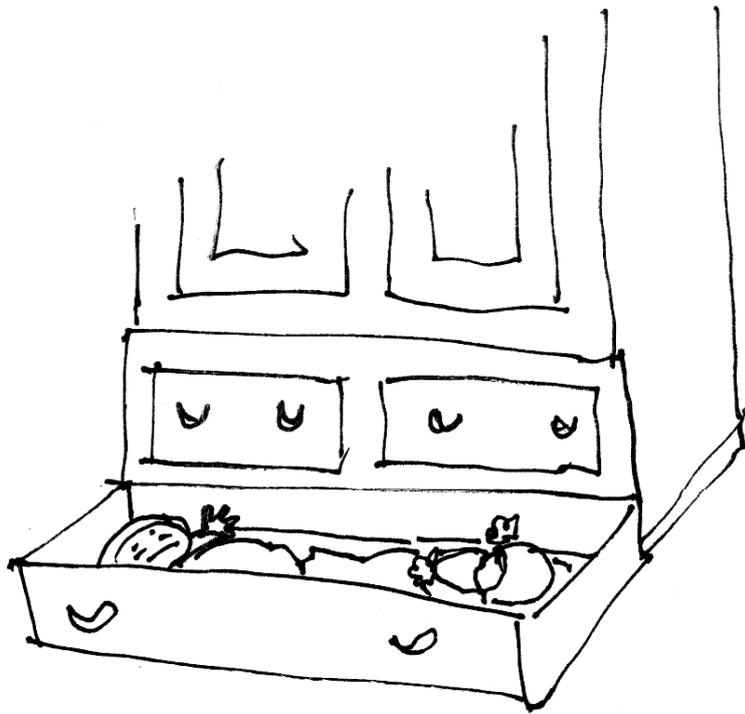




Children's Room



Children's Room



Main
Bedroom



Family
Room

Family Room, and Kitchen



Some Real Memories from the past from Tuggeranong Schoolhouse

BILL BYRNE

My name is Bill Byrne. I was born in Sydney on 29.12.1918, nearly a New Year gift for Mum! I was reared at the Tuggeranong Homestead. (Tuggeranong was the boundary between Yarralumla and Lanyon.) My father, Patrick, was employed as the janitor for Captain C.E.W. Bean. Dr Bean wrote the First World War history at Tuggeranong. My father was the general handyman, maintaining the garden, being butcher, milking the cows and doing whatever odds and ends were wanted around the place. One particular job was the weekly laundry run by horse and sulky to Canberra. The laundry was at Duntroon then. Those days it was the boundary between Yarralumla and the station owned by the Cunninghams. The laundry was the first steam laundry in the area and it was started and run by two women, about 1920-21, I think.

One day I was taken along for the ride. As we approached Molonglo siding (now Fyshwick) a goods train was there and was about to go. So a good blast on the whistle and a burst of steam, and away it went. Of course, it frightened the life out of our old horse, and away she went "too", full gallop down the road alongside the train, Dad pulling on the reins trying to keep straight, and calling out, "Whoa, girl, whoa!" A quick glance to see if I was

still there, and he yells out, "Hang on, boy! Whoa, girl!" I was only about 4 years old but I can assure you "boy" was hanging on. Luckily, the train beat us to the railway crossing and that stopped "girl" for sure.

School Days

I started school at the old Tuggeranong School, which is still standing but now closed, at the age of 5. The starting age was 7 but my age was "put up" for an early start—there was a bit of book fiddling (dummying the books) so the school would have enough pupils to remain open. I walked to school, which was about a mile from Tuggeranong Homestead.

Later we went to live at Booroomba Station, where my father carried on similar work. School was part-time Tharwa, part-time Tidbinbilla. Three days one week and two at the other school, then the following week school days would be reversed at the particular school. We rode a horse and prayed for rainy days, when school would be cancelled. Due to schools closing down I only received about four years schooling.

At 13 years of age I had had enough and left school to commence working in shearing sheds.

Harry Oldfield Interview :

The Tuggeranong Schoolhouse

Harry, like many children of his era, walked a long distance to school and more often than not, walked barefoot. Harry spoke fondly of his school years, although he was sceptical about how much he learned at the time. However, his schooling did have an effect on Harry and it was his teacher, Mr Francis McGee who left him with many lasting memories and words of wisdom. Mr McGee was the longest serving teacher at Tuggeranong from 1898 to 1927. Apart from being a skilled teacher, it appears he was also a creative writer and poet. During the interview Harry related stories about Mr McGee and his recollections revealed this piece composed by Mr McGee about Bob the Postman. Harry's rendition didn't miss a beat!

When I asked Harry to describe Mr McGee, he responded as if he saw him only yesterday –

Well, the main thing, he used to smoke a pipe, and if you did something bad and was kept in after school, well, you always knew where to find him. You'd go around and sniff a bit and you could smell the smoke, and there Mr McGee would be. He was a very lovely man... He was very thin – very thin – and grey haired... and not very tall... very scholastic looking; and that's how he was. He was very quiet; everybody loved him except the time when he kept you in occasionally, just to show you he was boss.

Harry's stories of attending the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse were lively and shed light on education in the first half of the 20th century. This was a time when children either walked, rode their bicycles or their horses to school and the talk of seeing such things as an airplane caused great amazement and delight, such as this recollection:

[Mr McGee] said to us one day, 'Boys and girls, if it's a nice day tomorrow you might have the opportunity to see the first aeroplane that flies from Sydney to Melbourne.'... Here we are almost in a direct line between Sydney and Melbourne.' So when the next day come we all come out, and we are all there, a few crows flew over and, 'Ah,' we said, 'no plane'. Anyway, a little after someone said, 'Did you hear that?' Sure enough, over it came and we seen it, and we couldn't believe it. And Mr McGee said to us, 'When you children grow up you'll be travelling in one of those', and we all said, 'No, never'. And he said to one of the girls, 'Myrtle,' he said, 'how would you like to be up there with him?' She said, 'Please, sir, Mr McGee, I would rather be up there with him than up there without him.'

(Myrtle Edlington was the girl; she was one of Harry's neighbours, along with the Sullivans)

From an early age Merv and his sisters walked to Tuggeranong schoolhouse from the weatherboard cottage near the church.

Used to walk up there – only four years old, and two miles – never knew what boots were. We had to line up and march into school – all that sort of business.



John Edlington's house – John's Place – where Merv was born. Royalla, 1996.

The schoolhouse on Simpson's Hill was built by Sanders Helman, with the help of parents, from bricks made on the spot. There was one high-ceilinged classroom shaded by a verandah. In winter it was heated by one tiny fireplace. Schoolmaster McGee and his wife lived in the residence attached to the school and had a small, brick-edged garden, sixty beehives and the grapevines which tempted Merv. Be-

neath the pine trees near the playground was the horse yard where those children lucky enough to have a horse to ride to school tethered their 'transport' during school hours.

Schooldays were happy enough and teacher McGee was respected for his efforts, as well as for his poetry which was often published in the *Queanbeyan Age* under the pen name 'Tugg'.

Merv's early childhood was during the First World War (1914–18). Some of the men from the district, such as Andy Cunningham, son of J. C. served in the armed forces. A 'big do' in the Tuggeranong Valley celebrated the end of the war and welcomed Andy home.



The children of Tuggeranong school with school-teacher McGee and Mrs McGee, 1908.

of that safe, around about six foot off the ground, there would be around about three inches, I suppose, that would hold water. Then we had to get chaff bags and hang them down on the four sides – they would absorb the water and it would drip down and the wind blowing through it would keep it very cool. I wouldn't like to go through it again!

Merv often helped his father pump water by hand from the dam at the Tuggeranong sheep dip, on the side of Tuggeranong Hill where the suburb of Theodore is now. And carpentry was learnt early at his father's side during the building of the shearing shed on Tuggeranong station. Much of the timber and iron for this came from the large hayshed, demolished in 1927, which Merv remembers stood close to John's Place.