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Miss G. Pratt

So far in this record the name of the woman who guided the young school through its most difficult years, Miss Gertrude Pratt, has been mentioned many times. Who was this woman who had the formidable task of beginning everything that is being written about today and who, between the years of 1920 and 1941 accomplished most of what she set out to do?

This description of Miss Pratt was published in the first school prospectus.

The first Principal of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Geelong, will be Miss Gertrude Pratt, M.A. The committee have been particularly fortunate in securing as their first Principal Miss Gertrude Pratt, M.A., who, at the time of her appointment, was Principal of 'Girton', The Church of England Girls' Grammar School, Bendigo. Miss Pratt is a member of the Presbyterian Church, a charming personality, with a wide experience of school management in Australia, England and France.

She was educated at the Methodist Ladies' College, Hawthorn, and matriculated with honours in several subjects. She holds the M.A. degree of Melbourne University having secured third-class honours and a second place in the list in history and political economy at finals.

She was for eighteen months second assistant at the Methodist Ladies' College in Adelaide, and first assistant and Senior Resident for ten years at 'Fintona' Presbyterian Girls' Grammar School, Camberwell. In 1914, Miss Pratt went to England to study Educational Methods becoming a student in the training department of the Bedford College for Women, London. During that time, she gave courses of lessons in several important London schools and was successful in gaining the teachers certificate of The Bedford College and the Diploma of Pedagogy of the London University. She also holds a certificate from the University of Oxford for attendance at special classes in Geography, conducted by Professor Herbertson. In 1915, Miss Pratt became a member of the staff of a large Girls' School in France, and afterwards took a special course in French in Paris in connection with the Alliance Francaise.

Miss Pratt's occupancy of the principalship of Girton College, Bendigo, has been marked by conspicuous success. She won the esteem and confidence of parents and the affection of the scholars in her charge. The number of boarders and day scholars has increased considerably, and at the last meeting of the Bendigo Synod of the Church of England, a letter of special thanks and appreciation was forwarded to her. Her pupils have gained honours and distinctions each year at University and other examinations. Miss Pratt has given special consideration to the physical side of girls' education. Whilst at 'Fintona' one of her teams proved champions in basket ball in 1912. In her present position, she has introduced and successfully organised tennis, basket ball and baseball.

In February, 1967, Miss Pratt was in hospital with a broken leg, yet she kindly consented to give an interview to help with this book. The day was a hot one, 104 degrees, and her visitors feared causing her any distress or overtiring a person of ninety-one. In retrospect, the fears were laughable.

She viewed the stranger with a very direct gaze; she had mastered a difficult surname after once hearing it: she answered questions with a precision that dispensed with formality and she told delightful stories of evil schoolgirls—'but not for the history, thank you.'

Her own account of her life is summarized here and it is interesting to note the differences in stress placed by a woman looking back seventy years, to those given in the prospectus.

Miss Pratt was born on 16th June, 1876 in Adelaide. Her parents were William and Mary Pratt and she was one of a family of four, having a brother and two sisters. She began school at the remarkable age of two and a half and she finished her schooling at M.L.C., from where she went to University to read History. Her final degree was that of M.A.

From this point she taught in several schools, in her words, 'too boring to enumerate', and, later, went overseas to continue studies at Bedford College, London, where she obtained her Diploma of Education.

It was while on a vacation course at Oxford that war was declared. Miss Pratt said that she was in her room when a great commotion started. Students were gathering and shouting the news which had just reached the college. The usual show of jingoism took place among the young and she recalled that it was a moving moment to remember, when tempered by the knowledge of the subsequent carnage on the Somme and the perspective that fifty years can give.

What could happen in the 1914-18 war seems surprising to those of us who are conditioned by the knowledge of the 1939-45 war or Viet Nam. Miss Pratt went to live in France in the village of Quinperlé in Brittany where she taught. Brittany of 1914 was unspoilt, the war might have been a million miles away, and she responded deeply to the beauty of the land and the interest of its people. From here, under the guidance of the Alliance Francaise, she went to Paris for two months—'partly to shake off my newly acquired Breton accent.'

Again, there was complete freedom of movement but the War was settling down; the 'over by Christmas' theories were wrong, and so, when a passage to Australia became available in 1915, Miss Pratt decided to return home.

Her next position was at Girton C.E.G.G.S., Bendigo, which she held for three years. At this point, the committee in Geelong offered her the headship of the new Presbyterian Girls' College which she accepted. It was the challenge she had been waiting for and she was to be headmistress of Morongo P.G.C. for twenty-two years until her retirement in 1941.

Her descriptions of creating the new school, deciding on uniform, choosing a crest, school songs, staff and curricula, organizing the boarding house and of teaching practically full-time herself, though told with fond amusement, could not but impress upon her listeners the tremendously hard work involved.

She modelled the school on public schools she had known and whose inheritance came from the English Public School system—an inheritance that was not questioned in 1920. Hence, the school was divided into two 'houses', Roslyn and Harris, named respectively after the newly brought property and Miss A. C. Harris whose school was incorporated into P.G.C. The curriculum was restricted when judged by today's standards but would be regarded as 'sound' in those days. Miss Pratt's attitude to sport was fairly advanced and, immediately, she introduced three energetic games, tennis, basketball and baseball, as well as the more ladylike dancing and eurhythmics.

Her diary for her first year will give the reader some idea of her commencement at P.G.C. One school year is very much like another to an outsider, yet school patterns do change. These extracts from Miss Pratt's diary for 1920, the first school year of Morongo may hold interest for past pupils and may provide a contrast for more recent students.

THE FIRST SCHOOL YEAR

Saturday, February 14

The Headmistress and Staff were formally welcomed by the Council and by the Old Collegians of the Newtown Ladies' College in the Assembly Room of the college. Speeches of welcome were given by Mr Pettitt, the Chairman of the Council, and by Mrs Purnell, the President of the Old Collegians. A musical programme was rendered and Miss Pratt thanked those present for their kind welcome. Afternoon tea was served in the Dining Room of the college.

Tuesday, February 17th

The School was opened, the numbers on the roll being, boarders 20, Day Girls 59, small boys 15.

Members of the Council were present at the opening exercise and the Chaplain, Rev. C. Neville, gave an address to the girls explaining their motto and impressing on them their responsibility as pioneers and founders of the new Presbyterian Girls' College.

Wednesday, March 24th

Mr Crookston (of the Peace Thanksgiving Fund) visited the school, inspected the buildings and spoke to the girls in the Assembly Room.

Thursday, March 25th

Sports at Kardinia Park in aid of Library.

Monday, April 25th

An Anzac Day Service was held in the Assembly Room. A stirring address was given by Mr Neville and suitable hymns were sung by the girls.

Saturday, May 1st

A School Team entered for an inter-schools flag race in connection with the University Carnival. Girls came third in their heat.

Tuesday, May 4th

The Rev. J. Paton visited the school. He also gave an address to the girls on 'Unselfishness and how it may be acquired.'

COUNCIL
SECRETARIES

Mr D. F. Neilson



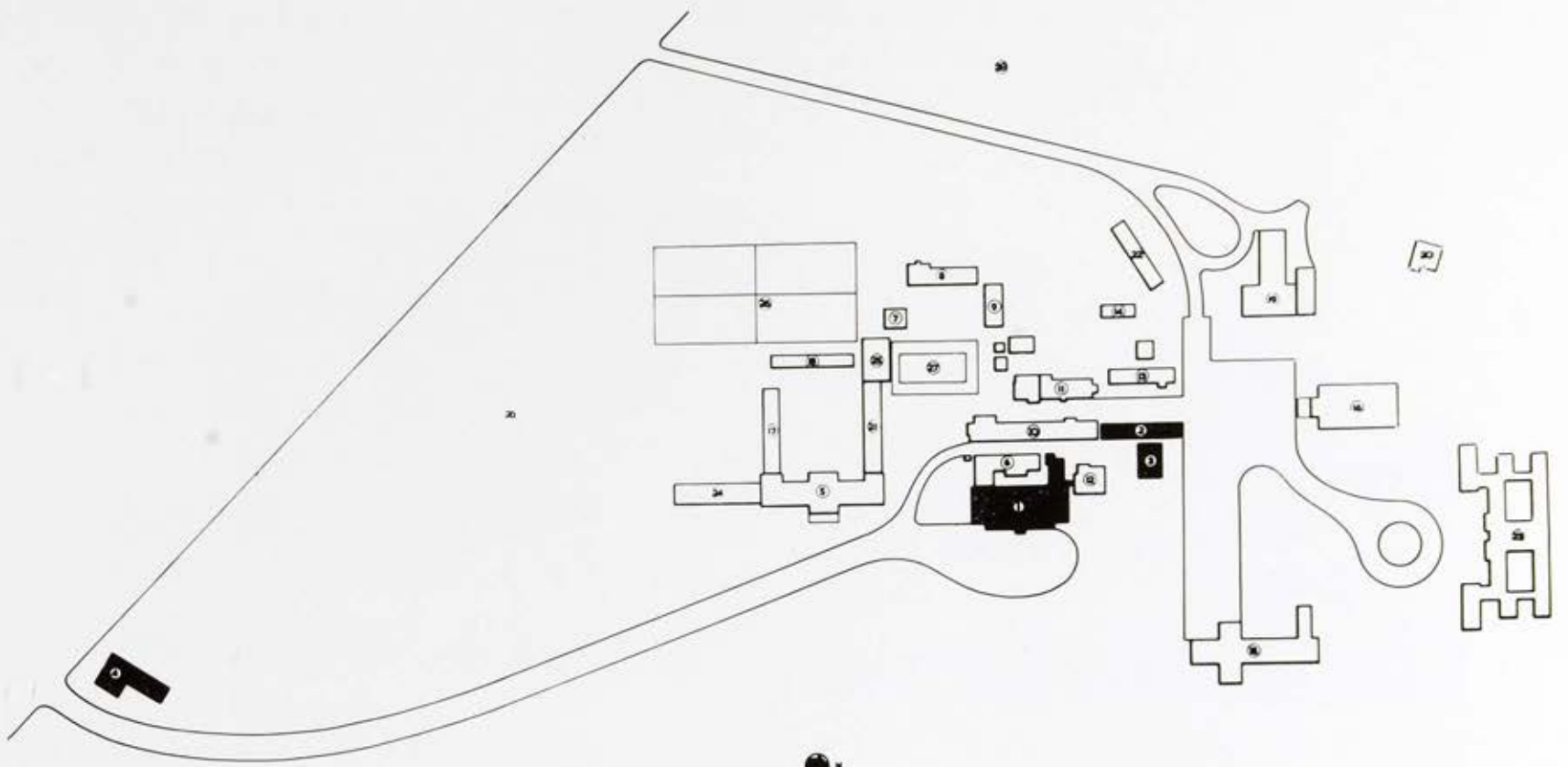
Mr P. Neilson



Mr D. G. Neilson



The Council 1968



Plan of the School

The Junior School—1952





The Gertrude Pratt Hall—1959

The Interior of Gertrude Pratt Hall



Wednesday, May 5th

Mr and Mrs Young Venters presented the school with the School Flag and the Union Jack. These gifts were received with great enthusiasm.

Thursday, May 15th

Dismissal Service in Assembly Room.

TERM II

Thursday, June 2nd

Special morning service in the Assembly Room. The address was given by Rev. Mr Maguire, M.A.

Saturday, June 19th

Official opening of the college. Luncheon at the A.B.C. given by the Chairman to welcome visitors, more particularly the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, the Rev. W. Frazer, M.A.

Tuesday, June 29th

Miss Skinner of the Presbyterian Mission in Korea spoke to the girls of her work. Great interest was manifested by the girls and promise was made to help in the work.

An inspection of school buildings and school work was made by Mr Dew, M.A., Inspector of Primary Schools. Mr Dew expressed himself as thoroughly satisfied with new school buildings and spoke with admiration of school tone.

Wednesday, June 30th

Mr Gosford of the British and Foreign Bible Society spoke to the girls of the work done by the Society and showed the girls copies of Bibles in foreign languages and interesting miniature Bibles.

Monday, August 9th

Mr Sinclair of Free Church spoke at morning assembly and later Rev. J. McKenzie of Toorak Presbyterian Church visited the school.

Saturday, August 21st

A fete was held in the school grounds to raise funds to assist in the building of tennis courts for the school. About £150 was raised.

The Mayoress, Mrs Howard Hitchcock, opened the fete and promised a silver cup for inter-form competition when the courts were completed.

Mrs Jarley's Wax Works were very well patronised.

Afternoon tea was served in the Dining Room by the Old Collegians.

Thursday, August 25th

Dismissal service in assembly Room with school concert, recitations, pianoforte solos, and class singing. An extra week's holiday was granted at the request of the Prince to all schools of Australia.

TERM III

Tuesday, October 5th

A Dramatic performance was held in the Assembly Room. The evening was very successful and the girls reflected great credit upon their teacher, Miss Haase.

Tuesday, October 12th

Mr Priestly of the Soudan Inland Mission accompanied by Mr Munro, M.A., and Mr Neville, visited the school and gave a most interesting account of the work done.

Friday, October 15th

Results of Music Examinations—

E. Ellis passed Grade IV

U. Handley passed Grade III

These are the first successes of the school in Public Examinations work.

Monday, November 8th

Rev. Mr Hambly visited the school and spoke to the children on 'Three essentials of good character'.

Thursday, November 11th

Armistice Day Service.

Friday, November 12th

Visit from Miss Todd of the Presbyterian Mission at Fitzroy.

Tuesday, November 15th

An address on 'How to listen to Music' was given by Dr Floyd of St Paul's Cathedral. The address was interesting and instructive and the children were delighted.

Saturday, November 20th

Scholarship examination was held.

Wednesday, 1st December

Splendid concert given in Assembly Room attended by Parents and friends.

Mr Dawson played violin solos, Miss Sisson played piano solos; Miss Wilmore—piano solos and Miss Haase recited the Wooing Scene from Henry V, the Merman and the Mermaid (Tennyson), The Looking Glass (Kipling), The Pied Piper of Hamelin. All were most heartily applauded.

Monday, December 13th

At 10.45 girls reassembled for Prize List and Dismissal Service.

Tuesday, December 14th

The Distribution of Prizes was held in City Hall at 8 p.m. The Mayoress, Mrs H. Hitchcock, distributed the prizes and the Rev. J. Mackenzie gave an inspiring address.

Mr Pettitt entertained council and friends and staff in No. 1 Room at the close of the function.

These extracts from her diary of 1920 show Miss Pratt's attempt to provide extra curricular interest for her pupils. There is, perhaps, a preponderance of ministers and missionaries but this could be expected of a new church school as could the solemnity of their subjects. Later, she encouraged the production of school plays and she instituted the 'Shakespeare Day' which has continued to be a feature of Morongo's school calendar until today.

On studying the record of the next twenty years, one is left with many impressions of Miss Gertrude Pratt. Her references to her 'naughty pupils', and the memories spread over those twenty years, show an obvious liking for the positive personality which is an unusual characteristic of a natural autocrat. Old girls refer to her as 'strict' and once more one must admire the woman who stuck to her ideals of a good school discipline when every pupil meant much to the

struggling school and reprimand might offend some fee-paying parent. On the other hand, in the Council minutes there is recorded a strong plea by Miss Pratt for a girl whose parents were missionaries on a Pacific island and who were having real difficulty in meeting fees. The girl remained at school.

Her lack of reference to her staff might mean that she delegated little power, but again, this period in most public schools histories shows little reference to staff. Times were hard; a man was lucky to hold a position in the depression, and this applied more so to women. When it is quoted that Morongo staff had their wages reduced in those difficult times and willingly accepted this, one wonders whether this was entirely noble or a lack of choice, though one prefers to accept the former. Staff superannuation funds and close relationships between parents and staff were things of the future. It is enough that Miss Pratt herself held the trust, respect and admiration of the council and the parents of her pupils through a very difficult period. During this time, some pupils destined for Morongo could not be sent to the school and the struggle even to keep the school open was a great one. Ten years' work seemed all but lost. Morongo needed a strong yet sympathetic woman, and it was more than fortunate that Miss Pratt was the headmistress chosen.

When she handed over the principalship to Miss Shaw, times were changing. A new prosperity had reached Australia which was reflected in education. Numbers increased and waiting lists grew, as wool and wheat prices improved. Desperate financial crises were over: the school was well established. Morongo will ever be indebted to this intelligent, kindhearted, indomitable first principal.

Every Old Collegian spoken to requests that some mention be made of 'Timmy', Miss Pratt's Australian terrier. They recall the piece of flannel round his middle when he had a chill; a dog fight between Timmy and a stray one morning in Assembly and the way he preceded Miss Pratt by enough distance to warn any miscreants of her approach, for which they are grateful to him.

Miss Pratt died in a private hospital on Wednesday, July 23rd, 1969. She was interested in all Morongo affairs to the day of her death, for, despite her infirmity, she retained full mental faculties to the end. A Service of Remembrance was held in the Gertrude Pratt Hall on Friday, July 25th, which was attended by members of the School Council, Old Collegians, members of staff and girls of the school.

Tributes to Miss Pratt were paid by the Chairman of Council, Mr E. W. McCann, the School Principal, Miss L. Shaw, and Mrs H. Fallaw, who as Vida Walter, was a foundation scholar.

The President of the Old Collegians Association, Mrs R. Pavia read the lesson, and the service was conducted by the School Chaplain, Rev. Reynolds Waters.

At the funeral service in Melbourne on Monday, July 28th, the school was represented by the Chairman, and the Secretary of Council, the Principal and two prefects. Former members of Miss Pratt's staff were also present, as were large numbers of Old Collegians. Knowing her death was near, Miss Pratt asked that there should be no grief, but it is fitting that so many people wished to remember and honour such a remarkable woman.