**Essays on Mount Crosby - Mount Crosby Schools**

*"Small but Strong"* read the Mount Crosby School motto until 1991, at which point “small” no longer really described it and a change was made to *"Strong and Sure".* However, in the late 1800s there was a provisional school at Mount Crosby endured by students who had a fair claim on both qualities. Known originally as the Lower Kholo Provisional School, then later as the Crosby Provisional School, it was built in 1882 on land donated by Edward Smith. In its first year 22 students enrolled under headmaster Mr Arthur Leigh (and set about learning in a very rustic style).

The school was described by an inspector in 1892 as *"far too small for the children and it is close and also full of vermin, as the children bring vermin home on their clothes.*" He also noted that it was "*roughly constructed and very unsightly."* The school house was none too comfortable either, as we can infer from the inspector’s notes describing the trying conditions. Besides a skillion roof shared with the school, he wrote that Leigh's accommodation was *"a detached building measuring eighteen feet by thirteen feet, … and divided into two rooms."*

It might surprise you to learn that by 1892, forty-eight children were enrolled at the school under these conditions. Numbers were up on account of the Water Board workers’ children, whose regular attendance improved the chances of Mount Crosby being rewarded with the construction of a real state school. The inspector’s notes are clear on the importance of this. He wrote, *“Of these forty-eight children, twenty-three belong to families employed at the Mount Crosby Pumping Station, while the remaining twenty-five … are children of selectors. The former group live within a quarter of a mile of the school and should be extremely regular attenders. Of the twenty five children other than those at the Pumping Station, twelve live three miles or more from the school, and most of these latter will in all probability attend very poorly.”*

Many of the twelve lived at Pine Mountain or Kholo, where their provisional school had been closed eight years earlier. For farming families, the children provided a valuable source of labour, so it is not surprising that this and the four miles of travel each way effected attendances.

Despite the inspector’s words, as is so often the case, it fell to the locals to campaign for themselves. Among the most active, and probably the most influential, was the Secretary of the School Building Committee, Joseph Stewart (also first Engineer in Charge at the Pumping Station). In any case, the local pressure built and, as certain as good was on their side, the state school was granted to them in the rain soaked month of February 1893.

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