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CLASS : Wednesday Evening Class
SUBJECT : Open Foundation - Australian History

ABSTRACT: History of the Region Assignemnt

"MY SCHOOL DAYS AND MEMORIES OF KURRI KURRI"

For my History of the Region assignment, I interviewed Mrs. Dorothy May Temperley for information about her school days at Kurri Kurri in the early 1920's, as well as her memories of the township during those booming coal mining days.

This interesting lady, 76 years of age, was born in 1912 at Kurri Kurri. Her grandparents had moved to Kurri Kurri from Warialda in the North West, seeking work in the coal mines of the district. Having six sons and one daughter in the family, the move was necessary to find work for the boys.

A clear and vivid description of her school days is given as she remembers daily routines and happenings of school life in those times. Included amongst them is the introduction of ink into the classrooms. This created the positions of boy and girl ink monitors, whose daily task was to mix the ink powder to the exact strength and to fill the china ink wells in the top of the desks.

The different educational levels strived for by the students are described by Dorothy, as she remembers the 'Qualifying Certificate' which was gained at the age of fourteen when students could leave school. Those wishing to continue on to seventh and eighth classes or 'Super Primary', as it was known then, studied typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, sewing and cooking. High school was the next stage and to qualify for this, one had to sit for a special exam called the 'Entrance to High School Certificate'. Bursaries were also given and many pupils from Kurri Kurri were bursers.

Methods of transport used by children who attended Maitland High School included travelling to Kurri Kurri station in Hampton's horse-drawn coaches, and then on to Maitland by train each day. A far cry from today's crowded school buses etc.

Various games and activities of the school children are related in accurate detail by Dorothy as she describes different ones played by boys and girls. Some of these games are still played today, perhaps the version differs slightly though.

Clear and accurate descriptions are given of everyday tradespeople found around the town, such as the baker, the iceman, the bottle-o and the prop-man, to mention a few, as they walked the busy streets of Kurri Kurri with their wares.

Comparison by Dorothy to today's primary school education system is defined as consisting of the three R's, with no real frills! "Today's education is so broad and so vastly different. They learn many, many more things than we did with our three R's", says Dorothy.

It was also interesting to hear of her occupation at the end of her school days and education. Due to the fact that she could not continue on to become a teacher of cooking and sewing due to the depression, she made her living at home taking in dressmaking and sewing.

The people of many nationalities who settled in the township, as well as the many fine buildings are described by her as she takes us back down memory lane and tells us of the life-style of those early years in the busy mining town. I was surprised to find out that the sewer was connected to Kurri Kurri during the Depression years, using men out of work for the job. Electricity as well was supplied to the homes in those early years from the power house, which was owned and run by the mining companies. These modern commodities were significant of the size of the town which was well designed and set out accordingly.

In summarizing the interview with Mrs. Dorothy Temperley, I found it tremendously interesting to hear her accurate and detailed account of schoolday activities of those times, set against a busy background setting of those bustling days of a coal mining town.

NAME : PATRICIA COWEN

CLASS : OPEN FOUNDATION AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

TIME : WEDNESDAY EVENING

HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER

"MY SCHOOL DAYS AND MEMORIES OF KURRI KURRI"

AN INTERVIEW WITH MRS. DOROTHY MAY TEMPERLEY

PAT : My name is Pat Cowen, I am a student of the Open Foundation Course conducted by the University of Newcastle. As part of my oral history essay, for history of the region, I am interviewing Mrs. Dorothy May Temperley and taking her back through time - down memory lane to talk about her school days in Kurri Kurri.

DOROTHY : My first school was Horseshoe Bend School in Carrington Street, West Maitland. As my mother was the eldest in her family of seven, I attended this school with aunts and uncles who were only just a few years older than I. The school was only a short distance from my grandparent's home. The school was built very high on wooden piers and under the school was used as a shelter shed where we ate our lunch. It was very cold in the winter and cool in the summer. The reason the school was built high was because of the flood area. It was situated on the bend of the river, therefore, the school was mostly known as the 'Bend School'. Recently a celebration was held there - 100 years old was the school. It is no longer used as a school because furniture is store there for the Department. When my father was invalided home from the war, my parents returned to Kurri Kurri and I then attended Kurri Kurri Primary School.

PAT : What class were you in Dorothy when you returned to Kurri Kurri school?

DOROTHY : Well Pat, I really think it was third class when I returned - memory doesn't take me back as far as that, but I know that boys and girls were in this Department until after third class, then we were in separate buildings. The boys had a wooden building and the girls had a lovely brick building.

PAT : What were the boys and girls taught in these classes Dorothy?

DOROTHY : Well, the boys had their carpentry room and different games of course. The girls, we had a very nice cookery building and we had different games. School days for me were very happy days. We learnt our lessons by reciting our tables, having spelling B's, poetry was learnt off by heart. We had pencils to form our letters and arithmetic, but in fourth class pens and ink were introduced. Of course, no biros!

- PAT : Did you have school captains in those days?
- DOROTHY : No Pat, we had monitors. Firstly we had ink boys or ink girls. The ink powder had to be mixed with water and had to be exactly the right strength. Large bottles were made up and poured into the ink wells. The ink wells were white china and had a small hole in which to dip the pen. Around the edge of the well was a small piece of cloth. The desks were long and the forms we sat on held five. Later on we had desks to hold two pupils with seats that folded back. Much noise was made in the morning for 'down seats' and the same noise for 'up seats' when the bell rang for home.
- PAT : Dorothy, in your days were you issued with school magazines?
- DOROTHY : Yes Pat, every month we eagerly looked forward to our magazine. There was always a serial, short stories and music. Lots of lessons were given from the magazine which we had to read as homework.
- PAT : Dorothy, how did your schoolday begin?
- DOROTHY : Well Pat, we had to get into lines according to our class. It was a race to see who would be the leader. We were then drilled - at ease, etc. etc. while in lines. We saluted our flag, sang the National Anthem (God Save Our Gracious King) and we recited "I honour my God, my King and country", and then we marched into school, sometimes accompanied by a girl playing the piano, or in the boys case, a drum - beating the drum. When the coal mines of the district weren't working, remember it was a coal mining town in those days, fathers would stand at the fence and watch the marching and drilling. It was nearly a procession and the boys especially, were caned if out of step!
- PAT : What kind of activities were available for the students at the school?
- DOROTHY : Pat, I can remember having a school choir and we competed in the Esteddford. Kurri at that time had a world known estedford. We had school frolics. They were held in a large building opposite the school. We had tuckshops or canteens as you know it

now, but most people went home for lunch. We had toffee days, cake stalls and generally sometimes skipping races, the Gould League of Bird Lovers and the Junior Red Cross.

PAT : What did most of the students do at the end of sixth class Dorothy?

DOROTHY : Well Pat, in those days it was called a Qualifying Certificate - known as the QC. Pupils mostly left at the age of fourteen, but those that wanted to, could continue on to what was called seventh and eighth class - 'Super Primary'. It was a clerical course - typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, sewing and cooking.

PAT : Did Kurri Kurri have a high school?

DOROTHY : No Pat, they had to qualify by sitting for a special exam that was called the 'Entrance to High School' certificate. A bursary was also given and many pupils from Kurri Kurri were bursers.

PAT : Where was the high school situated?

DOROTHY : Well Pat, the pupils who wanted to go to high school and had passed their exam, had to travel to Maitland. They travelled to the station, Kurri Kurri station, in Hampton's horse-drawn coach, then to Stanford Merthyr Station. Stanford Merthyr was a private railway owned by the great coal baron, John Brown. It was a dead-end line, the engine was uncoupled and driven to the other end of the line, the seats were reversed for Maitland. Pupils left Kurri Kurri at 7.00am and returned at 5.30pm. It was a long, tiring day indeed. After three years, an Intermediate Certificate was given and after five years of high school, a Leaving Certificate. Then pupils either progressed to the University or Teachers' College. By way of interest Pat, Kurri Kurri school building was used as a hospital as well as the existing hospital during the pneumonic plague in the early 20's, 1920's I should say. It was a terrible time, many people died. Every resident - even children and babies were vaccinated.

PAT : That must have been a terrible time Dorothy!

DOROTHY : Yes Pat, it was. As a further precaution we were made to wear muslin masks with tapes tied to the back of our head. These masks covered our noses and mouth, and had to be worn when shopping or travelling in trains. A yellow flag had to be flown outside a house if there was a person sick there, and all foods were only delivered to the gate.

PAT : Were there many deaths at the time?

DOROTHY : Well, as far as I can remember - many deaths, but funnily enough the toilet block behind the infant's school was made into the morgue. It sounds funny today, but that's where the dead were placed until the undertaker collected them. A toilet block was rebuilt after the plague.

PAT : What games were played by the children in the playground at the school?

DOROTHY : Well naturally very different games to today's. The girls played skippy - 'Solo' and 'French' skippy. We had rounders, the ball games were - 1,2,3 aleree and team games. We threw a ball at the wall, it was a throw-out against the wall etc. We had 'Hopscotch'. In 'Hopscotch' we had our own tope. A small round or square tin filled with soil. Also, 'Styles' or 'Stilts', I should say - two treacle tins filled with soil, a strong string threaded through the lid. These strings were over each shoulder and we placed our feet on the tins and endeavoured to walk 6" higher. We also played 'Vigaro' - a game like cricket.

PAT : Were the boy's games different from the girls?

DOROTHY : Well Pat, yes, they played one game called 'Saddle Me Nag', which was banned later. One boy against the wall and then three boys clinging to him. Then three boys tried to jump on their backs - hence 'saddle me nag'. If the saddle collapsed, the riders were winners. They also played marbles - 'Big Ring, Little Ring'. They had marbles called 'Connies' - white glass marbles were mostly taken from lemonade bottles in those days. They played a game called 'Odds and Evens' with their marbles. You had to guess how many marbles they held in their hand. If

you guessed the correct number, you gained the marbles. 'Grappee' was another marble game. You threw the marble against the wall and if the owner of the first marble could hand-span where the other marble lay, the marble was his. Another marble game was played by digging small holes so far apart from each other, then their marbles from each player placed in the hole. The idea was to fire your marble and to try and hit the marble out of the hole etc. They played 'Buttons' and 'Tinnies' and 'Blanks'. I've got some match-boxes at home that I really could show you Pat. The blanks they had from the match-boxes were flipped with the thumb and finger.

PAT : How did the children get to school each day?

DOROTHY : Well, most of us walked Pat, because you have to remember it was a much smaller town that it is today, and on the way to school you would often pass tradesmen such as the baker and the iceman. The ice was cut from a large block on the cart, and according to your ice chest size, the block was carried into the house covered with a hession bag. The block was then placed in the top of the ice chest. Boys loved to follow the iceman to get the small pieces of ice. Milk was also delivered - he poured the required measure into a half-ping or one-pint or quart measure and then into the customer's jug. No tests were made on the milk - straight from the cows - certainly no pasturisation. Kurri Kurri also had many lanes and the 'Bottle-O' drove his horse and cart along the lanes calling "Bottle-O". He bought the empty bottles of all kinds. There was a prop man, he brought the props along. Your clothes line was then propped up by this long pole. I can't remember a garbage man, the reason being, everyone had a coal burning stove or copper fire. There was also a Fruiterer who called, and we had a Fisho every Friday. Also an icecream cart, and it was a very very pretty cart with yellow icecream which melted quickly. There was a Bag-man which we called 'hawkers'. Lots of Chinamen, with their baskets suspended on a rod over their backs. The grocer sent an order boy to the homes and the grocer delivered the order the next day.

- PAT : Dorothy, how would you compare your school days to present school days at a primary level?
- DOROTHY : Well Pat, our education consisted of the three R's, no real frills. We did have our sport as I've mentioned earlier, but to-day, the general education is so broad, it's so vastly different. They learn many, many more things than we did with our three R's.
- PAT : Dorothy, just getting back to the classroom, did you wear a school uniform?
- DOROTHY : No Pat, school uniforms were not in in my day. When persons went to high school, they wore uniforms, but thinking back to the poor days, some of the boys didn't even wear shoes - I can remember that! We wore just frocks, mostly our bonnets - we had to wear hats of course (it was a very hot climate, Kurri) were the same as our frocks.
- PAT : Dorothy, what about sports uniforms?
- DOROTHY : No, we mostly played vigaro, or the boys played cricket in our school ground. Kurri Kurri school was a very large quarter acre or more than that I suppose, an acre of school and we had to play all games within our school.
- PAT : Do you ever remember having any school excursions?
- DOROTHY : Only one, Pat and that was the Duke and Dutchess of York who visited Newcastle in King Edward Park and the rotunda that's there today is the one we visited and waved to the Duke and Dutchess. We left Kurri on a special train and waving flags and specially dressed in white frocks stiffly starched. That's the only excursion I can ever remember.
- PAT : Dorothy, what were your leisure-time activities away from school?
- DOROTHY : Well Pat, I played tennis. We didn't go very far as you can well realise, what with transport difficulties, train and not many cars. At night time, if we had visitors, we all sat with our needle-work and naturally everyone showed each other their particular piece of work.

PAT : Dorothy, after primary school, did you further your education?

DOROTHY : Yes Pat, I went to Newcastle to Wood Street Tech. Today I think it is a museum, that may not be quite correct, but I spent three years there doing a home economics course - sewing and needlework and cookery, plus we did chemistry, english and maths for three years. At the end of three years, it being Depression times, I didn't get a scholarship to be made a teacher, so therefore, I had to take in sewing at my own home.

PAT : Did you make a living from this Dorothy? How much did you charge, for instance, in making a dress?

DOROTHY : I started off by cutting-out and tacking or cutting-out and pinning. If I pinned the garment for the person who could sew, they only got charged 1/6. If I tacked it ready to sew, I charged 2/-, but if I made an elaborate garment - the most I could get was 7/6 for that garment. That of course, wasn't a living Pat. I was an only child and my parents naturally, were able to keep me, but it made good money for those days because materials were only 3d or 6d a yard. Therefore, most people were on only a small wage and I was able to do everything that anyone else in the town was doing.

PAT : Well Dorothy, I really enjoyed talking to you about your memories and hearing all the interesting things about your school days at Kurri Kurri. I think now what I'd like to do is talk a little bit about Kurri Kurri itself, and find out what happened in those early years at Kurri Kurri. For instance, how did Kurri Kurri get its name?

DOROTHY : Well Pat, it's purely an ~~h~~aboriginal name with the meaning "in the beginning" or "the very first" or "Genesis", that's what's generally known. The word Kurri Kurri appears to have some association with Aboriginal ceremony of Bora or "man making", that's what I've been told.

PAT : What was the reason Dorothy, for your parents settlement in Kurri Kurri?

DOROTHY : My father's family left Warialda and came down to Kurri Kurri because of the opening of the mines there. Having six sons and one daughter in a family, evidently my grandparents thought they'd find work there. My father became a miner and his brothers likewise. Therefore, that was the early days of Kurri and mining was learnt then.

PAT : Kurri Kurri obviously grew into quite a large township. What are your memories of buildings in the town?

DOROTHY : Well, Kurri is situated on a hill and the main street is the top of the hill and the four hotels are in very good positions. Two are in the main street, exactly square to them down on the southern side of Kurri. Those buildings today are in the National Trust. They have the beautiful lace-work, the lovely brick buildings are well established hotels. Well, in my school days you bought everything in your own town. There was a cooperative store, a very big building and it had branches in all the smaller towns around Kurri. You didn't go out of town to shop, you had all the essentials - the bootmaker that mended your shoes, and you purchased your shoes in Kurri too. There was always plenty of frock shops, material shops, haberdashery, butchers - at least five or six butchers I can bring to mind.

PAT : What type of housing was found in Kurri Kurri in those early years?

DOROTHY : Well, my parents had a lovely home, but not everyone lived in such a nice home as ours was. Around the pits when it first started, I believe they were called humpeys made of slab timber etc. But today, there's the typical miner's cottage - it's just a veranda in the front and two rooms with an open fire-place, and how they housed all their children in one bedroom I'll never know!

PAT : Dorothy, you've just mentioned open fires - did you burn oil lamps?

- DOROTHY : Yes Pat, today I still have my mother's first oil lamp, but most of my life, I think electricity was connected to the home. My mother was really frightened of her first electric iron. She still used her flat irons or her 'Mrs. Potts' on the stove. I also remember as a young girl, sewer being connected to Kurri. It was an achievement because it was done during the Depression and men out of work were employed to lay the sewer. Mother had a beautiful porcelain bath which was a treasure. Prior to that we had a tin bath - it sounds funny today, but most people only had the round bath and bathed in front of the open fire.
- PAT : Dorothy, at this stage of your life, since leaving school, what kind of social activities were you engaged in?
- DOROTHY : Well Pat, mostly dancing. I loved dancing, but as I said earlier, I played tennis and also followed the football teams. Kurri had a soccer team - very good soccer teams and also the rugby league. Because that was the only girl could meet boy in those days. You went to church three times on a Sunday also.
- PAT : In those early days were there many emigrants from overseas in Kurri looking for work?
- DOROTHY : Yes Pat, lots of Welsh people and they were really wonderful people the Welsh people - with their Evan Evan's and their Morris Morris's and Mitchell Mitchells were their names. They had what was called a male voice choir - the "Male Welsh Voice Choir" in Kurri. There was Scotch people and they had their kilts and their band. There were German people by the name of "Bickmore" one particular gentleman, very well known German folk. Many nationalities I suppose. We had a gentleman there - a black man, we used to call him "Black Snow" - he was a clergyman. I can think of many persons, but I can't really know their nationalities.
- PAT : Well, thank you Dorothy for giving me your time today for this interview. I've really enjoyed hearing about the history of Kurri Kurri, especially all about your school days.

NAME : PATRICIA COWEN

SUBJECT : OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE —
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
REGIONAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

"KURRI KURRI — IN THE BEGINNING"

KURRI KURRI - IN THE BEGINNING

The history of Kurri Kurri is based on the development of mining from the beginning. However, it was not until fourteen years after the work of Professor Edgeworth David, that the Cessnock-Kurri Coalfields came into their own and became one of the greatest coalfield centres in the Commonwealth. Professor David's sensational discovery of coal at Swamp Creek near Abermain, led to the development of this area which was later known as the South Maitland Coalfields. Until 1900 the Newcastle mines were the main suppliers of coal.

Around these collieries, tents were pitched and bag humpes built. Many men left their work in Newcastle and lived in these tents, going home on the weekends. The first colliery to open was at East Greta in 1897. Then two mines opened which were to give Kurri Kurri its start - Stanford Merthyr (later Stanford Main) and Pelaw Main, which began production in 1900. Hebburn began in 1902 and Abermain in 1903. In 1904, the shaft of Aberdare was sunk. These mines were owned by the great coal barons James and Alexander Brown.

Small settlements soon sprang up as mines were opened and there was a demand for a planned township. The Government set up a special committee to investigate a suitable site and one was chosen, about one-and-a-half miles to the west of Heddon Greta. The name Kurri Kurri was given to the township. These words have an Aboriginal association, meaning "in the beginning" or "the very first". The words are also connected to the initiation ceremony of Bora, or man-making ceremony. Evidence has been given that a Bora ground was once located behind the site of the Hall in Victoria Street.

The planning and naming of the streets in 1902 was given high priority and many of the street names reflect that period, being associated with events such as:

- (i) Coronation of King Edward
(e.g. Coronation, Edward, Victoria Streets)
- (ii) Coming of Federation
(Rawson, Barton, Deakin and Gillies Streets)
- (iii) South African War
(the area Spion Kop)

It is interesting to note that the main street called Cessnock Street, later became Lang Street in honour of the State Premier who visited Kurri Kurri during his career. Kurri Kurri is claimed to be the first town in the state to be built under modern town planning.

The township was offered for public sale at an auction held on 10th January, 1903 and 74 lots were sold in 110 minutes for a record price of £13,036/10/-. Street clearing didn't commence until 1904, when a special grant of £94 was paid to William Casey to clear Cessnock Street from end to end. Electricity was connected to Kurri Kurri by 1905. This came from the power house which was owned and run by the mining companies. 'Cambria' - the home built by Funeral Directors, H. Bevan and Sons, was the first house in Kurri Kurri to have electric light. This was erected in Hopetown Street and cost £400/-/-to build.

The local newspaper "Kurri Kurri Times" was founded by William Liggins and Robert Gornall in January, 1905. This was sold at 1d. a copy.

In those early days, Kurri Kurri had several shanties where miners and wheelers could get a glass of ale. As the settlement grew, it became evident that these shanties wouldn't be able to keep the population supplied. It was decided to build a hotel between Kurri Kurri and Pelaw Main - to be

called the Empire Hotel, but to the early settlers it was always known as Milgate's Hotel. While the contractor was building this hotel, he also started work on the Kurri Kurri Hotel, but the Empire opened first. Later the Station Hotel opened and many years later Tooheys gained permission to erect the Chelmsford Hotel. These four hotels are still open today.

In 1905, a number of explosions occurred in Stanford Merthyr and five men were killed. The town suffered from this tragic blow as 310 men and 85 boys were thrown out of work. The seals of the colliery were not broken until June 1906, but a type of gas called 'Black Damp' was present and the mine didn't open for work until July and the cavel drawn early in August, 1906. The township soon recovered from the blow, with both Pelaw Main and Stanford Merthyr mines in operation. The area enjoyed a period of prosperity and many new businesses were attracted to the town.

One of the oldest and best-known citizens of Kurri Kurri was the late Mr. Edwin Bickmore. He came to Kurri in 1905 and built a brick store in 1908 with hitching rails, smooth board counters and regimented shelving. This store is regarded as one of the oldest on the coalfields and the business is still operated today by his family, and represents an eighty-year old landmark for the town. Mr. Bickmore, a seaman-come clerk and store-keeper was appointed a guardian of minors. This gave him the power to give permission to minors to marry, who had no parents.

Before the construction of a permanent school building in Kurri Kurri, many pupils attended the old Stanford Merthyr school. Parents agitated strongly for a permanent school and eventually a school was opened with Mr. J.H. Brown as the first headmaster. In 1910 an infants school was opened with Mrs. Stevens as headmistress. The schools were so crowded in

the boom days, that the Lewis Hall and the School of Arts had to be used. The Kurri Kurri convent school was opened in 1909.

The need for a hospital was very great because of the dangerous work carried out by the miners. The first hospital was started in 1903 in a small cottage that held five patients. The first move to establish a permanent hospital came from the Pelaw Main Miner's Lodge Medical Committee which stressed the number of accidents in the mines, as well as the rough roads to Maitland Hospital, good enough reason to establish a proper hospital in Kurri Kurri. The Stanford Merthyr disaster resulted in the lodges asking their members to pay 3d. per fortnight to a building fund for a better hospital. The people raised £1,500. and the Government gave £2,000. In 1912 the hospital was opened on its present site. At first a horse-drawn ambulance was used, but later motor vehicles were run by the Cessnock-Kurri Ambulance. Kurri Hospital served the people of Cessnock until the Cessnock Hospital was built in 1914.

The School of Arts was always a prominent feature of the coalfields and Kurri Kurri was no exception. Interest was shown in the School of Arts as early as 1905 and by 1926 a substantial building existed with a library, reading rooms, games rooms, etc.

Many people of the coalfields came from musical backgrounds, such as the Welsh, Scottish, Irish and the English. The people had to establish their own entertainment in those days of no wireless or television, and many musical groups were formed. The Kurri Kurri Esteddford attracted many people from all parts of the Commonwealth and the Kurri Kurri Orpheus Club Male Voice Choir was an outstanding musical body which competed with a great deal of success.

Churches of various denominations established themselves in the very early days bringing comfort and good into the lives of the people during periods of grief, strife and industrial depression. The Church of England, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic and the Salvation Army churches were all founded in the early 1900's.

By 1928, the population of Kurri Kurri was 6,500, with the district total - 18,000. With electricity and water connected to the town, as well as a good train and bus service to Maitland, the township was firmly established. A modern, well-planned township, whose beginning was the crude wooden and bag humpeys of the pit tops, Kurri Kurri truly was a monument to an era of man's achievements and dreams.

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