

Faithful Always

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS 1889–2014

Sacred Heart College, Kyneton

Dr Danielle White





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Preface & Acknowledgements

Any publication that celebrates a historical milestone owes its greatest thanks to those whose lives have played a part in living, creating, preserving and honouring the story told within its pages.

This 'potted history' commissioned by Sacred Heart College Kyneton commemorates the school's 125th Anniversary from 1889 to 2014. It is intended as a small legacy; a stepping stone laid at a significant point in time in the school's ongoing journey. It is hoped that the book will be explored, enjoyed, reflected upon and added to in time. At the very least, *Faithful Always* aims to guide readers on a reflective and celebratory discovery of Sacred Heart College's notable history – from its humble and devoted beginnings to its faithful fulfilments and ever-promising future.

As well as several key publications and resources that precede and inform this one, the author gratefully acknowledges all those whose hard work has contributed to this present work most especially the contributions of the following individuals and organisations listed alphabetically: David Pollock, Dr Berenice M Kerr RSM, Elliott Midland Newspapers, Kyneton Historical Society, Lynn Twelftree, Nola Malon, Ruth Garratt, SHC archivist Sharon Lanteri, Sisters of Mercy (Melbourne Congregation) as well as the many past pupils and teachers who generously contributed photos, mementos and memoirs to the school's archives, in particular Brenda McLeish (nee Keating) past pupil 1950's.

About the author

Dr Danielle White is an Alumna of Sacred Heart College Kyneton 1979–1984 and one of six children from a sixth-generation pastoral family living in the Kyneton district. Danielle's family connection to Sacred Heart College spans eighty-plus years from the 1930s when her Uncles Gerald and John White first attended the school to today via her relatives who attend Sacred Heart College.

Danielle holds a PhD, MA, BA (Hons), GradDip (Women's Health), GradDip (Health Education & Promotion) from the University of Melbourne where she worked in academia and in later years moved into marketing and communications. Since returning to live in Kyneton in 2004, and now living on a small rural property "Crofters Fold" with her husband Ashley, Danielle has established herself as a freelance writer predominantly published in *The Age* and on-line. Danielle is currently writing a history of Kyneton and blogs about her shared love of country life at www.thecountryphiles.com

Author's note: Whilst this publication is intended only as a reflective historical overview, all reasonable efforts have been made to ensure information is sound and accurate. All images have been printed with acknowledgements and permissions where appropriate and/or possible. As with most historical works that rely in great part on private collections, personal recollections and partial and uncatalogued information and imagery, corrections, amendments, variations and interpretations are inevitable. Please regard this publication as an opportunity to provide Sacred Heart College with additional material, updates, corrections, feedback and donations prior to its 150th celebrations in 2039.

Contents



Preface & Acknowledgements ii

About the author ii

Principal's message iv

Reflections v

CHAPTER 1 *1889—1890: A call nobly answered* 1

A generous God-given gift 6

CHAPTER 2 *1890—1915: Servite Domino in laetitia* 9

Keeping the home fires burning 17

CHAPTER 3 *1915—1940: Sacred Heart Ladies' College* 19

Letters home 25

The Chapel 26

CHAPTER 4 *1940—1965: Homely & happy* 29

Memories of Kyneton 33

CHAPTER 5 *1965—1990: The science of survival & joyous celebrations* 35

St Teresa's – Formative Years 41

Old Collegians 42

CHAPTER 6 *1990—2014: Faithful Always* 45

The early years 48

Principals 1889–2014 53

End Notes 54

Bibliography 57

Principal's Message

It is with great pleasure and a sense of pride that I introduce and welcome you the reader to this repository of the history of Sacred Heart College, Kyneton. The intention of this story, as recorded here, forms a touchstone for those who past, present and future have the good fortune to know this place of Mercy. We the current members of this educational community, acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and their elders, people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the courageous and hard-working pioneers, the founding Sisters of Mercy and those that followed over the century. Acknowledgment goes to the laity that became a greater presence, continuing today in this Mercy educational endeavour. To our parents, students and community members, both past and present, we thank you for your contribution to this Catholic College in the Mercy tradition.



Craig Holmes
Principal
Sacred Heart College, 2011–



*The simplest and most practical lesson I know....
is to resolve to be good today,
but better tomorrow.
Let us take one day only in hand,
at a time,
merely making a resolve for tomorrow.
Thus we may hope to get on,
taking short, careful steps,
not great strides.*



Catherine McAuley,
Foundress, Sisters of Mercy



Reflections



It may not be well known, but the celebration of 125 years is called a quasiquicentennial anniversary (quasqui – a quarter, centennial - 100 years)

Congratulations to Sacred Heart College Kyneton on this important celebration – this moment in time – its 125th Anniversary.

The celebration of a significant milestone in any institution's life provides an opportunity to pause and to reflect on the accompanying story. At such a time, past, present and future are intrinsically linked with the anniversary encouraging reflection on the history and legacy of the past, the challenges of the present and the hopes for the future.

As we celebrate 125 years of Mercy Education at Sacred Heart College, Kyneton, 125 years of educational excellence, we remember the people and events of the past that have contributed to the development of the strong, dynamic College that proudly exists today. This book captures some of this rich history.

The word "community" is the word that best encapsulates the spirit of Sacred Heart College, a place of welcome and acceptance. This book tells the story of a vibrant and caring community which over the years has contributed much to, and drawn much from, the wider geographic community in which it is situated.

At this time of celebration it is also appropriate to pose some questions – Would Mother Gabriel Sherlock, the founding Sister, be proud of the College that sits on High Street today?

Has Sacred Heart College remained faithful to her Vision and its Mercy heritage? Are students being educated to be the leaders of tomorrow and to make a contribution to our contemporary world and the world of the future? The only answer to these questions can be a resounding 'Yes'. And so we give thanks for the journey so far and look to the future with hope and confidence.

And in the words of Catherine McAuley – "God bless and preserve you and send you every blessing".

Mary Moloney

Sr Mary Moloney RSM
Principal
Sacred Heart College, 1993–2005





Et in tér - ra pax b

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1889–1890

A call nobly answered

At approximately 6:30pm on Saturday 20 July 1889, six people stepped from the evening express train onto the platform at Kyneton's Railway Station. Their arrival was as keenly celebrated that day as their legacy is celebrated today – one hundred and twenty-five years later.



Accompanied by His Grace Most Reverend Thomas Joseph Carr – who had joined the travellers at Spencer Street Station – were the Reverend Mother Mary Gabriel Sherlock with Sisters Mary Ignatius O'Connor, Genevieve Buckley, Philomene Conway and Mechtilde Henry. The purpose of their trip was not merely to visit the burgeoning parish of Kyneton, but to embark upon something far more enduring and momentous.

The prosperous pastoral township of Kyneton was to become the Sisters' new mission and home.

Archbishop Carr's attention had been drawn to the 'shortcomings' of Kyneton's many schools by Father John Daly who, upon taking over from the venerated Dean Horatio Geoghegan as

Kyneton's parish priest in 1888, had identified a dire need for additional quality teaching staff, decent school premises and financial respite; a need he knew the Sisters would meet admirably and nobly.¹ Mother M. Gabriel and the Sisters accepted Archbishop Carr's request to leave the Geelong Convent of Mercy and establish the first Convent of Mercy in Kyneton.

The travellers were greeted at the station by the Very Rev. Dean Geoghegan, Father John Daly, Father M. Quinn and a 'kindly gathering of ladies and gentlemen.'² The welcoming party escorted the 'dedicated pioneers'³ by horse and cart to St Mary's Church of the Holy Rosary, Ebdon Street, where 'special prayers of thanksgiving were offered'⁴ and later to '... the house designed for the Convent, a building

at the corner of Wedge and Yaldwyn Streets,' where 'a repast' thoughtfully prepared by the ladies' of the parish was held.⁵

Mother M. Gabriel was born in Ireland in 1830 to 'a noble Irish family' said to prefer to 'sacrifice lands and title rather than lose their Faith.' At eleven years of age, young Maria Sherlock went to visit the Baggot Street Convent of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland where she met the Foundress of the Mercy Order Mother Catherine McAuley who 'laid her hand on the fair young head of Maria Sherlock and told her she would one day be a Sister of Mercy.'⁶ Maria Sherlock was Received in 1848 and Professed in 1850. In 1859, Sister Mary Gabriel Sherlock volunteered for the Australian Mission and arrived at the Geelong Convent where, after many years'

*'Nestled amongst green hills,
and on the winding banks of the
Campaspe, lies the pretty township
of Kyneton. Its green fields and
hawthorn hedges, interspersed with
the rich yellow flower of the gorse,
bring back memories of the old
land; and such memories, maybe,
they awakened in the hearts of the
Sisters of Mercy who arrived
there on July 20, 1889.'*⁵⁵



work as Mistress of Novices and the passing of Mother Mary Xavier Maguire, she became Superioress.⁷ Thirty years later, at the age of fifty-nine, Mother M. Gabriel boarded the train for Kyneton. Little wonder the parishioners held the 'advance-guard of the Sisters of Mercy' in such high esteem and welcomed them so 'heartily' to their town.⁸

First known as 'Campaspe Flat' then 'Trio' then 'Wedge's Flat', Kyneton was marked out in 1846 by surveyor and squatter Mr Wedge (of Wedge Bros.) as a teamsters' camping reserve.^{9,10} Two years later, the site had become part of the Jeffrey Brothers' run. Viewing the site from atop a bare hill where *Catherineville* stands today,¹¹ Superintendent of Port Phillip Mr CJ Latrobe, acting on behalf of the Governor of NSW, decided it was suitable for a rural town



Portrait of Catherine McAuley,
Foundress of The Sisters of Mercy.

to support the vast and important pastoral holdings that surrounded it. Mrs Jeffrey, hosting the Superintendent's visit at her homestead, was 'given the privilege of choosing the name of the new town'; she chose 'Kinton or Kyneton after her native town in Warwickshire near Stratford-upon-Avon.'^{12,13} In 1849, Latrobe commissioned government surveyor H.B. Foot to survey Kyneton as the new centre for law and order for the Mt Macedon District. On 4 January 1850, the Executive Council in Sydney had approved the plans and the town site was gazetted.¹⁴ Gold was discovered in July–August the following year and a 'steady stream' of travellers, squatters, pastoralists, labourers, stockmen, bullockies, teamsters and gold miners on route to the Mount Alexander and Bendigo goldfields stopped in the new town for rest, food and supplies. The population grew so 'rapidly'¹⁵ it seemed to happen 'in a night'.¹⁶ With this growth came the need for children's education.

Within just two years, Kyneton had, somewhat remarkably, become an important trading post and 'an established mission with a resident priest'^{17,18} – and it kept on developing. A description of Kyneton in *Victoria Illustrated* published in 1862 illuminates just how quickly: 'There is a remarkable difference between the Victoria of 1857 and 1861 ... Take the view of Kyneton, for example, with its broad streets, kerbed footpaths, substantial houses and stores, gas lamps and telegraph posts, there is nothing to distinguish it from a country town



First students. Original Convent, Wedge Street, Kyneton, ca. 1889.

in Great Britain, except a bullock dray, the brilliance of the atmosphere and the absence of mendicants.¹⁹

Foundation stones laid beneath grand double- and triple-storey bluestone, brick, timber, slate and iron buildings soon replaced the calico shanties, slab huts and inns of Kyneton's modest

*'Many of the little ones had never seen a Nun before and no doubt were in wonderment at the happenings.'*⁵⁴

beginnings. By 1889, aided inexorably by the arrival of the railway in 1862, the riverside town had well and truly secured its importance as a rich agricultural district, trading post, home to many and educational centre.^{20,21,22}

Nestled amongst expansive pastoral stations on grassy woodlands and well out of earshot of the clamorous sounds of the giant batteries, flumes, poppet heads, boilers, picks, shovels, drunken revelry and murderous cracking revolvers that permeated the goldfields, Kyneton was a relatively safe and peaceful place for families – women and children in particular – to settle and attend education.²³ Ultimately, the town's rapid growth meant a lack of resources and pupils were often taught in whatever spaces were available; from spare rooms in Catholic homes to public halls, verandahs and unoccupied houses.^{24,25}

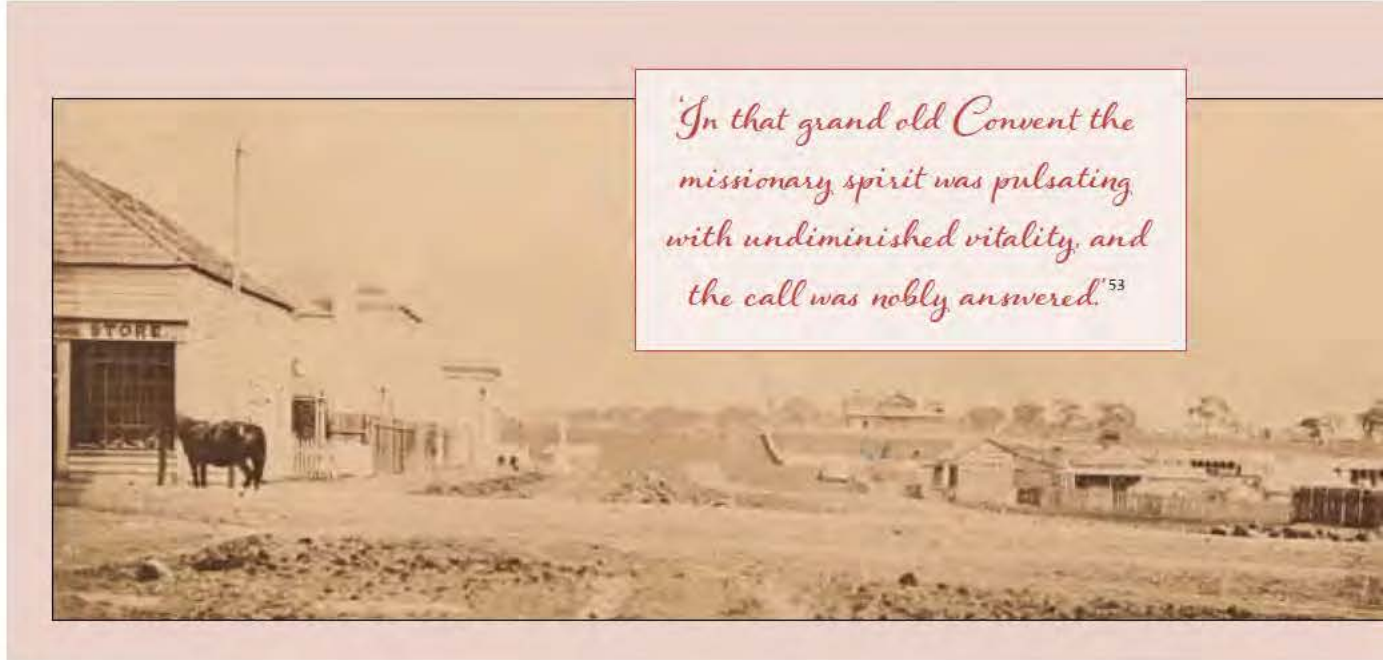
The Education Act of 1872, which took effect from 1 January 1873, gave the State control of education and 'State aid to denominational schools ended, education was to be free, compulsory and secular.'²⁶ The Sisters had their work cut out for them; and work they did.

At the time of their arrival, the Kyneton parish²⁷ had the 'highest proportion of Catholics outside the metropolitan area.'²⁸ Along with the School of Mines, Arts & Agriculture, the Mechanics' Institute, Our School No. 343 and other denominational, private and finishing schools,²⁹ there were twenty-five Catholic schools with a total of 1,335 children enrolled and an average attendance of 881. The Catholic schools were testament to Dean Geoghegan's 'untiring efforts'³⁰ during his 33 years in the parish and the loyalty and 'self-sacrifice of his teachers' and parishioners.³¹

Within days of stepping off the train and despite the bitter cold of a Kyneton winter, the Sisters promptly set about their active pastoral apostolate in true Mercy spirit: two schools were opened and the local hospital visited. On Monday 22 July, the Primary School dedicated to St. Joseph was opened (on the same Wedge Street site as the convent and secondary school) with 65 pupils and Sisters M. Philomene Conway and Ignatius O'Connor as its first teachers. A week later, on Monday 29 July the High School under the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas, also on the site of the convent, was opened with 24 day students and Sisters M. Genevieve Buckley and Mechtilde Henry as its first teachers.³²

Somewhat notoriously, the building refurbished for the Convent was previously the Robert Burns Hotel, which was one of the earliest built in Kyneton and said to have done a roaring trade until the railway opened in 1862.^{33,34} Indeed, the Sisters opened the Convent High School 'in what had previously been the bar!'³⁵ Known to locals during its heyday as the 'Bobbie Burns' the hotel's walls were said to have 'resounded to the rollicking yarns spun by the miners' en route to the goldfields.^{36,37}

When Archbishop Carr purchased the large, two-storeyed verandah-ed Wedge Street building in 1887 for £1200,³⁸ it had already been operating as the Collegiate School for young gents since 1865.³⁹ Of bluestone and brick with a shingle roof with galvanised iron over and set on a one-acre block of land,⁴⁰



*'In that grand old Convent the missionary spirit was pulsating with undiminished vitality, and the call was nobly answered.'*⁵³

His Grace had intended the building be used by the Christian Brothers. When securing the Brothers proved difficult, the building became the Sisters' new home.^{41,42,43} Prior to their arrival, Rev. Mother Gabriel and Sister Mary Cecilia had the opportunity to view the property and declared they were 'infinitely satisfied with the building, its capaciousness, site and surroundings.'⁴⁴

By 24 August, the Sisters had opened the Convent of Mercy, Kyneton: a boarding and day school for '... the proper tuition of girls and young ladies.' Alice O'Halloran, Kate Barry and Carrie Lyons were its first students⁴⁵ and twenty boarders were in residence by Christmas.⁴⁶ With all this activity and progress, two extra Sisters soon arrived from Geelong – Sisters Mary Austin Hall and Maria Silva. Such a successful beginning provoked Archbishop Carr to astutely predict 'a great future for the convent.'⁴⁷

View south down Wedge St. from opposite the Royal Hotel, Piper Street, ca. 1861. Tallest building on left Robert Burns Hotel; large building in distance original Kyneton Hospital.

By September, a funding-raising auction, concert and hurling match had been held 'to aid the Convent fund' and Rev. Mother of the Geelong Convent had gifted the Community a 'beautiful piano' along with extra funds for a second one. On 1 November, the sixty-five enrolled primary school students sang in Latin at the Feast of All Saints Mass held in St Mary's church.⁴⁸ Little wonder His Grace reported being 'highly pleased' at the end-of-year Distribution Day held on 16 December and equally satisfied with the 'creditably rendered' concert program, which included a concert, speeches and an exhibition of students' artwork.

After distributing the prizes in the presence of a large number of family and friends of the students, His Grace expressed 'his gratification at the entertainment which gave evidence of the high standard of education the children were receiving.'^{49,50} Christmas Day Mass was celebrated in the convent by Father Malone and to close the year, on 28 December Fr Hughes S.J., 'exhorted the Sisters to labour cheerfully and zealously in cultivating the little seed entrusted to them, to beautify their place, to try to make the best of everything, to preserve the "tranquillity of order" by their Sisterly union and charity, humility, obedience, silence and recollection – to make their little Convent a new Nazareth where God would be loved and served.'⁵¹

Archbishop Carr continued to visit the parish frequently to say Mass and encourage the nuns to maintain a close bond amongst themselves and observe their Rule strictly to help ensure the Mercy Convent at Kyneton was 'established in the right spirit.' This, he felt, 'would prove a blessing to future generations.'⁵²

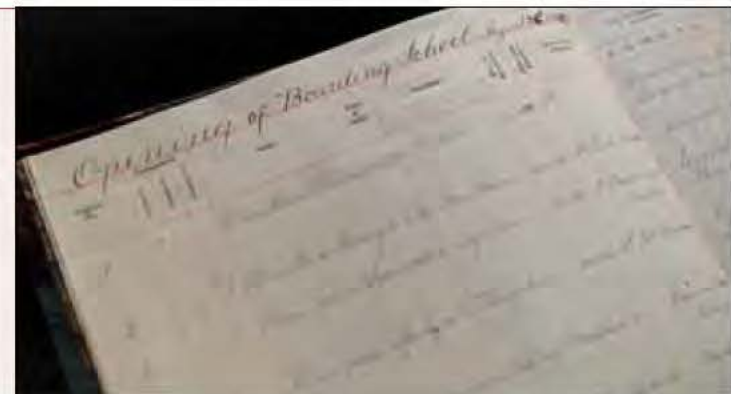


Student ca. 1900.

ABOVE 1890 Concert Programme.

BELOW Admissions Register. First students, July 1889.

*'The Sisters shall be convinced that no work of charity, can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the Poor, than the careful instruction of women; because, whatever the station they are destined to fill, their example and their advice will always have influence; and where a good woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.'*⁵⁶





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*'Mercy bestows benefits, receives us anew,
and pardons us again and again'*

CATHERINE McAULEY

