

**Drouin West School**  
**Head teacher from 1966 to 1968**  
**Information supplied by John Tribe**

I was appointed to the Drouin West School following three years as Head Teacher at Mallacoota Central School. I applied for Drouin West as it was closer to Melbourne and had a residence available for the Head Teacher.

The school was in excellent condition. Three good classrooms, two of which, plus an office and staffroom had been added to the original school building which had been built at the same time as the school house. The school building had been well maintained over the years. The school was placed towards the front corner of the five acre grounds with lawn and a garden in the front, children's play area at the rear and behind were two good quality asphalt tennis courts (although on the school property these were the Drouin West Tennis Club courts.) Behind these and to the side to the West was a reasonable sized oval. Between the school and our house - which was only about 50 metres away from the school - were a gravel quadrangle, shelter shed and boys and girls toilets, fortunately all attached to a new and properly functioning septic system.



*Drouin West  
Primary School  
1967*

The experience of several house moves and exposure to country life and the schools enabled us to quickly settle in. My wife, Rosemary, organised the house and made some initial contact with the neighbours on surrounding farms. I spent significant time at the school as the school year would commence in three weeks at the beginning of February, 1966. I had to rapidly assess the administrative details and general classroom equipment for the whole school. I had to prepare curriculum - annual, monthly, weekly (well the first week anyway) for the Years 5 and 6. I would take and make sure that all the necessary materials were available for my two teaching assistants, one of whom would teach a composite Prep, Year 1 and 2, and the other a Composite Year 3 and 4. This was all complicated by the fact that not only was I new to the school but my assistants whose names I knew through my perusal of the official correspondence were also new appointees and had not yet arrived nor had they made any contact. I hoped that they would arrive some days before the school year started as I had much to discuss with them regarding curriculum matters and general school systems but they had to find their own accommodation. The School Committee Secretary told me that apart from the Head, the assistant teachers were usually single and boarded either in Drouin about five miles away or in Warragul. The locals had no board arrangements for them.

At last, one week before school commencement, Rosemary Mulavey, the teacher I allocated to Year 3 and 4, arrived and fortuitously had a relative in Drouin and she had made arrangements to board with her. Hayden Hooley, the Infant teacher was married to a newly appointed Art teacher at Warragul High School. They had rented a house on a farm half way between Warragul and Drouin West so finally I had my staffing arrangements settled. Hayden Hooley was an experienced Infant teacher and I very quickly saw that she knew how and what to do to be ready for the commencement of Term 1. Rosemary Mulavey had only limited experience and had only ever taught Year 3 in a city school. This was her first country appointment and she was going to need quite a lot of my time preparing and in particular coming to grips with a composite grade

and the Year 4 curriculum. As I had comprehensive experience in all year levels since my first country appointment in a small, one teacher school, and in running a rural training school for two years attached to Melbourne Teachers' College, I had a solid knowledge of the curriculum requirements across all the years so that we very quickly had Rosemary understanding the work she had to do.

The school year started well. Early testing of all the children quickly determined areas of strength and weakness and between us we devised special programs for children with specific needs in various subjects. Once again the music program was my responsibility as in previous schools I had run the music program. At that time, and perhaps even now, teachers generally had poor music knowledge and there were no specialist music teachers available. I taught music to Years 3 to 6 as Hayden had developed Infant music programs in her previous schools so I could leave that section to her with confidence.

The School Committee was gathered together for its first meeting in February and a program for Building, Grounds and School Equipment was put to them by me and they agreed to pursue it. The Mothers' Club met and worked out their many fundraising activities for the year. I had spoken to them of the aims and objectives of the School Committee so they had a monetary target. Much of the equipment and buildings improvements and maintenance was paid for by funds allocated to the school by the Education Department and administered by the head of the school. It was the additional equipment and enhancements which were paid for by money raised locally. This is still the case.

Living where you work is an interesting experience. There is a feeling that you are on the job for 24 hours, 7 days a week even though you are home. Walk out to the toilet - there is the school. Not quite finished correcting some work? - It's Sunday morning but I'll stroll across and finish it anyway. Home for lunch each day. Forgot to bring a handkerchief to work? Duck home and get one - it's only a moment away.

## **Social Life at Drouin West**

Part of the school ground housed two asphalt tennis courts which were in excellent condition. These courts were the home of the Drouin West Tennis Club which was in the Neerim and District Tennis Association. The club was, together with the school, the community centre and meeting place for the district and became the main source of our weekend social life. The members of the Club were, in the main, also parents of children at the school and we were able to establish very pleasant, useful and in some cases long-lasting relationships with many people.

Our social contacts were not limited to the parents - we were now living in a well populated area and there were numerous schools of various sizes dotted about Drouin itself through Warragul, north to Noojee. The Victorian Teachers' Union branch (now called the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union) was very active and we met many of the teachers in the district this way. Again the meetings were rotated around the schools and held in the evening. We met in the school followed by drinks and supper at the school residence. These were enjoyable sessions and we had the chance to meet many of the teachers' partners as well.

## **Music at Drouin West**

A school choir was formed and this together with the recorder band played for the Mothers' Club meetings and at the Annual Christmas Concerts which were held in the Drouin West Public Hall. These were always packed houses as everyone in the community came, not just the parents. There was a piano in the school so I was able to accompany these choirs. I also used the piano in the infant section to accompany the percussion band that Hayden the infant teacher had developed. The children had great fun with these activities which were new to them as the previous teachers had not had much musical knowledge (easily

gleaned from a perusal of the music programs in the school records from previous years).

Hayden Hooley left the school at the end of 1967 as her teacher husband had been transferred to another school and Hayden moved on as what was known as a “compassionate transfer” to a school in the region near her husband. It is interesting here to note that the Education Department allowed women to transfer on compassionate grounds to follow the husband but would not allow the reverse - for a husband to follow a wife who had gained a position elsewhere. I was some years later involved in a test case regarding this situation.

Margaret Readhead was appointed to fill the vacancy. She had years of experience in Infant teaching and carried on the high quality work in that area of the school. She was a strong and forthright personality. We got on well together and I confidently left Margaret to run her section without much input from myself.

### **The School Residence**

The house was a disappointment. It had been built in 1874. Its design was typical of the housing in the country at that time. Veranda across the front. Passage down the centre - bedroom to the right, sitting room on the left, opening into the kitchen - 2nd bedroom off the kitchen to the right. Sloping back veranda filled in on the left with the third bedroom and on the right the bathroom. Out the back door to a paved area leading to the laundry and a toilet - at this time a primitive septic tank device but originally a pan disposal. The total house interior size was approximately the size of the infant classroom.



*Drouin West Residence - 1964*

Into this space had to be fitted all our furniture, two adults and three children. The total school property was about five acres, with one acre accommodating the school house and garden. The garden area was generous and quite delightful considering the tiny house sitting in one corner of it. At the front was an orchard of a dozen apple trees which faced the Drouin - Drouin West - Jindivick Rd. To the side a large Morton Bay fig which was probably planted about 90 years before when the house was built. At the back, behind and to the side of the laundry was a large grassed area with clothesline and shelter for the car.

The water, as it was in all our country houses, was tank water, tanks filled from roof run-off. The stove was a wood fire stove which had been upgraded a few years before and had the hot water pipes going through it.

We quickly worked out that, to have a shower, hot water had to be pumped to a tank in the roof which gravity fed to the shower rose. Before anyone could shower the water had to be hand pumped up to the tank. The pump was outside the kitchen window and we all became adept at giving the pump handle 100 pumps, which was enough to fill the tank

and provide a good shower - to forget the pump was to have the water cut out mid-soaping. We all only ever forgot once!

Several years before we came to Drouin West the residence had been condemned by the Education Department which meant that no further money would be spent on it and that we knew it would be demolished once we left the district,

The replacement of the school residence had been an agenda item for the School Committee and a succession of head teachers for many years. It was one of those problems that was the subject of an occasional letter to the Education Department from the Committee for a replacement and was always given a negative response by the Dept. It was placed on the bottom of the agenda for another day. I, too, had submitted the standard request in 1966 and 1967 just to keep the matter bubbling along, however, in 1968 the Victorian Teachers' Union State Council decided to have as its major campaign for the year the update of and improvement of housing for teachers across country Victoria. The campaign took many approaches, one of which was to highlight through the major newspapers and TV and radio the worst houses for teachers as a graphic example of the problem. I saw the possibility of pushing the Drouin West replacement more vigorously and publicly, so I contacted the campaign organizer suggesting the Drouin West house would make good publicity in the campaign and that I, the School Committee and the local branch of the Union, of which I was the Secretary, would co-operate fully in the pushing of the cause.

The VTU agreed with the idea and notified the newspapers of the chance for a 'good' teacher housing story at Drouin West. Within a few days we were contacted by *'The Age'* to arrange for a reporter and a photographer to visit the school.

The story ran about a week later with a photograph of me placing a brick on the corrugated iron roof of the house and a report regarding the

general condition of the house and the difficulty of having it repaired or replaced.



*Photograph of John on the house roof at  
Drouin West – **The Age** 1968*

The story brought an immediate response and I received a telephone call from the then Minister of Education, (later State Premier) Lindsay Thompson, saying that the Ministry would immediately find me a house in Drouin of high quality and would be pleased to pay all removal and associated costs. I replied by saying that the whole concept of a house on the school property in country districts enabled the teacher to operate the school as a community centre and to live and work in the community which he served. It sounds so pompous in retrospect but at the time it seemed to have been the right note to strike. The School Committee was delighted with the publicity and my response in declining a housing offer away from Drouin West.

A few weeks later, I received a letter from the Education Department advising that the residence would be demolished in the New Year and a new house built on the site during 1969. A new three-bed



roomed brick veneer house was built in 1969 as promised but we never lived in it as I made a decision to make a major career change. I was appointed as a full time salaried official of the Victorian Teachers' Union.