

THE HEADMASTER'S RESIDENCE

When the first Trustees of the School commissioned an architect to design what is now School House, part of the contract was that a residence for the Headmaster was to be built. The overall cost of the two buildings was £6,200 and a residence built in the style of a traditional Queenslander was erected on the site where the Middle School now stands. This residence was to last for seventy-six years and was to be home to seven Headmasters and their families. The Headmasters were Upward, Hodges, Miller, Rowland, Whight, Logan and Blank. When Mr Blank moved to the new residence in 1964 it ended a most fascinating chapter in the history of the School.

The residence was a large structure and included the school laundry, kitchen and dining room as well as the sick bay. Until the end of WWII the salary of the Headmaster was supplemented by a stipend which was paid for the number of boarders who had to be fed. Thus the wife of the Headmaster would also act as the housekeeper. The Headmaster's wife would also be the School matron: this continued until the death of Mrs Rowland in 1925 but even after that date the role of matron was undertaken by the two daughters of Mr Rowland. The role of matron was often quite an onerous task because, at times, many of the boarders were often bed-ridden with either malaria or dengue fever. At one Speech Day, Mr Rowland reported that every boarder in the School had been affected by dengue fever.

Mr Hodges was Headmaster from 1889 to 1900 and in that time the residence became a menagerie for birds and animals. In a book edited by Jack Pollard, *Birds of Paradise: birdlife in New Zealand and Australia* [1967] he recounts a story written by D. Le Souef called "Black Prince of Townsville Grammar." Le Souef writes about a pet cassowary that lived under the Headmaster's residence stating that the Headmaster, appointed from the Rugby School, and always immaculately dressed in a three piece suit would wander around the School with his arm around the neck of the cassowary and whose other companion was a white cockatoo. Chickens were also allowed to live under the residence and the cassowary would avail himself, on a daily basis, of the eggs laid by the chickens. Goats were also allowed to roam around the grounds of the School.

The residence took on a different function for the next Headmaster, Mr Miller [1901-1904]. On March 9, 1903 *Cyclone Leonta* hit the School completely destroying School House. Mr Miller had taken the precaution of battening down the doors and windows of the residence and thus the residence suffered comparatively little damage. Mr Miller had taken the girls out of the classrooms and put them into the safety of the residence. While School House was totally destroyed, the residence stood firm against the cyclonic winds although the dining room attached to the rear was unroofed and the laundry disappeared and the kitchen chimney fell with a crash. In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, repairs were made to the dining room and for a few weeks the boarders were housed in the residence until more suitable accommodation could be found for them.

Mr Rowland became Headmaster in 1905 and was to live in the residence until his retirement in 1938. It must have been a huge shock for Mrs Rowland when she arrived in Townsville. She had married Mr Rowland in January 1905 and found herself having to cater for and to nurse a growing band of boarders. Life must have been a little easier when in 1910 the Dining Room was enlarged when a panel was removed thus combining it with the verandah of the residence. A new sick bay, 23 feet by 12 feet was added to the residence. With the growth in boarder numbers, a new Dining Room was built in 1922, separate from the residence.

For many years the verandah of the residence was used for Speech Day. The official party would be seated on the verandah while the parents and students would be seated on the grass in front. Speeches were made from the verandah and students would have to climb the stairs to collect their prize. One act plays were also performed on Speech Day and would usually take place on the verandah. Mr Rowland had his office in the residence and the students, usually boys, came to call the stairs the "golden stairway".

If for any reason they had to see the Headmaster they would have to climb the stairs at the end of the day. Mr Rowland used to boast that he never had to discipline many students because they were usually too embarrassed to be seen climbing the "golden stairway".

Mr Whight [1939-1946] spent very little of his tenure in the residence. Between 1942 and 1944 the School was situated at "Rosslea" while the RAAF commissioned the School. Little is known of what use was made of the residence but it could be surmised that it was used as officer's quarters. The Trustees leased three houses at Rosslea, one for male teaching staff, one for the maids and one for Mr Whight. In 1943 Mr Whight was given five ducklings and a drake and until the end of 1944 the boarders were often treated to eggs and occasionally roasted duck. His yard was also used for the Inter-House vegetable gardening competition which was usually won by Rowland House.

On return to the main campus the residence was occupied by Mr Whight [until 1946], Mr Logan [1947] and then Mr Blank until the residence was demolished at the beginning of 1964. A new residence was built on a site close to where the Manual Arts' Centre is now situated. Mr Daniels took up residence in 1966 but in February 1975 the house burned down. Mr Daniels was to lose all his personal belongings in the fire. The Trustees found temporary accommodation for the Headmaster and in May 1975 they signed a contract for £47,950 for a, double storey, four bedroom house to be built on the corner of Paxton and Landsborough Streets.



Headmaster's Residence 1908

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