

THE METHODIST HOSTEL

(Woodleigh Residential College)

Rev. Clive W. Lanham writing for the "Queensland Methodist Times" dated Thursday, 2nd December, 1939 said that Herberton was fast turning from the mining industry to a more lasting and vital purpose, a centre of learning. He suggested that this ultimately would be Herberton's true title to fame and place in the towns of Queensland.

His words went this way -- "The education of our young people who are to govern and control this country in the future is of great importance, for on them will rest the responsibility of this Northern part of our grand Commonwealth. What better choice could be made than -- this locality, with its rugged splendour and its bracing climate, for the development of their young minds in the study of Mechanics, Law, Church, and general activities. Those who know under what conditions study can be applied agree that everything is in this district's favour.

"To have the mind ready for the reception of knowledge the body must be in perfect condition, avoiding any rush and nerve strain as experienced by young people in city areas". In this respect Herberton is all that is to be desired.

"Were a site for a University in the North being considered those who know the chief centres of learning throughout the world, and know Herberton would not hesitate one moment in their decision that this is the ideal spot for such a structure to rear its dignified head. It is a place where health and learning are marching on shoulder to shoulder".

Clive Lanham was certainly correct when he spoke about Herberton's unique location and bracing climate which

today still combine to produce an ideal place for the serious student.

What he did not foresee was the rapid development of other tableland and coastal centres which would naturally generate urgent educational needs of their own, and which would ultimately demand the building of large, local state high schools.

The mushrooming of scores of such schools offering education to grade twelve level dealt a death blow to Herberton State High School's claim to be North Queensland's headquarters of state school education, and, at the same time, reduced the urgent need for residential care to a more modest and manageable level.

But this later development does not detract from the fact that during the 1920's and through to the late 1950's the Methodist Hostel alongside the Herberton High School played a very timely and important role in providing both outback, coastal, and tableland children with a secondary education second to none in the state of Queensland at that time.

The real birth of the Herberton Methodist Hostel was on that day early in 1924 when Rev. and Mrs C.P.J. Clarkson received into their home the first student whose name was Mabel Giddings. When Rev. and Mrs. Jones replaced the Clarksons later that year they took in Mabel's sister Ethel as well as Rachel Pearson and Agnes Gray.

The problem of securing accommodation confronted parents. North Queensland children were being denied their rightful privilege of secondary education. Many parents had approached the Church requesting accommodation for their children.

Believing that his experiment of taking in just a few girls was the beginning of something important, Mr. Jones shared his vision of a larger accommodation scheme at the 1924 Methodist Conference. In its wisdom the members of that conference gave their sanction and approval for the larger scheme.

The church house or parsonage as it was known underwent considerable alteration so that it could cater for twenty-five students.

It was the President of the Queensland Methodist Conference Rev. H.M. Wheller accompanied by Rev. R.E. Bacon, the Chairman of the North Queensland District, who came to Herberton to open and dedicate the new venture on a fine Thursday, on 12th July, 1926.

This official opening of the Methodist Hostel was described by a newspaper of the day as "a milestone of far reaching importance in the progress of the town of Herberton".

At 1.30p.m. a dedication service was held in the presence of a large crowd of parents and friends. Herberton people were well represented and there were numerous people from the outlying districts. Car loads arrived from Atherton, Ravenshoe and Millstream while visitors came by train from as far afield as Mt. Molloy.

In his address Mr. Wheller spoke of the advantage of education and urged parents to give their children the best education possible. He maintained that the training of character was the most important aspect of education. Without it knowledge lost much of its value. He considered that it was in this respect of producing character that the Hostel would be of great service to the community.

He did not altogether like the formal sound of "Hostel". It was rather a "home" that the children would find who were fortunate enough to come into it.

After the dedication the hostel was thrown open to visitors. The newspaper of the day described it thus - "The airy and

well-lighted dormitories and the large dining hall were much admired after which about one hundred people sat down to tea".

In the evening the Public Meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the Shire Council, Mr.F.A.Grigg. It was noted with pleasure that Captain Watson and Leutenant Sloan of the Salvation Army were present.

Rev. R.E.Bacon spoke of the educational work that the Methodist Church in conjunction with the Presbyterian Church was doing at Charters Towers. He believed Herberton was following in the footsteps of the Towers, and was steadily gaining recognition as the educational centre of the north.

In congratulating Rev. and Mrs. Jones and the first housemistress, Miss Flaxman, Rev. Wheller said that "the Methodist Church would ever owe them a debt of gratitude for this new branch of work of which they were the originators".

Mr.Jones expected that when the hostel became known, and the climatic and educational advantages of Herberton were realised that the accommodation would be taxed to the utmost. His words were prophetic because by the early 1950's the numbers accommodated rose to over 200 students. However, the numbers remained modest up to 1940.

Ethel and Mabel Giddings, Rachael Pearson, and Agnes Gray were joined by Amy Chapman, Edna Fullerton, Leila Clarke, Margaret Hosie, and Ruby Brotherton in 1926. The hostel was officially opened with 9 students. In 1927 Dudley David became the first male student. The first primary age student was Alice Maiden.

After Rev. and Mrs Jones left Herberton, Home Missionary F.J.Leckenby took over in 1928. He was followed by Home Missionaries A.T.Walker, and then came John Else and S.J. Jones, 1929, the Rev. P.J.Lanham, B.A., 1930, Home Missionaries E.M.Johnston, 1931, D.E.Williams, 1932,

and George Cheetham, 1933. However, from 1928 onwards, it was Matron Bell, and not these Home Missionaries, who had direct oversight of the hostel. She gave many years of faithful and devoted service.

In the booklet prepared for the Herberton Methodist Church Jubilee Celebrations, 1933, the work of the Herberton Methodist Hostel was described as follows - "At present (it) is under the capable management of Mrs A. Bell. Children from all over the district have boarded at the hostel while attending the Herberton State High School, and we are delighted to know that the work of the hostel has been appreciated by the parents of the children. It has been very valuable in bringing the children under the Christian influence. We think of those who have stayed at the hostel during vacation and of others who have had fellowship with us. We pray that this institution will be greatly blessed in the service for the Kingdom of God". In 1936, Rev. and Mrs Clive Lanham took the responsibility of the Hostel and served five years.

The name of Mr. and Mrs Roy R.Toft are inseparably linked with the story of the Methodist Hostel. When they retired as Master and Matron at the end of 1960, they had devoted nineteen years to the work.

In a farewell speech to the Tofts on November 12th in the Methodist Hostel Hall, Mr.J.D.Syme said that in Herberton they all regarded the proposed departure of Mr and Mrs Toft with a deep sense of personal loss. He spoke of Herberton's pride in their record of achievement, and observed that few people had put in so many years of undeviating service to the people of North Queensland.

Mr. Toft should be permitted to tell his own story by means of his valedictory speech which was reported in a local newspaper of the day.

"It stimulates us a great deal to know that so many

friends and past students are here to join with us at our annual banquet. Some of the older people here will remember the hostel as it was nearly 20 years ago. Then we had eight students in residence - seven went home for the week-end which meant that we had one lad at the week-ends. Unfortunately that lad was unable to get here tonight. We had one building - about half the size of the main building here. We had no conveniences. We had no electrical appliances. We had a small wood stove and every morning at 4.15 I used to get up and light the stove and prepare it for breakfast. We had a wood copper for boiling clothes, and one shower bath. That was 1941. In 1942 we had 29 boarders. In 1943, 65, in 1946, 63, and in 1947, 80. Then one year we were expecting 100 and so our figures rose till we had 209. The buildings grew with the roll".

"Every part of the building has a story. The first year we bought the old home of Mr and Mrs Adcock Snr. There was no labour available. I took the building down myself and Mrs Toft came and helped me after she had sent the children off to school. The next year the A.I.F. was put into encampment round Herberton. There were thousands of eager young men with very little to do but rest - and the soldiers came and helped us with our building. The big block of bathrooms went in and a lot of good work was done. We excavated here to put in studies, we added another storey for a dormitory there, and as we built more students came. I may say Mrs Toft bore the brunt of the work in the hostel. She did all the cooking for 13 years - a record for any cook. She was also the matron and the nursing sister when the children were sick, which often happened as many people sent delicate children to Herberton from the coast for their health - particularly asthmatics. She had very little sleep and hours of broken rest. If greatness is synonymous with service, if service is the accent on a Christian spirit, then Mrs Toft has a great mind, and a great soul".

"Our numbers were not sustained automatically. Every parent whose children sat for scholarship received a circular about the Herberton Methodist Hostel.

Latterly, with the children of New Guinea in mind she made a visit to the territory with the result that this year we have 35 children from New Guinea and next year we will have 60. Despite the opening of new High Schools and the provision of Government Transport, our numbers have kept up. I think the people of Herberton realise the sort of woman Mrs. Toft is. At least 1100 individual students have stayed with us. We find our reward in the knowledge that we have made some contribution to the welfare of these people".

At the same gathering Mrs Toft said she could remember whole families of students - families of seven or eight girls and boys who had stayed for years - there were the Craigs, the Blakeys, the Pashens, the Shafferts, the Fassanos, and the Bennetts. She was proud to think that some of her students had become teachers, nurses, and missionaries. One boy had become a missionary in India. Others had become doctors and engineers. Mrs Toft told of the time when she had been hospitalised for an operation in Brisbane and had found that one of the theatre sisters was one of her hostel girls. She was always thrilled to hear from the many girls who had become happy wives and mothers.

1956 saw the erection of the first section of the new Hostel building at a cost of £30,000, a two storey brick building which still stands in Ellie Street, but which has since been converted into a block of flats.

The Tofts visualised a block of new buildings for administration purposes and grouped around it comfortable dormitories and cubicles, each age group having its own quarters. In the plan there was to be a recreation building, an up-to-date prep-room for students which would also serve as a music and hobby room, and a modern kitchen and dining room.

The substance of the dreams of the Tofts was taken hold of by others who followed even though the location and perspective of many of the dreams changed when the Methodist Church, in 1965, acquired the property of Saint Mary's School for Girls following a decision of the Anglican Diocese in North Queensland to transfer the school personnel to other centres.

From 1961 to 1982 the Methodist Hostel (Woodleigh Residential College since 1967) has suffered many ups and downs. Over this period a core of Herberton people together with many transferable people have remained firm in their conviction that the Church has a real responsibility to minister to children who, because of their particular domestic situation or remote location, are in residential care for part or whole of their school years. There have been other people including church leaders who have voiced other views about the degree and type of involvement the church and community should have in residential care. This wide cross-section of views has been mirrored in hostel staffing policies over these years, and has been confused even more by a rapidly changing economic climate which has generally made education and residential care more expensive; and the development of governmental policies both State and Commonwealth which have sought to fund specific groups of isolated and special need children in their educational development.

Mr and Mrs Sam Langford accepted responsibility for supervision of the Hostel from 1961 to 1963. They in turn were succeeded by Mr and Mrs Arthur Stokes. When Mr. Stokes retired because of illness Mr and Mrs Charles Tooley were appointed Master and Matron in 1965.

Mr. Langford, Mr. Stokes, and Mr. Tooley were laymen of the Methodist Church. After Mr. Langford's term the Methodist Church decided that the ministry to the students should be strengthened and some measure of

assistance should be given to the Master and Matron by inaugurating a Chaplain's position. Rev. Graeme Adsett was appointed as the first Chaplain in 1964, Rev. Alan Morrison followed in 1965, and Rev. Cecil Hawley in 1966.

After the Church purchased Saint Mary's School it was decided to appoint ordained ministers as Masters of the Hostel. The first of these was Rev. John Gillingham. He and his wife Iris began a ministry with the students in 1967 which lasted until the end of 1970.

Mr. Gillingham's term saw several policy changes. Instead of simply providing residential care, it was decided to extend student care by giving assistance in the form of tutorials in specific subjects. The development of a student library became a priority together with the arrangement of sporting programmes both within the College and in the community. To mark these changes the name of the operation was changed from Methodist Hostel to Woodleigh Residential College.

The name "WOODLEIGH" was used because of its association with an extremely large pastoral holding in the area in the late 1800's (406 sq.miles). Woodleigh Homestead was built on Millbank, on the Millstream, and was taken up by Charles Overland Garbutt in 1878. Today, the name "Woodleigh" is still applied to a much reduced area of land south of Ravenshoe.

The name change was considered appropriate too, because from the beginning of 1966 the boys lived with the Chaplain in what was the old Methodist Hostel and the girls lived with the Principal and his wife in the section formerly known as St. Mary's School. All students came together for meals, but had separate study blocks.

Mrs Walmsley who commenced her service in the time of Mr and Mrs Toft continued to give dedicated service up until the term of Mr and Mrs Gillingham. She accepted many roles for well over a decade. Among them was her love and care for the younger primary students in the house that was affectionately known as the "dolls' house". She must have mended thousands of garments. She assisted in the kitchen. Towards the end of her service her sight began to fail but she continued on tirelessly. Regularly each week she would slice up a whole sugar bag of fresh beans. For years she would see her girls and boys safely to school via "the crocodile" (the name given to the extended line of students which moved off from the Hostel to the school each morning). Miss Jan Luff and Deaconess Karen Crossman also assisted with the girls during Mr. Gillingham's ministry.

This programme was consolidated during the term of appointment of Rev. and Mrs Colin Howard from 1971 to 1975. Deaconess Colleen Grieve and Miss Geo Vettovalli worked with the girls from 1973 - 1977.

Rev. and Mrs John Gillanders followed the Howards to Woodleigh. It was during this period 1976 to 1978 that the College fell on lean times and it was thought that it would have to close. The issue was confused a little because it was in June 1977 that the Methodist Church united with the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches to become the Uniting Church.

There was strong community pressure as well as support from some local church people that the College should remain open for at least two main reasons - to save the high top of the Herberton State School and to continue to serve isolated children from Australia and Papua New Guinea. To accomplish this, the boys section of the College, the former Methodist Hostel, was sold and the operation was reduced to the section which was formerly St. Mary's School.

From 1967 to 1978 the following Housemasters and their wives looked after the students on what was known as the "boys' side". Mr. B. Petersen (1967-1968), Rev. and Mrs Graeme Adsett (1968), Pastor and Mrs Colin Amos (1969-1973), Mr and Mrs Eric Biggs (1974-mid 1977), Mr and Mrs Bob Colville (1977), and Mr. and Mrs. Zane Herrington (1978).

From 1979 until the present time the College has been operated by the Woodleigh College Management Committee on behalf of the Uniting Church. Mr. Bob Colville served as the Principal for two years (1979,1980), Mr. Terry Hayward for six months (1981) and Mr. Ivan Unwin was Acting Principal for the second half of 1981. At the beginning of 1982 Rev. Graeme Adsett returned to the College with his wife Ruth and family to become Principal.

Over the years children have been sent to Herberton for residential care for a whole host of reasons. Some have had health problems, and many have come because of broken home situations. Others came because of their geographical isolation. Since 1960 parents have been sending children from Papua New Guinea to take advantage of Queensland's higher standard of education. For a period the State Government, through the Department of Children's services, used Woodleigh College for some of its children. Most recently the Commonwealth Department of Education has used Woodleigh in its Aboriginal Secondary Schools Grant Scheme. Now, up to half of all students are drawn from the Torres Strait, the Gulf Aboriginal Communities, and from other aboriginal families in reasonably close proximity to Herberton.

The Management Committee of Woodleigh Residential College is committed to providing a caring staff to cater for an ongoing cross-cultural college community.