

# Len McRae – Much Loved Teacher

## Pioneer Poles - The McRae Family



The Pioneer Poles were created by Margaret Gernon and Pearl Ingram in 2005 to tell the story of our local history through the families of our early pioneers.

John and Elizabeth McRae, circa 1862

The pioneer Poles at this site represent John, Elizabeth, and their son George, of the McRae family.

John's father, Duncan Mcrae was one of the earliest pioneers to help settle the Tea Gardens/Hawks Nest area. He was only 14 years old when he arrived in Australia from Stroud in the UK.

In 1862, Duncan came to the Myall Lakes area with his wife Eliza, and set up a saw milling business. They owned three vessels that were used to transport timber from the Myall Lakes to Sydney; the "Caledonia", "Star of Peace" and "Janet".



Saw Mill at Winda Woppa

A drogher, fully loaded at Tamboi



Four of the McRae children, early 1900's.



View across Winda Woppa towards Tea Gardens



Duncan and Eliza had eleven children. Although they moved away from the area, three of their children remained; John, Alexander and Archibald, who continued to work in the timber industry until it slackened-off in the early 20th century, when they then turned to fishing.

John built a house at Winda Woppa as a wedding present for his wife Elizabeth, and planted pine trees there in 1911. The trees still stand today.

John's second son, George married Ida Rose Asquith in 1932, after meeting her when he was fishing in Nelson Bay. In 1935 he started prawning and fishing with another well-known local, Abe Sheather.

Ida also worked with George on the beach during the annual mullet run. During the Depression in the 1930's they literally had to live off the sea to provide for their children. Their eldest children married members of the Fiddlen family, and are still involved with the local fishing industry today, operating Tea Gardens Seafood Co-op and Mumm's Restaurant.

Fishing on the Myall Lakes, 1934



Hauling Fish at Jimmy's Beach



Beach Haul, being unloaded at Tea Gardens

*Len, when on the OBA Committee, told us that he was born in 1911 in the house under the three pine trees planted by his father that year at Winda Woppa. These huge trees can now be seen from all parts of Port Stephens. The plaque above, photographed 13 October 2017, is on the river to the west of the trees, also photographed that day. The rugby union photo and story were published in the Newcastle Sun under the heading 'Winning Team'. Len started at NHS, the School On The Hill, in 1924.*







**The year 1933 was a good one for Merewether Carlton rugby union football club.**

That was the year the team played the touring All Blacks, and won the premiership for the second year in succession.

This picture was submitted to *Your Town Yesterday* by D. Rose, of Bull St, Cooks Hill.

Pictured are: H. Clarke (trainer), A. Jones, J. Harkins, W. Elliott, E. Howarth, D. Borthwick (trainer); standing — L. Howarth, D. McDonald, G. McNamara, T. Hills, J. Mason, J. Fairhall, J. Rutherford;

sitting — O. Alderton (selector), D. Rose, Ald. E. Rowlands (vice-president), L. McRae (captain), T. Hills Snr (selector), J. Hills (vice-captain), E. Clarke (secretary-treasurer); front — A. Malcolm, Eddie Clarke (mascot), J. Tolhurst.

The winner of this week's \$10 award is Les Shedden, of Dunkley Ave, New Lambton, whose picture of Winns department store staff appeared in Tuesday's *Sun*.

*The Newcastle Sun* awards \$10 every week to the picture selected as the most interesting received in the *Your Town Yesterday* series.

Pictures should be in good condition, in

black and white or sepia (not tinted) and may be of any size. We would like to know when and where the picture was taken, and people in the picture should be named where possible.

Don't forget to add your own name and address.

Send your family picture to History Photo, The Newcastle Sun, Box 501G, PO Newcastle, 2300.

All pictures will be returned.

Please note that copies of pictures published are not available from *The Newcastle Sun*.



INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE RESULTS 1926—(Continued)

	English	History	Geography	Maths. I.	Maths II.	Latin	French	Elementary Science	Geology	Business Prin.	Art	Music	Shorthand
Kinder, Samuel .. ..	B	B	—	—	A	—	—	—	X	B	X	X	B
Lawrence, Jack .. ..	B	A	—	B	B	—	—	A	X	B	X	X	A
Linz, Thelma M. .. ..	B	B	—	B	—	—	B	—	X	X	X	X	X
Mairet, Phyllis R. ..	A	B	—	—	—	B	A	—	X	X	X	X	X
Mairet, Archibald S. .	B	B	—	A	A	—	B	A	X	X	X	X	X
McLeod, Elgar .. ..	B	B	—	B	A	—	B	B	X	X	X	B	X
McNamara, Earle V. .	A	A	—	B	A	B	A <sub>o</sub>	A	X	X	X	X	X
McRae, Leonard F. ..	B	A	—	A	A	A	A <sub>o</sub>	A	X	X	X	X	X
Mitchell, Harold A. S.	A	B	—	A	A	A	A	A	X	X	X	X	X
Mitchell, Kathleen M.	B	B	—	B	B	—	—	B	X	X	B	B	X
Pickard, Annie .. ..	B	B	—	B	B	—	B	A	X	X	X	X	X
Roberston, Mary .. .	B	B	—	—	—	B	B	B	X	X	X	X	X
Rowe, John C. .. ..	B	B	—	B	A	B	A	A	X	X	X	X	X
Royall, Arthur .. ..	B	—	—	B	B	B	A	A	X	X	X	X	X
Rudd, Jack C. .. ..	B	B	—	—	B	—	B	A	X	X	X	X	X
Ryan, Merle L. .. ..	B	B	—	—	B	B	B	—	X	X	X	X	X
Saunders, Zelma F. ..	A	B	—	B	B	—	—	—	X	X	X	X	X
Schofield, Eric G. ..	B	B	B	—	—	—	—	B	X	X	X	X	X
Smith, Lily S. .. ..	A	B	—	—	A	A	A	A	X	X	X	X	X
Stanley, Gwendolyn J.	B	B	B	B	B	—	—	A	X	B	X	X	B
Steele, Margaret A. ..	B	B	—	B	B	—	—	—	X	X	X	X	X
White, Jean J. .. ..	A	B	—	B	B	B	A <sub>c</sub>	B	X	X	X	B	X
Wilby, Bettine P. ..	B	B	B	B	B	—	B	B	X	X	A	X	X
Willgoose, Paphne M.	B	B	B	B	B	—	B	A	X	X	A	A	X
Williams, James W. ..	B	A	—	A	B	B	B	B	X	X	X	X	X
Williams, Jenkyn L. K.	A	A	—	A	A	A	A	A	X	X	X	X	X
Wines, Marjorie .. .	B	A	—	A	A	B	A	A	X	X	X	A	X

X did not sit for this subject

*Len's Intermediate Certificate results, that won him a Bursary to continue into 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Years. Novocastrian magazine, 1927.*



The wretched ventilation of class rooms, that is permitted through the small church-like windows that were never intended for the passage of air and which are not movable, renders the atmosphere on hot days objectionable and unhealthy in the highest degree. From the point of view of ventilation alone the old building should be condemned. Six out of fourteen class-rooms are temporary structures.

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Considerable newspaper correspondence some months ago sought to prove or disprove the objectionable behavior in the trains of students attending the High School. There will always be a small minority of boys and girls who fail to recognise the rights of the public who pay for their rail journeys. It is sincerely hoped that when the new hat-band comes into general use the public will realise that Newcastle High School students are not among those who commit the misdemeanours complained of.

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**EARL McGANN**, is one of our most promising students in the present Fifth Year Class. His picture is reproduced here in view of his having secured first place at the yearly examination of Fourth Year Classes at the close of 1926. He is now 16½ years old and he secured 7A's when he passed his Intermediate Examination at the close of 1925. In his early years, he attended Adamstown Public School.



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The library of the school is disappointing. Twenty pounds are about to be spent from Union funds for the purchase of new books. We understand that not long ago the City Council pledged itself to equip the library if a new school were provided by the Department. We are entitled to receive and we do receive from our city fathers considerable assistance, but the parochial attitude of some suburban aldermen who fail to recognise that the High School is a district institution is beyond comprehension.

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Every year, on the results of the Intermediate Examination, the Education Department awards 13 to 15 Bursaries to deserving students throughout the State. Two conditions governing the award of these bursaries are (a) that the candidate must have passed the Intermediate in at least seven subjects, and (b) that five passes at least must be at the "A" standard. The value of these Bursaries is equal to that of the ordinary fourth and fifth year Bursary. This year, two of our students won these Bursaries—**Harold F. Berriman** and **Leonard F. McRae**.

**September 1927**



**KENNETH IMRIE**, who headed 1B class at the half-yearly examination. He is 12 years 11 months, and formerly attended Hamilton Public School.

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**LEONARD F. McRAE**, 16 years 2 months, headed the list of 4A students at the half-yearly examination. He formerly attended Newcastle East Public School. Originally he came from Port Stephens. He has hopes of becoming a teacher of languages.



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**VEDA DRYSDALE**, occupied first place at the half yearly examination of 3B class in June last. She formerly attended West Wallsend Domestic Science School. She is 14 years 9 months old.

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**STANLEY M. LAYCOCK**, 12 years 7 months, formerly of Charlestown Public School. He headed the list of 2B class marks at the half-yearly examination.



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**CLIFF CURRAN** headed the half-yearly examination of 1AC class. His age is 13 years and 2 months. He formerly attended St. Peter's School, Stockton where he gained a Bursary in 1926.



## McRAE, Len – Retirement 1970

*From Novocastrian 1970*

### MR. McRAE RETIRES

The retirement has just been announced of Mr. Len McRae, one of the best-known teachers in the history of N.B.H.S.

After five years at the old school on the Hill, Mr. McRae won a bursary to the University of Sydney in 1928, and graduated B.A.

He taught at Cessnock, Murwillumbah and Newcastle Boys' Junior High, and served in the Army from 1942 to 1945. After the war, he came to N.B.H.S. in May, 1946, and has taught Latin and French for the past twenty-four years.

His main interest was in sport. He is still very proud of the fact that his Rugby Union N.B.H.S. team, with the legendary Mr. John Gibbs as coach, defeated the crack North Sydney Boys' High team in 1928.

Mr. McRae played full-back for Sydney University amateur Rugby League for three years, and Rugby Union for Merewether-Carlton from 1933 to 1936. He captained the Newcastle side against the All Blacks, and also the combined Country team against N.S.W.

As Sportsmaster at N.B.H.S. from 1947 to 1959, Mr. McRae, who had now become known as "Keg", was probably the most widely known sportsmaster in the State.

For more than twenty years he has coached the school's 13 years cricket team, so successfully that, without exception, these teams have produced one or more 14 years State representatives.

Mr. McRae was made a life member of the P.S.A.A.A. in recognition of his services to school sport.

In wishing him a long and happy retirement, we can assure Mr. McRae that his unending kindnesses and warm personality and, in particular, his almost quixotic striving for fair-play, will long be remembered by his colleagues and the many hundreds of young men that he has helped to inspire.





# Newcastle Old Boys dinner

**'YOU'LL find leaders in every field all over the world from Newcastle Boys High School,' the president of the Old Boys Association, Col Standen, said last week.**



**Len McRae, sporting his Old Boys tie, reminisces in readiness for the reunion.**

'There are many old boys out there. We've got members in England, Canada and all over Australia.'

One of those old boys, Len McRae, 81, was first a pupil at the school on The Hill and then returned as a teacher when the boys high had moved to Waratah.

Mr McRae said he was looking forward to the annual Old Boys Association dinner to be held at Newcastle City Hall on Saturday, August 22.

Between 1946 and 1970 Mr McRae taught French and Latin at Newcastle Boys High. He was the sportsmaster from 1948 until 1960 and has many fond memories of his days at the school.

'I have many happy memories of students and sportsmen,' Mr McRae said.

'The school had a good reputation in scholarship and sport.

'At the yearly dinners memories revive. Men meet their classmates and their well known predecessors.'

One of the memories which is clear in Mr

McRae's mind is the tale of how he came to be nicknamed 'Keg' McRae.

Mr McRae recalled the day when some students saw him playing cricket with his mates who worked at the Castlemaine Brewery.

When the students sighted the team's usual match keg of beer sitting on the sideline, they dubbed their sportsmaster 'Keg' McRae.

The Old Boys Association has around 1030 members whom Mr Standen said he hoped would attend the annual dinner.

He said that any old boys who haven't joined the club would be most welcome to do so before the dinner.

'It's a night of good fellowship,' Col said.

'A get together of old school boys, discussing memories.'

Those who have lost touch with their school mates will be able to track them down through the association Mr Standen said.

'There's no problem finding out if your old friends are going to be there,' he said.

Some of the high profile old boys include MHR Shortland, Peter Morris, the principal of Waratah Technology High (the second Newcastle Boys High site), Lyall Abel, and retired supreme court judge, Jack Lee.

If you're an old boy and would like to join the association phone the club secretary, Richard 'Paddy' Young on 63-5631 or write to PO Box 1117, Newcastle, 2300.



**NBHS Len McRae at Reunion 1993**



Len ('Keg') McRae - Latin teacher, Sports Master, Old Boys Association Committeeman - receiving an award at the 25th Reunion of the Year of '72 boys, in 1993.



27/8/91

# Keg, a martyr of Marx, had his work cut out

POOR old Len McRae. "Keg", as he was known to generations of students at Newcastle Boys High School, was secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party.

Between teaching us French and railing against the British in what was then Malaya, he carried out his party secretarial duties with touching enthusiasm. Not that those duties were especially onerous. That particular branch could have held its meetings in a telephone box.

In Newcastle in the late 1950s, the Australian Labor Party ruled supreme. Then, everyone had a job, in what we called "the industries" which fed off BHP's output of steel.



**Peter Charlton**

The sky was thick with smoke and washing day was always a risk, but the workers were happy. They didn't need the appeals of international brotherhood; they resisted any world call to unite.

Away from their shifts, they were too busy fishing, or going to the football, or just sitting on the beach. Keg and his comrades had their work cut out

preaching the message of communism.

He would stand on street corners, trying to sell copies of Tribune, the party's deadly dull newspaper.

It had no appeal for the punters, but even with a form guide, Tribune would have had few takers in comfortable complacent Newcastle. But Keg tried hard for the party and for a cause he loved and in which he fervently believed.

Once he came to our back door, seeking donations. My mother, who always voted Liberal — "I like Mr Menzies," she would say at election time, "He's a gentleman." — sent him packing.

During Vietnam, Keg's line of anti-Americanism endeared him

to a later, perhaps more impressive, generation of students. He was regarded by them with affection and as a man before his time.

Prague, in 1968, might have stretched the friendship but Keg kept on, thanks to a remarkably tolerant series of headmasters and a Department of Education prepared to tolerate eccentricities in good teachers. For all that, Keg was a good teacher.

Keg certainly kept the faith. Years later, at a school reunion, I asked after him. "He's still around. Still pushing the Party line," was the reply.

Poor old Len McRae has gone now, and perhaps it's just as well, for the faith he kept for all those years, first as a student and then as a teacher, has gone

as well. And, now, all over the world the martyrs of Marx, the enthusiasts for Engels, the devotees of dialectic materialism are left bereft of belief.

"Communism is dead," proclaim the Russians. Even the Communist Party is over.

For the true believers, the shock must be great, almost as if the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope were to meet today, confer for an hour, and announce to their congregations that God is dead.

Of course, we know now that communism could not last. It was a system which, as Prof Norman Stone said recently, worked on the basis that civilisation could progress if everyone was made poor except the Russian Communist Party.

It has been a long time dying. But once the reforms initiated by Gorbachev developed their own momentum and the oncemighty Russian empire succumbed to its obvious and serious internal tensions, communism was doomed.

In the 1950s, however, with the Cold War and mushroom-shaped clouds both chilling reminders of a precarious peace, the Russian empire and communism were powerful attractions to those who believed that peace could come from the international Marxist brotherhood. Keg was one of those men.

At least, old Keg was honest in professing his beliefs. He was "Com" and proud of it.

The great promise of communism was unable to be fulfilled 50 years ago; the doctrinal dogma of dialectical materialism was demonstrated to be fatally flawed.

Perhaps the searing experiences of the Great Depression left sensitive young men like Philby and Blunt, and dear old Keg McRae too, convinced that there must be a better way, that communism promised more than capitalism, that the future lay with Marx and not with the market.

They were wrong. Old men might mourn the death of their faith; the Russian people, with enviable good sense, are rejoicing. Good luck to them.

\* Peter Charlton is an associate editor of *The Courier-Mail*.