



FRYERSTOWN SCHOOL PROJECT

**The repair and refurbishment of the
historic Fryerstown School
for re-use
as community hub &
tourism centre**



What was the abandoned Fryerstown State School No 252 lies at the heart of the Fryerstown community. Close by are the old court house, the old police lock up and prisoner chain trees, the Burke and Wills Mechanics Institute Hall and the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park containing the relics of the Mount Alexander Gold Rush

The Fryerstown School Committee of Management was formed in August 2011 under the Crown Lands Reserves Act. Its vision is to restore the school and to build and maintain good and strong relationships through using the school for a variety of purposes and formed in response to:

- Changing circumstances — Fryerstown is an isolated small town which currently has no shops or community centre and one that is experiencing considerable population and life-style change
- Community demand — local planning has identified the need for a community hub to harness the considerable talent, skill and dedication of long-term and new residents
- Community well being — the desire of residents to better appreciate their natural and cultural environment and to improve health and fitness levels
- Tourism demand — improving accessibility to the Goldfields Track, a walking & mountain bike track connecting Ballarat and Bendigo via small towns like Fryerstown
- Interpretive opportunities — providing support for the Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Bid focused on the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

With the assistance of local tradespeople and experienced project management, grants, donations and volunteer effort the initial building repair and restoration are close to completion within budget. Funds are still required to finish the floors and lighting in the gallery before proceeding to develop the interpretive aspect of the facility, so any further contributions are very welcome.

The History of Fryerstown State School No 252

The Fryerstown National School opened on 6th February 1853 in a tent at the Commissioners Camp at Golden Gully with 27 pupils. The tent could of course be moved to where the population was and in May the School Committee recommended that it be moved to Chapel Hill, where it was later partly destroyed by fire. In February 1854 it was transferred again to a site near the Commissioners Camp still in a tent. In April 1855 plans were drawn up and in a few months a permanent weatherboard building was built next to the Wesleyan (Methodist) Chapel in Heron Street. A report in the **Mount Alexander Mail** of 20 July 1855 says, *"I have much pleasure in noticing the opening of the new National School on the hill adjoining the Wesleyan Chapel. The building is by far the neatest in town and reflects great credit on the builder, Mr Moseley Dunn. Entering the township from Spring Gully, we present a very animated appearance to what we did twelve months since. The Episcopal Church, the Wesleyan Chapel (a neat building) and now the National School all stand out in bold relief, as monuments of the English character, that although we may forsake the homeland for the love of gold and accumulation of wealth, we do not forget those better things, the education of our children and the evangelization of those around us."* Well, the person who wrote that was impressed anyway! The emphasis on neatness is probably a reflection on the makeshift camps and shanties in much of the rest of Fryerstown at the time. The enrolment in 1858 was 30 boys and 44 girls. In 1862 The National and Denominational School systems were replaced by the Common School system under the government's newly formed Board of Education. Fryerstown National School became Fryerstown Common School No. 252 and in 1872 when schooling became free, secular and compulsory, Fryerstown Common School No.252 became Fryerstown State School No. 252.

By that time the local community was faced with increasing numbers of pupils, in a building that was built in 1855 and had been considered to be in an unsatisfactory condition by the early 1860's. In November 1865 the Committee decided that a new school house was needed. In February 1866 written plans and specifications were submitted to the Board and in July 1866 an application for financial aid to erect a new schoolroom was submitted. At that time the school enrolment was 450 pupils consisting of 200 boys, 150 girls and 100 infants under 8 years of age. In May 1868 the school committee wrote to the Board citing the large increase in student numbers and they successfully applied for a grant of 50 pounds, which they matched, to build an additional brick and stone room. This was completed in March 1870. Numbers of pupils continued to grow and the schoolroom could accommodate 162 but attendance was up to 300 students. The Wesleyan Church School was rented for a year or two, but clearly a new classroom was needed and in 1874 the Department of Education built an additional room. The saga with maintenance problems went on for another forty plus years. By 1914 it was recognized that the stone classroom, weatherboard infant room and weatherboard storeroom were beyond repair and a new school was erected on a site in the centre of Fryerstown. It is intriguing that the School Committee had asked that parts of the old school be moved to the new site and incorporated into the new school using a low wagon and horse teams. The wooden shingle roof is still evident today under the corrugated iron. The School was officially opened in November 1915 by dignitaries including the Director of Education (later Sir) Frank Tate, himself a former pupil of the School, and H.S.W. Lawson, then Minister for Education. It served the town as a school until 1967 when it closed for lack of students and the last 3 students were relocated. The school remained vacant until taken up as a school camp in 1973 by Gardenvale Central School later Gardenvale Primary School. The School camps ceased in 2003. They are a significant part of the School's history because of the large numbers of city and local students who attended and enjoyed the camps and developed a lasting attachment to the town, its history and its environs. The educational programs they offered were important in the development of environmental education. Those who attended the camps remember them with affection.

Acknowledgements: Ken James **A History of the Fryerstown State School No. 252**

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