

Title: The First School Teachers and Schools in Colonial New South Wales 1789-1810

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Abstract:

The first stage of this project aims to identify the first school teachers in the colony of NSW during the period 1788-1810. Thirty men and women have been identified as having taught in a NSW school at least for one year during the period under review. Of these thirty a total of seventeen were discovered to have been convicts, four were missionaries, one was a soldier and the others were free emigrants. The three most significant people contributing to the establishment of schools in the infant colony during its first twenty years were Rev. Richard Johnson, the settlement's first chaplain, Phillip Gidley King, founder and Lieutenant Governor of Norfolk Island (1788-1797) and later third Governor of NSW (1801-1808), and Rev. Samuel Marsden.

Although no official provision was made for the inclusion of a schoolteacher among the government personnel in the First Fleet, nevertheless the Rev. Richard Johnson established the first school, thought to have been a "Dame School". It is believed to have been established within eighteen months of the arrival of Governor Arthur Phillip's Fleet in January 1788. The three most significant people contributing to the establishment of schools in the infant penal colony during the first twenty years were Rev. Richard Johnson, the settlement's first chaplain, Phillip Gidley King, founder and Lieutenant Governor of Norfolk Island 1788-179 later the third Governor of NSW 1801-1808, and Rev. Samuel Marsden, who arrived in the Colony as Assistant to the Chaplain in 1794.

What is equally significant in the history of schooling in NSW is that over half of the first active school teachers during the first two decades of the colony were convicts or ex-convicts, 17 out of the 30 teachers identified and listed below. Also, the first school to be organized in the colony was a private initiative of Rev. Richard Johnson, who appointed two convicts, **Isabella Rosson**¹ and **William Richardson**², First Fleeters, as teachers in his school beginning in 1789 or 1790. Rosson married William Richardson in 1789. He continued as a teacher until 1810. As a teacher he received a salary from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Both he and his wife were commended for their efforts by Rev. Richard Johnson. Having served out his seven year criminal sentence **Richardson** also received a land grant of 75 acres. **William Richardson** was, in 1793, joined in his teaching by **William Webster** a member of the NSW Corps. Both teachers were to receive financial allowances from The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.³ However in 1797 Webster was dismissed for bad conduct.⁴

School lessons during the first few years would have been held in a tent or makeshift building prior to the construction of Rev. Johnson's first church, part of which was then used as a school. This first school for the children of the families of the marines accompanying the First Fleet and also for children of some convict mothers, was initially of the "Dame School" type, which was a small private school for young children taught by a literate but untrained woman. In the absence of desks and equipment the children sat on

the floor or rough built stools gathered around their teacher. The alphabet and the rudiments of reading and writing were taught, along with bible lessons and the Catechism.

At Norfolk Island Lieutenant Governor King was quick to establish schools for the children of the convicts and government officials. Rev. Samuel Marsden, in a report to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1796 writes,

“In one part of the Island he [Lt. Gov. King] has built a school for girls and committed them to the care of **Susannah Hunt**, who appeared to be well qualified for her situation. The boys are taught in the town of Sydney (Norfolk Island) by **Thomas Macqueen**, who was once a schoolmaster in England and has merited by his good conduct the opinion of the Governor.”⁵

Marsden goes on to report that the enrolment of children in Norfolk Island schools totalled 75, “some of whom have neither parent or friend to superintend their bringing up, as many of their fathers whose time of transportation have expired and have left that part of the world.” It is significant that both **Susannah Hunt** and **Thomas Macqueen** were both convicts. Susannah Hunt arrived per *Lady Juliana* with the Second Fleet in 1790, having been transported for the crime of theft of eight yards of muslin. During her time as a teacher on Norfolk Island she was also supported by the S.P.G. On the Island she married a free settler, and with her husband and family moved to Hobart Town in 1807. Macqueen, also transported for seven years, arrived aboard the *Active* in the Third Fleet in 1791.

The following schedule lists the names of the first thirty teachers who at some time in the period 1788-1810 were actively teaching in the colony of NSW.

The First Thirty Teachers in the Colony, 1788-1810

Isabelle Rosson, Convict, arrived First Fleet, 1788, first school 1789 or 1790.
William Richardson, Convict, arrived First Fleet 1788, teaching c.1790-1810
Mary Johnson, Convict, arrived 1791, teaching Sydney, Dame School?
William Webster, Soldier, NSW Corps, teaching 1793-96
Thomas Macqueen, Convict Norfolk Island, arriv. 3rd Fleet teaching 1793-
Sussanna Hunt, Convict Norfolk Island, arriv. 2nd. Fleet, teaching 1793-
Isaac Nelson, Convict, teaching in Sydney 1796-1810
Thomas Taber, Convict, arriv. 1796, teaching 1797- 1824 Sydney, Parramatta
John Tull, Convict, arriv. 1799, teaching at Parramatta
Matthew Hughes, Convict, arriv. 1796, teacher at Kissing Point 1800-1810
John Mitchell } Academy for the Instruction
James MacConnell } of Youth, Sydney, 1804
Rev. William Crook, Missionary at Parramatta, Boarding School 1803
John Harris, Missionary, at Windsor school 1808
John Hatcher, Convict, First Fleeter, Norfolk Island Orphan School 1790s
John Hosking, arriv. 1809-1818, Parramatta School
Isaac Lyon, teaching at Parramatta 1809-1810
Elizabeth More Hume, Sydney Orphan School 1801-
Jeremiah Cavanaugh, Convict, arriv. 1800, 1807-1810 Teaching at Sydney
Daniel Parnell, Convict arriv. Hillsborough 1799, Teacher on Norfolk Island 1804-

James Partridge, Convict, teacher at Parramatta 1800-1803

William Maum, Convict, from Ireland, 1800-

Rev. John Youl, Missionary, teacher at Windsor, 1808

John Eyre, Missionary at Parramatta 1810

James Kenny, Convict, Ireland, Teacher at first Catholic school at Rocks, 1793.

Farrell Cuffe, Convict, 1798 Irish rebellion, arriv. 1800, private school Sydney

Henry Perfect, Boarding school Sydney, 1806

John Anderson, Ebenezer School, Portland Head, opened 1809

John Davies, appointed 1810, Public Charity School

Richard John Robinson, Convict, teaching Sydney 1795-1800

Vernon Goodin⁶ states that by the end of the year 1814 there were 35 persons, excluding wives, earning their living as school teachers in NSW:

13 in Sydney

11 in Parramatta

9 in Windsor

2 in Liverpool

The majority of these schools would have been obtaining some assistance from the colonial government, but not owned by the government. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was contributing to the salary of a number of the convict teachers during the 1790s and early 1800s, the first Sydney schools having been initiated by Rev. Richard Johnson. One or two of the schools may well have been "Dame Schools". Certainly by 1793 there was at least one school in Sydney, one school in Parramatta and a school on Norfolk Island, in addition to an Orphan School on Norfolk Island.

According to Barcan⁷ by 1797 there were six schools in the colony, three of them in Sydney, one at Parramatta and two on Norfolk Island. After 1801 there was an Orphan School in Sydney established through the initiative of Governor King, and later one in Parramatta, with the support of Governor Macquarie, during whose governorship considerable expansion of schooling occurred with the arrival of additional teachers in the colony, employed and paid by the colonial government. Barcan⁸ states that on arrival at Port Jackson in 1788 there were only 26 children in the settlement, by 1810 there were 2,304 children in the colony out of a population of about 8300, many of them the sons and daughters of convict or ex-convicts, together with children of soldiers, civil servants in the administration and free settlers. Apparently a significant minority of these children were orphans, a problem which prompted both Governors King and Macquarie to establish Orphan Schools at both Sydney and Parramatta, by 1820.

The main sources of information on teachers and schools 1788-1810 are the official sources:

Historical Records of New South Wales, Vols. 2-4

Historical Records of Australia Vols. 2-4.

The Sydney Gazette, 1803-1810.

Of the secondary sources the most detailed and well documented is the four part article by Vernon W.E. Goodin, "Public Education in NSW before 1848" published in the *Royal*

Australian Historical Society Journal, Volume 36, 1950. Other useful sources include:
Barcan, Alan, *A Short History of Education in New South Wales*. Martindale Press, Sydney
1965.

¹ Gillen, Mollie, *The Founders of Australia: A Biographical Dictionary of the First Fleet*. Library of Australian History, Sydney 1989, p. 315.

² Gillen, Mollie, op. cit. p. 307.

³ *Historical Records of New South Wales*, Vol. II, p. 282.

⁴ Op. cit. Vol. III, p. 2, see footnote.

⁵ *Historical Records of New South Wales*, Vol. II.

⁶ Goodin, Vernon W. E. "Public Education in New South Wales before 1848" *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 36, Part 2, 1950, p. 144

⁷ Barcan, Alan, *A Short History of Education in New South Wales*. Martindale Press, Sydney 1965, p. 25.

⁸ Barcan, Alan, op. cit.