

EAST WIMMERA PARISH – DONALD COMMUNITY

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Sunday, July 17, 2022 Celebration of 100 years since the arrival in Donald of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions

*The Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions
was founded in 1861 in Lyon, France, by Euphrasie Barbier.*

*The Sisters use the initials RNDM,
which is taken from the French language
Religieuses De Notre Dame des Missions*

*The first foundation in Australia was at Highgate,
Western Australia in 1897, and during the following
twenty years foundations were made and schools
opened in rural country towns and suburbs of Perth.*



During the years they were present in Donald, the Sisters were very actively involved in the life of the parish. They visited and gave support to the families in many different ways.

During the years the Sisters were in the Diocese of Ballarat, 16 young women who were educated in Donald, or came into contact with the Sisters, travelled to Perth to join this missionary congregation. They would be missionaries in distant parts of Australia, in Papua New Guinea and Africa. Two of them, Sr Lorna Brown from Oakleigh, and Sr Maureen Belleville from Watchem, who went to boarding school in Donald, were present at this celebration.

The Sisters gave thanks for the RNDM Mission in the Ballarat Diocese, for the support of the people of Donald and for the families whose daughters shared in RNDM life and mission for many years.

The Sisters cherish the memory of their time in Donald and rejoiced to celebrate in Donald with the St Mary's community.

Eight days after arriving in Donald the Sisters opened the primary school with pupils.

The Convent of St Joan of Arc was opened in 1923 providing accommodation for boarders and facilities for secondary classes.



Convent Building



Netball Team 1925

The school soon gained a good reputation. These comments were written in the State School Inspectors' report during the 1920's. He commended the people of Donald:

"I congratulate the people of Donald on being in possession of such a beautiful up-to-date school, equipped as it is with every requirement in the way of teaching children and making them happy and comfortable during their school lives and of taking care of their bodily health. It is unique in the way it caters for all the wants of the children and is, of course, much appreciated by them."

He gave detailed reports of the children's achievements in reading and writing and extra-curricular activities commenting particularly on the scientific garden beds.

The present school building was opened in 1928.



Physical education Donald playground



Community 1945

Due to growing pressures in other schools in Australia in 1961, the Sisters left Donald, handing over to the Sisters of Mercy Ballarat East.



Classroom in Donald 1960's

The first four Sisters arrived in Donald in August 1922.



M. Judith Ward



M. Assumpta Lamb



M. Theonilla Harvey



M. Theodora McFall

The Bishop of Ballarat, Dr Daniel Foley, had visited the Superior General in Deal, England (a coastal town near Dover in South Eastern England) to request a community of Sisters to take responsibility for the Catholic School in Donald, which had been opened in 1866 as a one teacher school and had been staffed by lay teachers.

The Bishop believed that Religious Sisters would “edify and duly impress their pupils.” He selected the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (WA) because his investigations had led him to believe that in Western Australia and New Zealand, the Sisters had an enthusiastic pioneering spirit and had established excellent teaching credentials.

The parishioners were very happy to welcome the Sisters and made a commitment to provide a Convent and to assist them as they provided Catholic education for the children from Donald and boarding accommodation for pupils from outlying districts – an education they themselves had not had the opportunity to receive.

*Information, commentary, and photographs provided by:
- Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions
- Margaret Hogan
- Anne Walsh*