

Andersons Bay School celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2008



In 1885 James Jeffery, a native of Ballarat, Australia, the eldest son of newly arrived Cornish miners Christopher Jeffery and Eliza [Sim], accepted the position of Head Teacher at Andersons Bay School.

He had arrived at Port Chalmers in 1879, one of some 20 teachers who had been recruited in Victoria earlier in the decade. Jeffery was arguably the most impressive of the lot, although he had left school early and had never attended a Teachers' College. He had read voraciously since childhood, however, and even in old age read regularly into the wee hours of the morning. He taught at Swift Creek, West Otago, North East Valley, and Mornington.

On appointing Jeffery Head Teacher – the roll was 119, and he had one woman assistant and a pupil teacher – the Otago Education Board authorised construction of a new residence and school. The new school opened in 1887 on its present site and a residence for the Head was built close to where the first school had stood, where Jeffery and Silverton Street meet.

James Jeffery stayed for just over 28 years and put his stamp firmly on the school. He strongly believed that children learned best from doing things that interested them. He also strongly believed that by the time they left school his scholars should have some knowledge of what was going on in the world, and his teaching aimed at making 'good citizens' of them for both New Zealand and the British Empire.

In this era schools were still run along military lines, partly because class sizes were usually in the range of 60 to 80 pupils. Rote learning and memorisation were central. Jeffery detested both. 'Just like a parrot', he snorted. Nor was he entirely in sympathy with other contemporary practises, such as homework. He treated the national curriculum as a springboard rather than a strait-jacket, and made no secret of the fact that he considered the local papers more useful than the Board's texts (some of which had been written by local Inspectors)!

He took a keen interest in the NZ Educational Institute and became national president 1904-05, and this interest continued into retirement. He immersed himself in patriotic work during World War 1 and was a city councillor for one term in 1919.

Aged 24 he married Annie Johns in Dunedin and they had seven children.

James Jeffery died on 12 August 1923 and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay cemetery. After his death the Andersons bay community established a Jeffery Memorial Prize for 'general knowledge of current events' which is still presented annually. Jeffery Street, Andersons Bay, where the school is situated, was named after him.

Prepared by The Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from Eric Olssen' book published to coincide with the 150th Anniversary - *Our School, Andersons Bay School 1858 – 2008*, and *Southern People A Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography*.