Sea pictures of a convent boarding school: Oral histories of teachers and students at St Ursula’s Yeppoon 1917-1997

Maree Lillian Ganley

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Sea Pictures of a Convent Boarding School:

Oral Histories of

Teachers and Students at St Ursula’s

Yeppoon 1917-1997

Submitted by

Maree Lillian Ganley

Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Bachelor of Education Studies

A thesis submitted for the total fulfilment of the requirements of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Arts

Faculty of Education and Arts

Australian Catholic University

1 July 2019
Statement of authorship and sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee.

The production and storage of transcripts and audio recordings of interviews of participants in this study complied with the requirements of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. All transcripts and recordings are in the author’s possession.

..............................................

Maree Ganley

1 July, 2019
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the people who made the completion of this thesis possible:

Dr Marguerite Nolan, my principal supervisor, for her expert guidance and active support of my research and writing.

Professor Shurlee Swain, my co-supervisor from 2015 who advised me wisely.

Dr Kathleen Ahern and Dr Rosa MacGinley RIP for their expert editing advice and encouragement.

The Presentation Sisters and the many past pupils, teachers, priests and bishops who granted me interviews, and whose recollections and perceptions of St Ursula’s gave life and authenticity to the study.

I am grateful to the Queensland Presentation Congregational Archivist Sister Theresa Stewart for her assistance and a special thanks to the library staff of ACU Brisbane for their professional and unwavering support.

My husband Phillip for his strong support and patience during this study, to my family Brendan, Kathleen, Liam, Patrick and Caitlin for your encouragement.
Prologue

Australian historian, Inga Clendinnen stated:

*It is a preposterously ambitious enterprise, trying to make whole people, whole situations, and whole other ways of being out of the dusty fragments left after real lives end. But that is what the best historians set out to do. Their core narrative is always their struggle with recalcitrant, evasive sources. As they interrogate those sources before our eyes, we have a fleeting sense of what it would have been like to have lived a different life, in a different place, in a different time.*

Clendinnen’s reference to making whole people and whole situations out of dusty fragments is an apt description of the task of producing a history of St Ursula’s Yeppoon. The motivation for this project stemmed from my attendance as a past staff member at the ninetieth anniversary in 2008 of the founding of St Ursula’s, when I discovered that there had been no continuous record keeping of the progress of the college until the late 1980s. It became obvious that the details of what would constitute a history of the college, its daily routine, organisational structure and historical landmarks, what it was like to be a boarder, personal stories of achievement, struggles and hurt, were stored in the memories of past students and teachers, who were keen to tell of their experiences at that event.

---

1Inga Clendinnen, "Pardon, Your Ethics Are Showing," *The Age*, 30 September 2006. 16.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMEB</td>
<td>Australian Music Examinations Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATCL</td>
<td>Associate of Trinity College of Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCAA</td>
<td>Brisbane Catholic Archdiocesan Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSSS</td>
<td>Board of Secondary School Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFC</td>
<td>Christian Brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPA</td>
<td>Isolated Country Parents Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTCL</td>
<td>Fellowship Diploma of the Trinity College of Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTCL</td>
<td>Licentiate of the Trinity College of Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PJP</td>
<td>Public Juridic Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBVM</td>
<td>Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSCA</td>
<td>Presentation Sisters Congregation Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Past pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Past teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QPA</td>
<td>Queensland Presentation Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTU</td>
<td>Queensland Teachers Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCIA</td>
<td>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Tasmania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCS</td>
<td>Tasmanian Catholic Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWPA</td>
<td>Wagga Wagga Presentation Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>YCS</td>
<td>Young Christian Students Movement</td>
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Abstract

This thesis is a history of St Ursula’s Yeppoon, a Catholic boarding school on the central coast of Queensland that was established in 1917. The provision of adequate education in the scattered settlements of remote Queensland was low on the list of government priorities for the first hundred years of settlement in the colony and state secondary schools in those areas were not established until the 1960s, hence St Ursula’s played an important role in the education of girls in Queensland.

The arrival in western central Queensland and eventually Yeppoon of a community of women religious known as the Presentation Sisters was a cultural clash in lifestyle, dress and curriculum for many children who had never seen nuns before and, in many cases, had not even been inside a classroom. Through interviews with eighty-five past staff and students of St Ursula’s, this thesis yields new perspectives on the complex interactions between gender, religion and class in the education of girls in religious institutions in remote Queensland through much of the twentieth century.

The history’s main threads and themes of origin, leadership, formal education, culture and faith are viewed through the lens of personal memory as a multiplicity of experiences, perspectives, interpretations and subjectivities. This thesis employs the basic technique and the goals of oral history and incorporates oral history testimonies of a collection of stories and reminiscences of staff and students of St Ursula’s. This is in keeping with qualitative research methodology where there are multiple approaches as well as multiple types of oral history.¹

The findings from this study challenge the widely held assumption that the teaching sisters were always complicit with the church’s view that a convent school education was ultimately a preparation for the role as a good Catholic wife and mother. In so doing, this thesis provides a richer and more nuanced account of the operation of the power and challenges facing religious educational institutions as they negotiated

the rapid changes taking place in remote parts of Australia in the twentieth century. Its aim is to contribute to Australian educational history and to the history of secondary education in the vast remote regions of Queensland.
# Table of contents

Statement of authorship and sources ........................................................................... ii
Prologue ...................................................................................................................... iv
Abbreviations ........................................................................................................... v
Abstract ..................................................................................................................... vi
Table of contents ....................................................................................................... viii
List of tables ............................................................................................................. xiii
List of figures ............................................................................................................ xiii
Chapter one ............................................................................................................... 1
 Setting the scene ...................................................................................................... 1
  Introduction ............................................................................................................ 1
  Aims and purpose .................................................................................................. 5
Synopsis: The Presentation Order, its structures, systems and mission ............. 6
  Structure and systems of Queensland Presentation schools ........................... 10
  Teacher training for sisters in Queensland Presentation schools ................. 13
  Teacher training for secondary schools ............................................................. 16
Synopsis: The history of St Ursula’s in the Presentation tradition .................. 18
  St Ursula’s co-education history ...................................................................... 21
A poetic metaphor for a challenging project ....................................................... 23
Literature review ...................................................................................................... 24
  Boarding school education ............................................................................... 24
  Boarding school life: a universal perspective .................................................. 26
  Incorporating religion into the writing of women’s history ........................... 29
  School histories .................................................................................................. 31
Convent boarding schools and girls’ education .................................................. 36
  Gender stereotypes and the convent boarding school ................................... 41
  Social class and the convent boarding school ................................................ 46
Table of contents

Social class and denominational differences ................................................................. 48
Research methodology ................................................................................................. 50
Oral history theory and popular memory ................................................................. 51
Ethical considerations ................................................................................................. 54
Oral history and memory ............................................................................................... 56
An ‘insider’ perspective ................................................................................................. 63
Thesis overview ............................................................................................................. 64
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 66
Definitions ......................................................................................................................... 66

Chapter two .................................................................................................................. 68

The development of a convent boarding school model - Sea Pictures from another shore ................................................................................................................................. 68

- Sabbath Morning at Sea by Edward Elgar. Words by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861). ................................................................................................................................. 68
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 68

Women’s religious orders and girls’ education ............................................................ 69

The Company of St Ursula (the Ursulines) .................................................................. 71
A new curriculum in the convent boarding school ...................................................... 72
The boarding school experience ..................................................................................... 75
Secondary education for girls ......................................................................................... 77

The establishment of the Presentation Sisters .............................................................. 78
A curriculum for daughters of the Irish merchant class .............................................. 80
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 84

Chapter three .................................................................................................................. 86

Secondary education for girls in Australia - Sea Pictures of old traditions in a new land ................................................................................................................................. 86

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 86

The elite convent boarding school tradition in Australia .............................................. 90
Table of contents

The Presentation and Mercy Sisters’ high schools ............................................. 95
Queensland - a most isolated outpost for schooling ........................................... 103
  Longreach ......................................................................................................... 103
  Yeppoon (1917) ................................................................................................. 107
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 112

Chapter four .......................................................................................................... 116
The keeper of the keys - Sea Pictures from the superiors’ window ...................... 116
  Introduction ....................................................................................................... 116
  School administration leadership - selection criteria, formation and structure 118
  Superior and principal roles, coordination and conflict ...................................... 121
  The St Ursula’s experience of administrative leadership – convent and school ................................................................. 124
  The search for a leader of convent and school .................................................... 126
  Funding an affordable convent boarding school .................................................. 130
  The superior as principal of a secondary school (1917-1951) ......................... 133
  Enrolment history ............................................................................................... 135
  Leadership practices in convent and school ....................................................... 136
  Leadership in times of crisis: The Depression years (1928-1939) ..................... 140
  Leadership in the war years (1939-1945) ......................................................... 142
  A new age of leadership (1952) .................................................................... 143
  Vatican II (1962-1965) - implications for leadership in religious life and the Catholic school (1970s). ................................. 149
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 157

Chapter five ............................................................................................................. 160
St Ursula’s-academic curriculum, culture and faith ............................................. 160
  Introduction ....................................................................................................... 160
  First day at school ............................................................................................. 164
  The Catholic school curriculum 1917-1953 ...................................................... 167
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracurricular activities in the curriculum</th>
<th>180</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school experience in living memory 1930-1953</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and the arts in the curriculum</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay teachers in the secondary school</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The war years and St Ursula’s schooling 1942-1948</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-World War II limited opportunities</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catholic school curriculum 1954-1998</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary education developments for country students 1968-1982</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The academic curriculum 1983-1998</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing the school curriculum for a new age</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First lay principal and new governance model</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter six ............................................................................. 216

Culture and faith formation in a Catholic school ......................... 216

Introduction ............................................................................... 216

The hidden curriculum and Catholic faith formation ......................... 220

Symbols of belonging in the Church ........................................... 220

The Catholic way of life in the school day routine ......................... 223

Catholic cultural expectations for a young lady ............................ 225

Issues of sex and gender .......................................................... 229

Membership of religious societies ............................................... 231

Recruitment activities to join the Presentation Sisters .................... 235

The formal curriculum in Catholic faith formation .......................... 237

Conclusion ................................................................................. 242

Chapter seven ............................................................................. 245

Boarding school life - Sea Pictures from the dormitory window ............ 245

Introduction ............................................................................... 245
# Table of contents

A boarding school routine for bush children ................................................................. 250
Boarding life in times of national crises (The Great Depression and World War II) ................................................................. 254
Boarding school in difficult family circumstances ........................................................... 257
Dealing with homesickness ............................................................................................... 259
Home versus boarding life (loss of independence) .............................................................. 263
The underground student culture (secret societies and codes) - achieving autonomy .................................................................................................................. 268
Group bonding through shared experiences ..................................................................... 271
Friendships and sexuality` .................................................................................................. 273
Mental health issues in a boarding school environment .......................................................... 279
Discipline and punishment ................................................................................................. 280
Cultural changes in the boarding school .......................................................................... 293
The era of lay boarding staff ............................................................................................ 297
Chapter 8 .......................................................................................................................... 304
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 304
  Limitations of the study .................................................................................................. 313
  Further research .............................................................................................................. 314
  Concluding reflections .................................................................................................... 318
Appendices .......................................................................................................................... 319
Appendix 1 Sea Pictures song ............................................................................................. 319
Appendix 2 Glossary ............................................................................................................ 320
Appendix 3 Letter to potential interviewees ....................................................................... 323
Appendix 4 Ethics approval from Australian Catholic University .................................... 326
Appendix 5 Study interviewees .......................................................................................... 327
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 330
List of tables

Table 1 Summary of key female religious institutes active in Australia from the 19th century ........................................................................................................................................ 95

Table 2 Superiors/Principals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon from 1917 to current........ 128

Table 3 A summary of developments of the Queensland secondary school curriculum ...................................................................................................................................... 163

List of figures

Figure 1 St Ursula’s students circa 1920s names unknown ............................... 56

Figure 2 Mother Ursula Kennedy circa 1920s ...................................................... 106

Figure 3 Map of Queensland, Australia, showing the Diocese of Rockhampton 108

Figure 4 Picture of St Ursula’s in 1917 ...................................................................... 109

Figure 5 Mother Patrick Madden, Archbishop Duhig, Mother Ursula Kennedy (Mother General) 1946 ........................................................................................................... 120

Figure 6 Presentation Superiors, Aloysius Ryan, Clare McMahon and Michael McMahon circa 1920s ............................................................................................................. 129

Figure 7 The three Martin girls from Emerald (1918-1924) ................................. 131

Figure 8 Report cards of student Doris Whitwell from 1922 and 1923: sixth and seventh form end of year results. .................................................................................. 170

Figure 9 Doris, Vera Vivian and Lynda Whitwell circa late 1920s...................... 173

Figure 10 School uniform circa 1920s ..................................................................... 227

Figure 11 St Ursula’s Catholic Action Group .......................................................... 235

Figure 12 Picture of Sister Celsus and boarders in school uniform at the beach in 1940s ...................................................................................................................... 253

Figure 13 A note from a parent in an autograph book of a boarder (1930) ....... 314
Chapter one

Setting the scene

Introduction

This thesis is a history of the first eighty years of St Ursula’s, a secondary Catholic boarding school for girls established in 1917 in the undeveloped seaside settlement of Yeppoon, forty-eight kilometres north east of Rockhampton on the central coast of Queensland, Australia. The history tells the usual stories in chronological order of building projects and key foundational figures. By drawing upon personal stories it elicits from the memories of past students and teachers other traditional elements of a school history, its daily routine, the organisational structure, the curriculum, and significant landmark events most of which were undocumented over eighty years. This thesis acknowledges the value of oral history to extend the boundaries of a traditional school history. It examines deeper and more subtle questions about the underlying sense of the vision to develop St Ursula’s as a Catholic secondary school for girls, the purpose and ideology, and the inner realities of convent boarding school life. This approach necessitated some innovative qualitative methodological strategies.

The data for this history was assembled from the recollections of students and staff, scattered records in newspapers, and what has survived in church and convent archives. In this thesis the students and staff are the agents of their own school history. I trace the school’s connection with 250 years of the tradition of educating women established by Nano Nagle, the foundress of the Presentation Sisters. In 2018 St Ursula’s is a Catholic secondary day and boarding school of over 380 girls of which fifty-two are boarders and is administered completely by lay people. Its enrolment history is a reflection of the sociocultural history of the central west of Queensland and in particular the gradual population growth around the original isolated seaside village in 1917. From the mid-1970s Yeppoon developed into a thriving tourist destination and a satellite suburb for the city of Rockhampton because of the improved road system. Indeed the current principal of St Ursula’s (2018), Mrs Catherine Dunbar commutes each day from her home in Rockhampton.
Recent research on boarding school education traces the rise in its popularity from the 18th and 19th centuries.\(^1\) Into the 20th century in the United Kingdom, parents who could afford education in public schools continued to perceive as normative a child being separated from his or her family from a young age.\(^2\) In this thesis I argue that to fully understand the values and beliefs about boarding school education it is essential to trace the progress in development for the education of girls in a specific boarding school setting over 500 years. I include the research that has traced the evolution of girls’ education and in particular how Catholic women’s religious orders established the tradition of the convent boarding school in this evolution.\(^3\) This thesis examines the history of a convent boarding school in Australia that evolved over several centuries and maintained a specific tradition of lifestyle and curriculum well into the 20th century.

In this chapter I outline the historiography and methodology used in the thesis, including the sources and procedures used to collect the data. It provides an overview of the main trends in the literature on women’s education and identifies the issues of class and gender in a Catholic girls’ boarding school setting. For most of the twentieth century, the population of Queensland, like much of the rest of Australia, was overwhelmingly white and British as a result of two sets of policies. The population of St Ursula’s for the first seventy years was no exception. The first, known as the White Australia Policy, restricted the entrance of non-white migrants into Australia through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. The second known as the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 meant that Indigenous Australians were governed by a separate set of policies. After the brutal frontier wars of the nineteenth century, Indigenous Queenslanders were subject to state-based regulatory regimes of control and surveillance. This Act governed their lives and determined the government of Aboriginal populations in Queensland until the 1960s. Under the Act, Aboriginal Australians were segregated


\(^2\) The term ‘public school’ in Britain is equivalent to the term ‘private school’ applied to schools in Australia conducted independently of state run systems.

in nine missions and five government institutions throughout Queensland. The enrolments of the Catholic schools that the Presentation Sisters established whether in country or coastal townships reflected the restrictive nature of these government policies in the make-up of the school population.

The Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Sisters approved by Pope Pius VII in 1805 included a specific commitment to include the poorest in society in their schools. This commitment was expressed throughout St Ursula’s first eighty years as an undocumented corporate belief amongst the superiors of the boarding school that “no-one is turned away”. Despite this assertion by a pioneer member of the Presentation Sisters, St Ursula’s, like most other schools, was an overwhelmingly white school in an overwhelmingly white settler colonial country and, as such, the oral histories outlined in this thesis do not include the voices of Indigenous Australians and a small number of non-white migrants. St Ursula’s was a largely monocultural school that accepted and educated students from a range of white socio-economic levels. The change in the enrolment landscape occurred when, under Australian Government funding, St Ursula’s was one of the boarding schools in central and northern Queensland that accepted small numbers of Papua New Guinea girls for secondary education from the late 1960s until Papua New Guinea Independence in 1975.

The history of St Ursula’s that unfolded was at times complex because the work in education of the Presentation Sisters emanated from their commitment to the spiritual dimensions of the Rule of life of a canonically approved religious order operating with very little change under the auspices of the Catholic Church from the late 18th century. From the 1850s as the number of Presentation convents grew throughout Ireland, Presentation superior Mother De Pazzi Leahy produced a directory to unify the interpretation of the Rule by the sisters in their work of conducting schools. In fine detail it defined the daily routine in a Presentation school, its timetable, subjects to be taught and expectations in behaviour of nuns and

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5 Rupert Goodman’s history of Secondary education in Queensland devotes one half-paragraph to Indigenous children and their connection to Queensland education. 21.
6 Sister Teresita Ahern, interview by Maree Ganley, 12 March, 2015, audio.
students. A 1905 in Australia a similar directory was produced to unify the growing number of Presentation convent schools particularly in the state of Victoria. This directory gave some more flexibility for the transference of sisters between convent foundations but differed little in the prescriptions for school routine and subjects from the earlier Irish directory.\(^8\) Although a Queensland directory is not referred to throughout the interviews of the sisters for this history, boarders at St Ursula’s often commented on the difficulties they experienced in accepting the rigidity of a convent boarding school routine involving food, movement and social exchange that suited conditions of another age and foreign culture.\(^9\)

This thesis establishes a place in the literature on girls’ secondary education internationally and locally.\(^10\) The record of a girl’s boarding school education is of value historically in Australia or overseas as many girls’ secondary colleges had closed their boarding residences from the mid-1970s. In Queensland these include the earliest founded boarding schools of All Hallows, the first convent boarding school in Queensland founded in 1861, Brisbane Girls Grammar founded in 1875, and St Rita’s Presentation College, founded in Brisbane in 1926. St Ursula’s founded in 1917 still has a boarding residence although in recent decades day student enrolments have overtaken the boarder numbers.

Histories of Australian convent secondary schools have examined the formal curriculum aspects but have given only token reference to the totality of a convent school education. Boarding school life is considered in this history as a holistic learning experience in keeping with the original intention of a convent boarding school education for girls. It acknowledges and examines the presence of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in a convent boarding school education. That is, in the history of convent boarding schools it was always intended that what was learned outside the

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\(^9\) Judy (Lasker) Williams, interview by Maree Ganley, 4 July 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane. The students described the rituals and expectations at times as harsh and the nuns were judged to be strict at all times.

classroom, of the cultural experience of living with women religious, was just as important as formal classroom lessons.

This thesis explores the impact on students’ lives of the compulsory daily school routine within the highly symbolised and ritualised culture of women’s religious life. Patricia Curran, from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, argues that even customs surrounding convent food were imbued with religious ritual and symbolism.\(^\text{11}\) She stated that ‘Convent refectory practices affected attitudes towards the body, its capacity for movement and stillness, silence and speech, nature and grace, the expression and repression of character, the life-affirming and life-denying’\(^\text{12}\). The students and sisters reported similar customs in the St Ursula’s boarding school refectory into the 1980s where there was seniority of placement at tables, silence imposed during periods of mealtime and no choice of food, however unpalatable. The original idea in convent life that special behaviours in the refectory were a meaningful part of spiritual formation, particularly in the denial of bodily pleasure, did not reach the young students in the years when religious sisters conducted boarding schools.

**Aims and purpose**

This is a study of a convent school through the oral histories of teachers and students. The thesis has three goals: to document the religious, academic and pastoral traditions in St Ursula’s; to contribute to the literature on educational practices in rural and remote Australia; and to contribute to the literature on the histories of education by women religious whose focus was the education of girls.\(^\text{13}\)

The history’s main threads and themes of origin, leadership, formal education, culture and faith are viewed through the lens of personal memory as a multiplicity of experiences, perspectives, interpretations and subjectivities.

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\(^{12}\) Ibid. 34-43
Synopsis: The Presentation Order, its structures, systems and mission

This section focusses on the history of the founding of the Presentation Order by Irish woman Nano Nagle and in particular on its offices and how teacher training and schooling were structured within the Order. In Cork Ireland on September 29 1776, Nano Nagle formally named her new foundation as the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She intended this first native Irish religious institute to be dedicated to the religious, literary and industrial instruction of the children of the poor – particularly the female poor.14

The traditional structures of religious orders of women in the Catholic Church were defined through their Rule and Constitutions. Nano Nagle’s original Rule and Constitutions defined her community as a congregation of women religious. It was first formulated and then received official approval from Pope Pius V11 by 1793. He approved the name of the congregation as The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. By 1805, through many trials of illness, small numbers of applicants and lack of financial support, Nano Nagle’s successors changed the status of the institute from a ‘congregation’ of sisters to an ‘order’ of nuns thereby committing the sisters to the rule of enclosure. They became known as the Presentation Order of Sisters. (Appendix 2).

From then on they would have approval in the Church to operate as members of an enclosed order with solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and with a fourth vow that of educating and instructing young girls especially the poor.15 As a religious ‘order’ of nuns the sisters did not have the freedom to move freely out in the community to carry on their key mission of conducting schools in local areas.

The rule of enclosure meant that the sisters were not to pass from the physical limits of the monastery, unless for the most weighty reasons.

The superiors of each new convent foundation adopted and implemented the Rule throughout Ireland. With a common rule, each house was administered as an independent foundation responsible particularly for its own financial affairs, recruitment and the superior ultimately accountable to the local bishop. As the number of convents grew around Ireland and overseas in the nineteenth century, the sisters were unified by the Rule and their *modus operandi* became enshrined in the Presentation directory which laid down practices to be observed by the nuns in their various offices in the order whether as superior or classroom teacher.\(^\text{16}\)

Independent Irish Presentation convent communities were approached for assistance by the first bishops in the new Catholic dioceses of the Australian colonies from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Contrary to the avowed commitment to educate the poorest only, the Presentation Sisters agreed upon request from the bishops to establish also fee-paying schools for young ladies. The bishops intended that these schools for young ladies would lay the foundations of an educated Catholic elite and to prepare young women as teachers in Catholic primary schools.

Many sisters in the Presentation Order called the ‘superior’ had the opportunity to fill the leadership role of overseeing the work of establishing and maintaining a successful school and religious community. The model of governance outlined in the constitutions prescribed the way in which individual communities were to be organised and how they were to operate in the convent and school. The Rule and Constitutions stated that the superior must show herself a model of regular observance…, that regular discipline is duly maintained, that the sisters diligently apply themselves to their respective charges, and particularly that they most sedulously attend to the instruction and spiritual training of the children.\(^\text{17}\) The role


of the teaching sisters in the classroom stated that they were to do their utmost to maintain a high standard of education in their schools according to the requirements of the age and country. Also the rule stated that 'in mental training as well as the accomplishments expected of women, their Catholic girls may be in no way inferior to those brought up in non-Catholic schools'.

In 1833 the Presentation Sisters became the first Irish order to establish a foundation overseas in Newfoundland from Galway. The Newfoundland mission afforded the Presentation Order the opportunity to establish itself in an international context which included Australia by 1866. Each new foundation of the Presentation Order from Ireland arriving to the newly proclaimed states of Australia in the mid-19th century was also autonomous. The norm for religious orders sending women to overseas missions was that there would be no ties of legal authority to the mother house in Ireland. It was expected that the founding mother superior would defer to the local Australian bishop who had invited the sisters to his diocese.

The Presentation Sisters of Kildare convent Ireland were invited in November 1873 to establish a community in Wagga Wagga in the Riverina district of New South Wales. In Wagga Wagga they were requested to conduct a European model of schooling for girls within the convent precinct called Mt Erin to which boarding accommodation was eventually added in 1890. The rule of enclosure had considerable implications when the first Presentation sisters arrived in Australia in 1866. There would be many occasions when a concession would be sought by the bishops to allow the sisters to conduct their mission effectively in early pioneering Australia without the restrictions of enclosure. This development was particularly relevant for the Queensland foundations of the Presentation Order because of difficulties of communication from the vast distances and few roads. Each small group of sisters was faced with frontier conditions unsupported by a centralised system of government such as Mary McKillop’s congregation the Sisters of St.

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18 Ibid. 18.
21 Ibid. 137; 145.
Joseph founded in Australia in 1867.\textsuperscript{22} The consistency of commitment to both the routines of a religious community and the school curriculum was determined by the canonical observances required of a community of Catholic religious women whose primary apostolate was education.

In Mt Erin Wagga Wagga young ladies learned in the ‘select’ or fee-paying school room while the sisters opened an elementary school in north Wagga Wagga for the non-fee paying children called St Joseph’s.\textsuperscript{23} The classical traditions of education in the Presentation ‘select’ schools for young ladies whether in Hobart, Melbourne or Wagga included subjects in the ‘accomplishments’ of music, singing, painting, needlework and dance. In 1917 in the new Presentation convent school called St Ursula’s Yeppoon, Mother Patrick Madden advertised a similar course of instruction to include all the branches of a ‘superior English education’.\textsuperscript{24} Subjects which varied according to the abilities of the sisters in each Presentation school were languages French and Latin and Euclid, Algebra, Bookkeeping, Botany and Physiology. The Irish Presentation Sisters were not trained initially to deliver the advanced curriculum which included the ‘accomplishments’. They relied on their personal educational backgrounds and the universal pedagogical principles of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century English schools of rote learning which was memorisation based on repetition. The curriculum of the Catholic school also included the teaching of the catechism, and preparation for the sacraments of the Church as essential subjects.

The newly formed Rockhampton Diocese in Central Queensland to which the Presentation Sisters were invited in 1900 covered 920,000 square kilometres. In comparison Ireland is 84,421 square kilometres. Bishop Higgins was appointed bishop of the Rockhampton diocese (1899-1905) and it is believed to have been his familiarity with the educational work of the Presentation nuns in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales that led to his invitation to them to open a school in Longreach in

\textsuperscript{22} MacGinley, \textit{A Place of Springs}. 66-70. MacGinley argues the abolition of the distinction of lay sisters and choir sisters and the length of terms of office for key positons such as Mistress of Novices and Bursa were examples of unique adaptations to the Rule made in the Longreach community in its first ten years that did not occur in the southern foundations of Australia.

\textsuperscript{23} MacGinley, \textit{Roads to Sion}. 144.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 68-9.
The town of Longreach is 700 kilometres west of the main coastal city of Rockhampton. Five Presentation Sisters volunteered for Longreach and amongst them was Alice Kennedy under the religious name of Sister Ursula (1876-1960). She is credited as the woman who was to have the strongest influence on the growth and development of the Presentation Order in Queensland from its foundation in 1900. She was twenty-four years of age when she volunteered to leave Wagga Wagga Presentation convent where she had trained to be a member of the Presentation Order.

Alice was one of the first pupils enrolled in the ‘select’ boarding school at Holy Cross Presentation convent school Daylesford, Victoria. She was schooled in the classical traditions of education for young ladies and she also competed in the matriculation exams for Melbourne University which was unusual for women in 1890s, and went on to graduate as a teacher. In 1909 the Presentation Order in Queensland numbered just fifteen. The style of leadership required was on the one hand a commitment to the fundamentals for adherence to the daily rule of a Catholic religious order and on the other to function as an organisation that would support the key element of the bishops’ agenda which was to generate membership and loyalty to the Catholic faith in the remote central regions of Queensland.

Structure and systems of Queensland Presentation schools

The Presentation Sisters came to Hobart, Tasmania in 1866 with a particular mission to educate the poorest in society. As a Catholic order of nuns dedicated to the education of poor children, the Presentation Sisters had their own set of customs and practices for the daily routine in their classrooms. In 1824, the Presentation convent annalist at Doneraile, Ireland, noted that ‘none of us entered religion to

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25 Ibid. 315.
become schoolmistresses, but rather to make the dear little ones of Jesus useful active members of society and prepare each one of them for the battle of life’.  

In Ireland, this educational tradition was further influenced by the incorporation of the Presentation elementary schools for the poor into the Irish National Education System. Irish historian, Deirdre Raftery argues that almost all Presentation schools were officially connected with the board between 1834 and 1871. The Presentation approach to operating schools was detailed in The Irish Presentation directory published in 1850 by Mother de Pazzi Leahy from the South Presentation Convent Cork, Ireland. It was distributed throughout all the Presentation convents in the country. It defined specific roles for both superior and community sisters in their capacity as women religious whose specific mission was teaching. The role of the Presentation nun in classroom management was highlighted in the chapter about methods of instruction. The means of instruction were explanation, interrogation and repetition. This approach was similar to that adopted and implemented in Australian government and non-government schools well into the 20th century.

In 1915, the independently founded Presentation convents throughout Victoria amalgamated and began operating with a common Presentation schools directory. The schools conformed to the directory’s criteria and, because they were part of the centrally devised state government curriculum, they publicised records of their Australian schools’ results. Queensland education historian, Rupert Goodman argued that, eventually, educational policies in independent institutes such as the Presentation Order or the later Catholic systemic schools differed little from the

28 Raftery, Delaney, and Nowlan-Roebuck, Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy. 91. Quoted from Presentation Convent Annals, Doneraile, 1845.
29 Ibid. 98-99.
30 Ibid. 77-78. By the time the directory was circulated, many of the principles for school management recommended by the National Board of Ireland in the 1830s had been in operation in Presentation schools since the late 1790s.
31 Raftery and Nowlan-Roebuck, “Convent Schools and National Education in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Negotiating a Place within a Non-Denominational System.” 362.
32 Anita Selzer, Educating Women in Australia. From the Convict Era to the 1920s, 1st ed. (Melbourne: University of Cambridge, 1994), Study exercise.
policies in government schools.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, in Queensland, from 1900, the Presentation Sisters conformed to the secular requirements of the State education department and complied with the requirements of local diocesan Catholic Church authorities who oversaw the religious education syllabus.

The Presentation Sisters arrived in Australia from Presentation convents that had been founded in early nineteenth-century Limerick, Fermoy and Kildare. They began to operate by both maintaining the character of a Catholic educational institution in the tradition of the Presentation Order and meeting the secular requirements of a national curriculum.\textsuperscript{35} For example, the first bishops of the Queensland colony, James Quinn (1819-1881) and Robert Dunne (1830-1917) adopted the practices of seeking government inspection for their schools and submitting pupil-teachers for the departmental examinations.\textsuperscript{36}

The Presentation Sisters in Queensland used an 1805 edition of the Presentation Rule and Constitutions brought from their Kildare convent to Wagga Wagga in 1874 and then to Longreach in 1900. The sisters in Queensland later adopted the revised Constitutions promulgated in Cork in December 1927. The directive in the revised Rule that spinning be taught in elementary schools reflected the directive’s lack of consistency with the Sisters’ local Australian practices. However, a later 1947 revision better reflected adaptations already in practise in Queensland in accordance with the state curriculum.\textsuperscript{37}

A common timetable of the school day operated in Presentation boarding schools in Longreach and later Yeppoon, presumably from an oral tradition drawing on the Victorian directory of 1915. Two past Queensland Presentation leaders from the late 1970s, and the oldest sisters interviewed for this thesis, could not recall ever


\textsuperscript{35} Presentation Sisters Longreach, ed. \textit{Echoes from Longreach} (Rockhampton: Record Printing Company Ltd East Street 1916).

\textsuperscript{36} MacGinley, \textit{A Place of Springs}. 143.

\textsuperscript{37} Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Virgin Mary, "Constitutions of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary," ed. The Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation Order (Cork1928). 24. The revised edition of the Constitutions of 1947 for Australia did not prescribe subjects such as spinning to be taught.
sighting a copy of either the Irish (1850) or the Australian (1915) directories. It is presumed that the pioneer sisters in Longreach from 1900 operated from an oral tradition based on the Victorian directory and applied the same daily routine in the classroom and boarding house in St Ursula’s from 1917.38

**Teacher training for sisters in Queensland Presentation schools**

In 1900, the Presentation Sisters in Queensland established a pupil-teacher system of teacher training, in keeping with state departmental practice. This was a monitorial system for preparing prospective teachers. The system emerged in England in the 19th century to provide mass education by preparing the higher achieving pupils to become monitors and pupil-teachers. The system involved training older pupils to teach those ‘who knew less’, through drilling and rote learning. Later, pupil-teachers or apprentices were appointed to replace the traditional school monitor.39

St Ursula’s annalist for the school’s early years speaks of a mix of trained and untrained young women at the school. They most likely participated in a pupil-teacher apprenticeship style of teacher-training in which a past pupil of St. Ursula’s partnered the classroom teacher as a monitor. Amongst the ‘untrained’ young women filling teaching roles, there is reference to Miss Lizzie Bolger and Miss Dorothy Judson as ‘state school teachers’.40 From 1935, the annalist refers to Miss Vera McEffer of Yeppoon as being ‘the last of a line of unqualified young teachers’. By this time, Queensland Presentation Sisters’ leader, Mother Ursula Kennedy was able to provide more young professed sisters from Longreach whom she had trained to teach during their three novitiate years.41

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38 Ahern, "Interview."; Sister Andrea McGrath, ibid., 29 June 2011, Audio, ACU Brisbane; Sister Kathleen Tynan, ibid., 4 May 2015. In 1934, Sister Teresita Ahern recalled in detail the daily routine of the superior Mother Evangelist Murtagh who would monitor the teachers performance in her daily rounds of the school.


41 Ibid. 137.
In addition to the annal’s reference to the presence of young and untrained lay teachers in St Ursula’s’ early history, the annal also reported the relocation of the temporary church precinct built in 1918 on the ground floor of the original 1917 St Ursula’s building. The ‘church’ was a shared space in the St. Joseph’s primary school room. From December 1928, the classroom teacher of the St Joseph’s low fee-paying school, conducted in a classroom on St Ursula’s property, could at last leave desks and work in place at the end of the school week instead of moving the classroom equipment aside to make way for the Sunday services. The teachers and pupils in the select fee-paying classroom of St. Ursula’s ‘high’ school upstairs, which also had primary aged boarders as well as the secondary students, had not had to deal with that inconvenience each week.\(^{42}\)

Newly trained teachers in the state training college established in Brisbane in 1914 were often among the applicants to join the Presentation Sisters. One of the earliest trained teachers to enter the Queensland Presentation Order in 1933, Sister Teresita Ahern, taught in West End State School.\(^{43}\) Not until 1914, when a teacher training college was established in Brisbane, was it possible to upgrade the standard of teacher preparation beyond the level of the pupil-teacher system, which was phased out between 1923 to 1935.\(^{44}\) The pupil-teacher system of teacher-training was abolished in Queensland in 1935, but there was only one state teacher training institute located in Brisbane to the disadvantage of aspiring students teachers from country regions.\(^{45}\)

The Presentation Sisters founded convents only in the central west and coast of Queensland until 1926. This remoteness, coupled with the rules of enclosure, prevented them from accessing either university or technical colleges. Their access to teacher-training contrasted significantly with resources for teacher-preparation provided for various teaching religious orders, including the Presentation Sisters in

\(^{42}\) Murtagh, “Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1.” The term ‘high school’ is the title used until the early 1920s to refer to special schooling for fee-paying girls of all ages in the boarding school.

\(^{43}\) Ahern, “Interview.”


\(^{45}\) Sister Agatha Freeman, interview by Maree Ganley, 22 September, 2009, Audio, ACU Brisbane. Sister Freeman’s father from Longreach would not allow his daughter, Bonnie Freeman to travel to Brisbane to be a teacher after graduating from St Ursula’s.
Victoria and Western Australia. During the depression years of the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, the Queensland Department of Public Instruction embarked on cost-cutting exercises. It rejected the proposal from the Grammar school sector that the state financially support teacher-training in both government and non-government schools. Until the late 1960s, new recruits to a teaching religious congregation such as the Presentation Sisters in remote Queensland were prepared internally by an experienced state trained teacher such as Mother Ursula Kennedy. Copies of Queensland state prepared examination papers were used as a standard.

In view of the absence of teacher-training institutes in remote Queensland, the Presentation Sisters sought informal recognition from state approved institutes. They invited the inspectors from the State Department of Public Instruction to report annually on the standard of teaching in their primary schools. The sisters in training did not sit for the various levels of pupil-teacher examinations, even though many copies of these examination papers remained for years in the Longreach Convent library. Hence these papers may have been used for reference and comparison of standards. From 1900, new applicants to the Presentation Sisters who entered with state system teaching qualifications were appointed to supervise trainee sisters.

This practice continued until 1967, when the first sisters who had completed their religious training attended a teacher’s training-college conducted by the Sisters of Mercy and approved by the Queensland Department of Education in Brisbane. From the mid-1970s, young women who entered religious congregations in Queensland straight after secondary education began to attend newly established State Colleges of Advanced Education specifically directed to secondary education. After teacher training was completed, some of those women who were

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46 Esther (Leigh) Jordan joined the Presentation Sisters in Geraldton, Western Australia from Carlow, Ireland. The sisters’ teacher training and accreditation were conducted externally from the West Australian Graylands State Teacher’s College.  
47 MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 147 (10).  
48 Ibid. 145.  
49 Ahern, “Interview.”  
50 Marie Griffin, ibid., 9 February, 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
appointed to secondary colleges conducted by the Presentation Sisters also completed university degrees in their specialised subject fields.\textsuperscript{51}

**Teacher training for secondary schools**

In Queensland, the Presentation Sisters opened two secondary schools to senior matriculation level, St Ursula’s Yeppoon (1917) and St Rita’s Clayfield (1926), and two high schools to junior matriculation known as high school tops attached to primary schools. These were Our Lady’s Longreach (1912) and St Joseph’s Murgon (1937). The small number of Queensland Presentation sisters destined for teaching advanced levels came from those applicants who had themselves experienced a ‘high school’ level education in a convent boarding school or were graduates of a State department training system. Ursula Kennedy competed in the senior matriculation examinations for Melbourne University in the 1890s and went on to complete teacher training in Victoria before joining the Presentation Sisters in Wagga Wagga. Sister Mary Rose Mac Ginley recalls being a trainee sister in Longreach and using examination papers from the Queensland department of public instruction. Core subjects were English Grammar and Literature, Mathematics, History, Geography and Art, and subject options included papers in Latin, Greek and French.\textsuperscript{52} It seemed that the internal teacher-training and personal educational background of the sisters enabled them to prepare students for the first junior university examinations in St Ursula’s in 1922.

Until the early 1930s the sisters had adequate expertise in music and the arts to prepare girls to diploma level, but trained lay specialist teachers were employed in Mathematics as more St Ursula’s girls and a small number of boys began their studies towards senior matriculation. As both junior and senior matriculation could be attained without science being a core subject, the science subjects were introduced only when a qualified sister in sciences was appointed in the early 1950s. Two factors hampered the introduction of a broader curriculum for St Ursula’s as a secondary school to senior matriculation. They were, firstly, the absence of a strong financial source of income and, secondly, the constant requests from the bishops of

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Mac Ginley, *A Place of Springs*. 147.
Queensland for religious institutes to open more primary schools, not just in country regions but in the fast growing urban areas around Brisbane. Historian, Tom Boland argues that in the case of Queensland’s Archbishop James Duhig (1871-1965) and his grand plans for Catholic education in Queensland, ‘it was one thing to decide to build parish schools in Winton, Cloncurry or Ayr; it was quite another to find teachers for them. If Winton and other towns wanted parish schools, they would have to be staffed by nuns’.\(^{53}\)

Following the opening of the University of Queensland in 1912, a system of state secondary education was introduced. State secondary schooling was combined with either existing primary schools or technical colleges where twenty-five pupils were available. In small centres, if fewer than twenty pupils were available for secondary education, a secondary ‘top’ class to junior level was added to an existing primary school. Until the 1950s, state high schools existed in six Queensland towns only, including Mt Morgan west of Rockhampton. Longreach and Yeppoon state high schools opened later, in the mid-1960s. The Presentation Sisters opened the first registered secondary school in the central west of Queensland at Longreach in 1935.\(^{54}\)

When the Presentation Sisters opened St Rita’s in Brisbane in 1926 some young women who applied to enter the religious order of the Presentation Sisters were selected for secondary education in St. Ursula’s and St Rita’s. Past pupils of St Rita’s, Catherine Casey (Sister Veronica) and Mary Hogan (Sister Alphonsus) obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree and Diploma of Education by the mid-1940s through external studies from the University of Queensland and taught at St. Ursula’s before returning to St. Rita’s. By the 1940s, several Presentation Sisters at St. Rita’s had either obtained or were completing university qualifications.

Sisters Mary Rose MacGinley, Elvera Sesta and Bernadette Fleming were past pupils of St. Rita’s who, between 1949 and 1957, completed Science Degrees either

\(^{53}\) Boland, James Duhig. 96-97.
\(^{54}\) MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 125.
externally or through evening lectures and then taught Science at St. Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{55} However, there appeared to be a push to establish St Rita’s as the premier Presentation secondary school in the state. With the exception of sister Mary Rose MacGinley, subject specialist teachers spent no more than two years at St Ursula’s and then returned for longer periods of time to St Rita’s to teach or to complete postgraduate university degrees.\textsuperscript{56} The exception, Sister Mary Rose MacGinley remained at St Ursula’s from 1954 until 1968 and was pivotal in launching St. Ursula’s science curriculum into the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century.

At St Ursula’s, in the mid-1970s increasing student numbers necessitated a more structured approach to school administration. There was a need for multiple classes of core subjects like Mathematics and English. There was also a need for subject-specialists for new syllabi in the lower secondary classes of languages and the sciences. The monastic administrative model, where the superior of the convent was ipso facto qualified to administer a secondary educational institution, was no longer operable.\textsuperscript{57} Until a deputy principal was appointed in 1984, and a lay principal was appointed to St Ursula’s in 1996, the organisational details of convent routine and matters such as year level and subject coordination of the school were generally conducted around the religious community breakfast table. This practice presented challenges for the growing number of lay teachers on staff who experienced difficulties with communication about subject and administrative matters.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Synopsis: The history of St Ursula's in the Presentation tradition}

The seaside settlement of Yeppoon on the central coast of Queensland became a Christmas school holiday destination for the Presentation Sisters from Longreach after 1900. They were offered accommodation in the holiday cottages of friends and the sisters’ families until Bishop Shiel invited them to open a school there. St.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{55} Each of these three women religious was dux of their senior matriculation year at St Rita’s. Sister Bernadette Fleming went on to be awarded a high distinction for studies in pure mathematics at the University of Queensland.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Science specialist, Sister Elvera Sesta and foreign languages specialist, Sister Veronica Cruice remained for one or two years respectively at St Ursula’s before returning to St Rita’s.
\item \textsuperscript{57} The monastic model of the superior as head of the monastery and its activities operated because the superior was generally the highest educated in the community.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Margaret (Clifford) Ramsay, interview by Maree Ganley, 30 July 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane. Mrs Ramsay was the first lay principal of St Ursula’s.
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Ursula’s was built in the latter half of 1916. At that time, the only other educational institution in the town was the Yeppoon State School. A provisional school opened in 1885, and the town's first state primary school in 1889. A provisional school was defined as one 'in which temporary provision is made for the primary instruction of children and not being a state school'. Provisional schools were established where there was an average attendance of between twelve and thirty pupils. The provisional school teacher appointed was usually an unclassified teacher who was not provided with a residence by the Department of Public Instruction and who received a salary that remained less than that of the lowest classified teacher. Consequently, such a teacher was often a person with barely adequate education, or occasionally, a well-educated person who had failed in other occupations, or an educated woman forced to provide for herself.

The Presentation Sisters opened St Ursula’s boarding and day school in Yeppoon on February 5, 1917 in a new purpose-built single two-storey building. Sister Evangelist Murtagh, a graduate of Our Lady’s College Longreach and a teacher and superior at St Ursula’s, states that Bishop Shiel proposed the name St Ursula’s to honour the leadership of Sister Ursula Kennedy in administering school construction and the development of the curriculum of the Presentation schools in the Central west.

The four foundation sisters in Yeppoon represented the fourth generation of members in the Nano Nagle tradition from Kildare. Three of the four first Yeppoon sisters were Australian born, and all had trained to be sisters in the convent at Longreach. The first Yeppoon superior, Mother Patrick Madden had come from Ireland to enter the order at Wagga after attending the Presentation Convent in Galway City. Sister Stanislaus O’Rourke came from Longreach, Sister Clare McMahon came from Sydney, and Sister Aquinas McReady had been educated by the Mercy sisters and entered from Emerald, western Queensland where her father

was the postmaster. Overseeing the launch of a new foundation at Yeppoon was Mother Ursula Kennedy who was a founding member of the community that came from Wagga Wagga to Longreach. Her leadership style has been described as strong and confident, and her work influenced the direction of the Presentation Congregation foundations in Queensland.62

The first St Ursula’s convent building housed accommodation facilities for a community of five sisters, twenty-six girl boarders and a classroom. It was advertised in the local Rockhampton Morning Bulletin as a convent school for young ladies.63 The advertisement claimed that the fees were ‘moderate’. The twenty-six girls enrolled in the boarding school at its opening constituted the class of the select ‘high’ school for young ladies who ranged in age from five to sixteen years. The college register entries for 1917 also records eighty-one day students had enrolled by the end of the year, of which twenty-eight were boys.64 The Presentation Sister’s archive contains no clear formal statements of vision, aims and purpose for the school at its opening. The college register reveals, however, that St Ursula’s was open to children of all ages and middle and working class economic circumstances and educational needs. Boys were admitted as day students as in the Presentation Sisters’ junior secondary school in Longreach. The difference at St Ursula’s was that by the mid-1930s boys would join the girls in the senior university matriculation classes.65

Bishop Shiel (1913-1931) stated at the official opening of St Ursula’s that the sisters would “persevere with that courage and self sacrifice of all our nuns who never think of self as long as there are souls to whom they can impart the knowledge and comfort of religion and the development of the mind which by their own education and attainments they are so fitted to impart”.66 He went on to state that “this venture was a great business opportunity for the town having boarders at the school and as a mark of gratitude he would hope to hand over the convent free of all debt!”.67 He

62 MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 111-112.
64 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon,” ed. Presentation Sisters Archive (Yeppoon1917). 1-24.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid. 8
claimed that this indeed was a venture for “true education”. As early as 1917, it was mooted that a Christian Brothers College would also be built so that “Yeppoon would become a centre of real Christian culture”. However, the boy’s college did not eventuate until 1940.

**St Ursula’s co-education history**

St Ursula’s retained its character and reputation in its 100-year history as a Catholic girls’ boarding school despite the fact that for a short period (1917-1940), boys were enrolled as day students. From 1917, superiors admitted boys to St Ursula’s from remote regions in central Queensland which did not have access to primary and affordable secondary education, particularly to senior university matriculation. From 1917 to 1939, 485 of the 1152 students enrolled in the primary and secondary school were boys. For the first twenty-three years, girls and boys ranging in age from five to sixteen years were taught by the sisters to the last year of primary school known as the scholarship year, and eventually through to senior university matriculation. From the early 1930s, boys joined the girls in the secondary school as day students at St Ursula’s and began to sit both junior and senior university matriculation. This continued until 1940, when St Brendan’s boys boarding college, conducted by the Christian Brothers, opened in Yeppoon.

The number of boys enrolled at St Ursula’s from 1917 challenges any assumption that only girls were disadvantaged by the lack of secondary educational opportunities in the central west of Queensland. Catholic women religious opened schools that focussed particularly on the education of girls and included secondary education to junior university level initially. In contrast, Catholic male religious congregations in central Queensland opened boys’ day schools only and these were in major regional centres such as Rockhampton. The Presentation Sisters conducted the only co-educational secondary schools in Longreach and Yeppoon.

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68 Ibid. 8.
69 Ibid. 8
70 It has not been possible to establish at this stage where country boys stayed except perhaps in Yeppoon with relatives or in special hostels for students.
71 Noel Milner, *A Dream Come True: St. Brendan’s College Yeppoon 1940-1990* (Brisbane: Booralong Publications, 1990). In 1952, past pupil, Shirley Wilson recalled that both she and her brother studied as secondary students at St Ursula’s.
until the State schools opened in the mid-1960s. Co-education by the Presentation Sisters in these isolated townships existed primarily for students whose families could not afford boarding-school education in major cities.

The superiors adapted the rule of convent enclosure to allow boys into a convent boarding school precinct as day students. Boys and girls featured on the 1930 St Ursula’s prize list in all subjects from lower primary to junior university. There were boys listed in the first senior university class that graduated at St Ursula’s in December 1931. Two seniors for 1934 at St Ursula’s were Louis Church who became a dentist, and Ian Ralfe who in 1939 joined the RAAF and then became a Qantas pilot. Both shared the St Ursula’s Senior University A class Maths prizes along with James Wilson who won the Geometry prize in the Junior University B Class.72

In the years between 1934 and 1939, a small number of girls pursued senior university studies and were excelling in the arts to diploma and licentiate levels. In the workplace, women would continue to be confined to employment as domestics, teachers, nurses and clerical workers. The St Ursula’s curriculum opened up that opportunity for girls to fill those employment opportunities. The proportion of boarders to day students varied over 100 years and this variation was due to St Ursula’s geographical position in the central west. In this region, the pastoral, agricultural and mining industries experienced fluctuations in progress and prosperity as a result of unique climatic and economic conditions.

Education historian, Rupert Goodman asserts that, in the first fifty years of the 20th century, the State Government did not support the idea of funding secondary education beyond grade ten in remote areas of the state.73 State scholarship examination conditions changed in 1914 to a qualifying rather than a competitive exam, and school leaving age was raised from twelve to fourteen years. The ‘scholarship test’, as it became known from this time, became the zenith of

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education for a large percentage of Queensland pupils. For others, it was a stepping stone to higher education. By 1915, an amendment to the state scholarship scheme also provided for an extension scholarship if the student gained an approved pass in the University of Queensland Junior Examination. This provision gave great financial support to the Presentation Sisters at St Ursula’s. In 1920, Ursula Kennedy, the leader of the Queensland Presentation Order, successfully established St Ursula’s as a registered secondary school with the State Education Department. This registration qualified St Ursula’s to receive funding per capita for successful scholarship applicants to junior matriculation, with further funding applied for applicants to senior matriculation.\footnote{Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”}

**A poetic metaphor for a challenging project**

In acknowledging the challenges of this project, I draw upon a powerful metaphor from the work of English composer, Edward Elgar and his ‘Sea Pictures’ in music and poetry (Appendix 1). The images from the suite of Edward Elgar’s music and lyrics are apt metaphors to describe how writing the history of St Ursula’s Yeppoon involves not only an epistemological approach, but also an element of creativity. There was the challenge of entering into a history of an enclosed community that usually kept its life hidden from public scrutiny, and of surfacing the private memories of adults recalling experiences of schooling.

As both friend and foe, the sea had a significant influence on the lives of the students and staff, and the proximity of the school to the beach was a key reason many parents chose St Ursula’s over the urban girls’ boarding schools in Rockhampton. Proximity of the school to the sea tested the resilience of staff, parents and students through the experiences of near drownings, the destruction of property caused by tropical cyclones, and the threat of bombing and coastal invasion during World War II.\footnote{Coastal areas from Sydney to Townsville and Darwin were bombed before coastal schools were closed in World War II.} Throughout the whole ‘seascape’ that is the history of St Ursula’s, there were certain practices in the daily school routine that related more to the community rule of Catholic religious sisters. These practices impacted on the consciousness of both
students and staff and at times tested their resilience as they attempted to conform to what seemed to be meaningless exercises. These practices became ritualised in the daily school programme, especially in the routine and lifestyle of girls who were boarders.

Literature review

Boarding school education

This thesis is located in the field of narrative inquiry which captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context. The focus in the literature on boarding school life broadly, and convent boarding school education in particular, is outlined in this section. Australian authors of the Presentations Sisters in Victoria, Wagga Wagga in New South Wales and Queensland have documented the broader historical and geographical contexts of their convent secondary schools.76 Anna Barbaro’s case-study of the Presentation Catholic girls’ day school, St Rita’s in Clayfield, Brisbane, traces the European traditions of girl’s secondary education and focuses on the history of how the Presentation Sisters established that academic tradition in a convent boarding school in Brisbane.77

Historians of the Catholic girls’ secondary school system in Australia have addressed the agency of women religious in pioneering structured secondary education in Australia. Catherine Kovesi-Killerby’s history of the first Mercy Sisters in the West Australian colony in 1849 is one of the more recent histories of women religious and the convent day and boarding schools they established in Australia on

77 Anna Barbaro, “The Origins of the Convent High School in Europe and Its Implantation and Evolution in the Antipodes: St Rita’s College Brisbane, as a Case Study (1926-2008)” (Australian Catholic University, Queensland, 2011).
a considerable scale from 1849 to 1866. By the late 1880s, there were eighty-five convent high schools in Australia, and by 1910 there were 212.

Barbaro’s and Kovesi-Killerby’s histories extended the focus from the records of key events and the history of curriculum development to include an examination of the agency of the leaders of women’s religious orders in the colonies. Religious orders established in Australia included in their mission convent high schools to teach ‘the accomplishments’; that is, a higher and further enriching education beyond elementary schooling. The convent high schools that served young ladies in the colony were initially the sole domain of the Catholic teaching sisters. The Presentation Sisters were not the first enclosed order of nuns to open convent high schools. The Benedictine nuns, led by Dame Magdalene le Clerc from Stanbrook Abbey in Worcestershire England in 1849, established a high-class monastic-style convent boarding school along Benedictine traditions in Parramatta outside Sydney.

At the time the Presentation Sisters first arrived in Tasmania in 1866, various Presentation convents from Ireland had already established convent boarding schools in overseas missions in Newfoundland, America and India in similar challenging conditions. In their foreign missions, the sisters, with the support of the bishop, obtained the papal rescripts required to open girls’ boarding accommodation, a feature that had not been part of their schools in Ireland.

Authors such as Christine Trimmingham Jack and Stephanie Burley also expanded the scope of the histories of convent boarding school education by including the boarding component as a significant influence in the educative process. In 1997,

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80 Killerby, *Ursula Frayne: A Biography*.
83 MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*. 166.
Trimingham-Jack argued for a ‘shift in writing school histories away from a focus on structure and planning towards a focus on experience and the formation of subjectivity’ focussing especially on the boarding school experience. Both Trimingham Jack and Burley highlight how practices in the daily routine of boarding school ‘played a critical role in the gender formation of students’. Their works were the forerunners of histories of education institutes that drew on the personal experiences of students and staff.

More recently, Australian historian, O’Brien examined the influence of women religious in education in rural areas of New South Wales. She argues that Irish bishops and women religious saw Australia as a foreign mission and thinly populated rural areas (termed ‘the bush’ in Australian jargon) as a particular challenge. O’Brien and Australian education historian, Tom O’Donoghue examined how the boarding school life for girls, which involved living closely with the sisters, was a source of enculturation about the Church’s expectations for women. Also, boarding schools were the greatest source of applications from young women wanting to join the sisters. O’Brien focussed particularly on how the Catholic convent boarding school was a source of vocations to religious life for girls from rural regions.

Boarding school life: a universal perspective

Literature from the disciplines of psychology and sociology informs the interpretation of interview data gathered from students and teachers for this history. One of the earliest sociological studies on boarding school life, published in 1968, is Robert Lambert and Spencer Millham’s *The Hothouse Society: An Exploration of Boarding-*

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school Life through the Boys’ and Girls’ Own Writing.\textsuperscript{91} Using a sociological lens, Lambert and Millham examined the organisation of the complex society of an English boarding school, including its aims, how it operated and with what effect.

Lambert and Millham’s research captured children’s personal reactions to school structures, and the way a boarding school organised itself to achieve certain goals. Their study was predominantly about boys’ boarding schools and included the experience of the English public-school prefect system. It examined the effects residential education had on children - effects not necessarily experienced in a school for day students only. The student responses were often about their experiences of interacting with rigid hierarchies of student power which were not usually present in convent boarding schools. The students in the English public schools reported a great sense of isolation in a boarders-only institution. The same sense of isolation did not seem to be experienced to the same extent in a day and boarding school population such as St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{92} However, the study yielded much data in relation to common boarding school experiences, peer relationships and the ‘inner-world’ created by boarders throughout their boarding school life.

Brad Papworth’s quantitative study, ‘Attending Boarding School: A Longitudinal Study of Its Role in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes’ explored the extent to which being a boarder, relative to day students, affects academic outcomes (e.g. motivation, engagement) and non-academic outcomes (e.g. life satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem).\textsuperscript{93} Jacqueline Down’s study, ‘Coping with Change: Adolescents’ Experience of the Transition to Secondary and Boarding School’ addressed specifically homesickness and the psychological consequences for boys and girls of leaving home for boarding school.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. 414.
\textsuperscript{93} Papworth, "Attending Boarding School: A Longitudinal Study of Its Role in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes."
\textsuperscript{94} Jacqueline Downs, "Coping with Change: Adolescents’ Experience of the Transition to Secondary and Boarding School" (PhD thesis, James Cook University, 2001).
A similar study, Shirley Fisher, Leona Elder and Graham Peacock’s ‘Homesickness in a School in the Australian Bush’, also addresses the issue of homesickness. These studies explored the distress reaction that afflicts many of those who leave home to reside in educational and vocational institutions. Mathew White’s thesis, ‘An Australian Co-Educational Boarding School as a Crucible for Life: A Humanistic Study of Students’ Attitude from Their Own Memoirs’, is a small-scale qualitative investigation of students’ views in a co-educational boarding school. He examined conditions and consequences that contributed to the long-term effects of a boarding school experience on students from international backgrounds.

The study by Robert Baker and John Andrews, ‘Parental Reason for Sending Children to a Rural Day and Boarding School’ is particularly relevant to my study, as these researchers canvassed data from a small independent day and boarding school founded in 1919 in a small inland town of Queensland. Their study addressed two inter-related concerns: the main reason for sending a child to the school, and the importance of various possible influences and sources of information in choosing the school. Their findings informed the search in this study for evidence that parents of St Ursula’s students also considered the social and economic benefits of a convent boarding school education in their choice of secondary education for their daughters.

Helen Proctor and Arathi Sriprakash in School Systems and School Choice, extend the scope of Baker and Andrews’ study beyond regional Australia to examine ‘the phenomenon of differential school provisions in Australia and explain its history’. This history of St Ursula’ seeks to answer some of the questions put forward in Proctor and Sriprakash’s study. How did St Ursula’s address the lack of adequate

96 Ibid. 15-16.
99 Ibid.
primary and secondary schooling for girls and boys of the central west and coastal region of Queensland? A highly centralised approach to administering Australian education, particularly in Queensland, left vast areas of the state without adequate schooling, even to junior secondary level, well into the 1960s.101

**Incorporating religion into the writing of women’s history**

American historian and author, Ann Braude noted that women’s stories do not easily fit into the frameworks that have traditionally structured religious history.102 She argues that women historians need to include in their narratives the impact of distinctive Catholic values, practices and institutions. Similarly, Kathleen Cummings, another American historian, argues that as more attention is paid to religious identity, women’s historians will be forced to confront many difficult questions, including the questions of where to place women who were part of patriarchal traditions like the Catholic Church.103 In this thesis, I contribute to the few records in the histories of women religious that include a focus on their business acumen as builders and founders of girls’ secondary educational institutions. I therefore document their professional and religious lives in the schools and classrooms for which they were responsible. This includes an examination of their leadership capacity as principals to conduct competitive secondary school education for girls.

Recent approaches to writing history about women’s lives in the context of Church history by Australian authors such as Stephanie Burley and O’Brien have led to the expansion of the field of women’s history. Australian education historian Stephanie Burley examines the history of the professional lives of women religious as principals in a South Australian context.104 Burley has played a key role in restoring

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101 Ibid. 322.
women religious not just to church history but into education and social history. Burley’s extensive scholarly research into the history of women religious and their schools locates them in larger contexts of women’s work and culture.

In *Women Writing History*, Angela Woollacott argues that “A greater inclusiveness regarding historical evidence (from the oral, to the visual and material, to historians’ own stories and memories) has broadened at least some shared definitions of what counts as history.” Antoinette Burton makes a strong case for the importance of recognising women’s memories of house and home as legitimate historical evidence in her study, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India.* Angela Woollacott cites Mary Spongberg’s *History Since the Renaissance* as one example of writing history that fulfils one of the original and enduring goals of women’s history, that is, to inform us of the range of past women’s contributions and creativity, so long obscured. That assertion is pertinent in this history because I examine the complex workings of gender and social class intersecting with the commitment and motivations of women religious to educate girls reaching back several centuries. Throughout this study, I highlight the recollections of girls and women religious regarding how they established agency and negotiated the patriarchy and misogyny in the Catholic Church. I also examine the long-term consequences for female students who experienced empowerment in their school life as young women through the work-skills and accomplishment curriculum presented by women religious.

Education historian, Tom O’Donoghue continues to press for a clearer understanding of the relationship between religious life and teaching as a career through his analyses of the educational endeavours of women religious. He co-authored with Stephanie Burley, ‘God's Antipodean Teaching Force: An Historical Exposition on Catholic Teaching Religious in Australia’. O'Donoghue and Burley

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105 Ibid. 1999. 276-289.
106 Angela Woollacott, "Women Writing History," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 3 (2005).
108 Woollacott, "Women Writing History." 182.
call for a widening of the scope of existing research on female religious teachers. O'Donoghue and Burley argue that much remains unknown of the contribution of women religious to education. They have launched an exploration of how the work of women religious in schools was affected through the demands of their religious vocation, their own education, the atmosphere they established in the schools, leadership opportunities and what O'Donoghue terms, the ‘darker side’ of their way of life.110

O'Donoghue’s most recent work, which he co-authored with historian, Judith Harford, Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967, models an approach to scholarly research in the history of education. They argue that much can be learned from experience through effective interviewing and recording memories. They incorporate oral history of student experiences as an enlightening perspective on the Irish nation’s journey towards comprehensive secondary education.111 I extend the scope of data gathering through interviews to include the recollections of women religious who were the teachers, the superiors and principals.

School histories

In this thesis, I seek to move beyond the well-known genre of institutional school histories in the light of contemporary approaches to history-writing. This history will be a repository to preserve memories, facts and figures, photographs and documents of St Ursula’s that have not been assembled and recorded previously. In A History of Australian Schooling, Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor argue that the production of school histories is enriched by adopting the perspective that schools are an integral part of society rather than reflecting it, and that schools are often powerful agents in society’s making.112

110 Ibid. 24.
Likewise, Australian Church-historian, Paul Chandler focuses on writing institutional history. Chandler rethinks an approach to writing institutional history, and he does this by proposing two guiding principles that I apply to my own research.\textsuperscript{113} The first principle is to acknowledge changed attitudes to heroes or models from those schools conducted by women religious. He argues that ‘we are in general more realistic, and indeed quite resistant to romanticising or idealising the past.’\textsuperscript{114} The second principle is to address a range of specific concerns, and thus change the way history is constructed. These concerns are the mentalities of ordinary people, the history of everyday life, the encounter between cultures, the interplay of power and freedom or structures and individuals, the construction of personal and group identity, the history of body and sexuality and the role of gender.\textsuperscript{115} This thesis addresses Campbell and Proctor’s argument that writing a school history on a national scale, as they did, inevitably results in a patchy story. They argue that there needs to be more of the rich accounts of particular incidents or experiences of ordinary individuals or groups, thereby illuminating the ways in which 19th-century and early 20th-century teachers, students and families operated within schools and school systems.\textsuperscript{116}

Specific school histories can be identified on a continuum from those that take a celebratory nostalgic approach to those with an interpretative analysis focus such as Christine Trimingham Jack’s history of Kerever Park (1944-1968).\textsuperscript{117} The memoir, by pioneer Presentation sister, Evangelist Murtagh (1894-1988), of the first fifty years of St Ursula’s is a school history presented ‘within the boundaries of aspirations’.\textsuperscript{118} The audience would appear to be the congregation itself, and the history a means to explain the community to itself, to bear witness to the experience of the elders and only secondarily to communicate to others who might be interested.\textsuperscript{119} Trimingham Jack’s recollection of the early years of St Ursula’s is an

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. 186
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 190.
\textsuperscript{116} Campbell and Proctor, \textit{A History of Australian Schooling}. xii.
\textsuperscript{118} Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon."
\textsuperscript{119} Chandler, "Writing Congregational History: Beyond the Institutional Model." 187.
example of a school history where the writer is an ‘insider’. It is a record of someone who was a member of the school family who had a love for and loyalty towards the school. The reader is left to infer the details of challenges and hardships from vague references.\(^\text{120}\)

Two histories of All Hallows secondary boarding school for girls in Brisbane, produced in 1963 and 1985, are examples of diverse approaches to the production of a school history. In 1963, Queensland Mercy sister historian, Anne McLay wrote a history of All Hallows called *A Critical Appreciation of the Educational System of the Sisters of Mercy, All Hallows Congregation, Queensland.*\(^\text{121}\) The school, which opened in 1861, was the first Catholic girls’ secondary school in Brisbane. McLay adopts a contextual and thematic approach and documents landmark achievements of All Hallows within the context of Queensland’s education history. In the 1985 history of All Hallows, *Dieu Et Devoir*, Mercy sister, Jean-Marie Mahoney, a former principal of the college, also documents landmark advances in the curriculum for girls. She adopts a traditional narrative by including the achievements of headmistresses and high achieving past students.\(^\text{122}\) However, it also extends the scope of the traditional school history by including insightful references to educational, social, and economic factors that influenced the changes to the curriculum and lifestyle in the school over one hundred years.\(^\text{123}\)

Sister Jean-Marie’s history of All Hallows was part of a surge in school histories written in Australia by female religious through the late 1980s to 2000 to mark centenary anniversaries. Members of religious orders often initiated the task of writing these histories themselves. Examples include Sister Delia Birchley’s history of the Good Samaritan Sisters in Queensland (1900-1980) entitled, *Only Love Survives: A History of the Good Samaritan Sisters’ Foundations in Queensland,* as


Chapter 1 Setting the scene

well as the Presentation sister, Dr Mary Rose MacGinley’s history of the Presentation Sisters in Queensland, A Place of Springs (1900-1960).\(^{124}\) I am cognizant of the criticism of some histories by members of their respective religious orders. Catholic Church historian, Patrick O’Farrell argues that such histories avoid unfavourable references and present uncritical bias in recording the achievements of their religious superiors/principals.\(^ {125}\) In this history, I adopt more complex perspectives by incorporating the personal experiences, both positive and negative of women religious and their students.

The histories of two Rockhampton secondary schools are commissioned works produced by Betty Cosgrove, a local historian. They are The Spirit of the Range: A Social History of the Sisters of Mercy, Range College, Rockhampton (1895) and the history of Rockhampton Girls Grammar, The Wider View: Rockhampton Girls Grammar: A Social History (1883).\(^ {126}\) The themes and content of Cosgrove’s histories are drawn from various sources, such as school and newspaper archives, college annuals and Board of Trustees’ reports in the case of Rockhampton Girls’ Grammar. The histories of these two Rockhampton boarding and day schools and that of St Faith’s Church of England Girls’ Boarding School in Yeppoon, St Faith’s School: Gone but not Forgotten (1923-1964) by John Mackenzie-Smith, summarise, without critical examination, the curriculum offerings, reports of high achieving students, and the contributions made by leading figures such as headmistresses.\(^ {127}\)

These school histories provide valuable historical and social comparisons as background data for the production of a history of St Ursula’s because their boarding school students came from the same geographical regions as the St Ursula’s boarders. The enrolments in both Rockhampton schools, however, represented


more of the upper middle class of country and regional town society than enrolments at St Ursula’s. The oral history of student boarding school experiences does not feature in the records of these school histories. The developments in Catholic education such as those documented in these local histories from central Queensland would have contributed another dimension to the wider national coverage in Australian Catholic educational histories produced from the mid-1950s.

Ronald Fogarty and Patrick O’Farrell documented a history of Australian Catholic education from 1806 to the mid-20th century from chronological and systemic perspectives.128 Fogarty’s history is widely regarded as a defensive response to A.G. Austin’s ‘manifesto for state education 1788-1900’, which was published during the 1950s.129 As such, Fogarty offers an historical statistical summary of the contribution to Australian education by un-named women religious who, by 1940, numbered 11,000.130 Cursory reference is made in both Fogarty and O’Farrell’s histories to the establishment of Catholic education in Queensland from the early 20th century. Both authors refer only to boarding schools founded by the Christian Brothers for boys and the Mercy Sisters for girls in the greater Brisbane area of the south-east corner of Queensland. The heavily populated corner of the state is hardly a true reflection overall, as Queensland is 1.853 million square kilometres and seven times the size of Great Britain.131 This history of St Ursula’s extends the geographical boundaries of Fogarty and O’Farrell’s histories of Catholic education in New South Wales, Victoria and south-east Queensland to the central regions of the state. State records of the beginnings of secondary education in Queensland do not include the history of the first country secondary schools founded by the Presentation Sisters from 1900.132

130 MacGinley, A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia. 355.
131 Fogarty, Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950, 2.
132 The State of Queensland, “Distance Education in Queensland a Brief History,” ed. Queensland Department of Education and Training (Brisbane: Creative Commons Attribution (cc by 4.0), 2016).
Communities of women religious, some numbering just two, set up primary schools for the Catholic diaspora in many small Queensland townships from 1869. Their histories are beginning to appear in the scholarly literature, such as in Margaret McKenna’s history of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the primary schools they established throughout remote Queensland from the late 19th century. The sisters’ presence supported the itinerant priests who travelled year-round from Brisbane, on horseback initially, to reach these remote settlements. On their annual visits to a country district the priest would say a Mass, conduct the sacraments, particularly of Marriage and Baptism, and give religious instruction to children. Despite that missionary work on behalf of the Church, the sisters suffered the deprivation of basic daily needs of food and medical attention.

McKenna uses the title, *With Grateful Hearts* to launch one of the key aspects of the history. When the Sisters of St Joseph and other institutes such as the Presentation Sisters opened primary schools in rural Queensland, the local people living in the surrounding remote communities kept them in food and lodgings for their survival. This thesis of St Ursula’s history reveals the previously unexplored history of the experiences of women religious who opened secondary boarding schools for girls and boys under these same conditions.

**Convent boarding schools and girls’ education**

Recent literature in the historiography of education for girls from early modern Europe examines what it meant to be an educated woman in that period. Barbara Whitehead’s collection of essays, *Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* tracks the work of the agencies that established pathways for girls from the privileged class to become educated women. Whitehead examines the implications of the adage adhered to from early modern Europe that a woman was considered educated if it allowed her to establish her place in the world.

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Italian Renaissance historian, Sharon Strocchia in *Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence of the 15th Century* analyses the foundations of a convent boarding school education in Italy. Florence was one locality where there were preserved extensive records of the beginnings of a structured routine of girls’ education within a convent precinct.\(^{135}\) Jo Ann McNamara in *Sisters in Arms* argues that one of the earliest references to a group of subjects known as the ‘accomplishment’ subjects being delivered in the convent, came from the late 16th-century Florence. The records describe that girls being educated in the convent were expected to learn the social graces: dancing, singing, drawing and even acting.\(^{136}\) These were the models of education for girls developed by both religious and secular organisations throughout Europe, the British Isles and America into the 20th century.

Carolyn Lougee expands the research in the history of curriculum and social status of students in convent boarding schools in early modern Europe to include issues such as health and safety.\(^{137}\) Lougee’s history of the earliest domestic experiences of the fundamentals of boarding school life for girls in Italian Renaissance times, adds an important perspective to the history of modern secondary education. Lougee details the threats to the safety and wellbeing of girls in boarding schools. Although the circumstances were different, threats to safety were also real issues in the geographically remote boarding school of St Ursula’s particularly in its earliest years.

As the belief that the convent boarding school was the ideal place to ‘learn the virtues’ became more popular throughout Italy in the 15th century, more Church-sponsored organisations became involved in the education of girls. Educating girls became one of the main missions of newly founded religious orders in Europe. The

\(^{135}\)Strocchia, “Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence of the 15th Century.” Ch. 1: 3-46.


Ursuline Order of women religious contributed to the establishment of formal girls’ schooling in two different fields of pioneering work at either end of the social spectrum. Firstly when newly founded branches of the Italian Ursulines became established in France in the early 17th century, they conducted catechetical schools in the French countryside as they had done in Italy. Secondly beginning in 17th-century France, noble women, such as Madame Barbe Acarie from the French court, assisted the Ursulines to become established in Paris and to develop a model of convent boarding school for the wealthy upper class.

Karen Carter’s *Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern Europe* examines the beginnings of schools that became known as petite écoles. She argues that schooling in the catechism for girls and boys crossed gender lines in rural areas in Italy and more so in France in the post Tridentine periods of the Catholic Reformation (1545-1563). Although by modern standards the schooling in the petite écoles might seem primitive, Carter argues that through this system of schools a majority of boys and girls in rural areas of France had the opportunity to obtain a basic education in reading and writing through a curriculum based on the catechism. The inclusion of the three ‘Rs’ of early modern education to read, write, and recite in the petite écoles contributed to progress in the early stages of elementary education for girls from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Francoise Soury-Lavergne argues that the idea of a convent school education as so-called public education is attributed to Napoleon who, in 1806, suggested that the Ursuline Sisters’ statutes for the education of girls be adopted in France. He preferred religious teachers ‘whose absence of ambition … would ensure an appropriately moral upbringing’. The traditional ‘accomplishments’ curriculum of 17th-century France, introduced by the Paris Ursulines, was extended to include the Jesuit-based curriculum originally drawn up for boys. It concentrated on the study

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140 Ibid. 13.
141 Ibid. 14.
of French, Latin, numeracy and cultural studies. Cultural studies included history, literature and civility, which incorporated lessons in social duty, charity and the virtues of justice, chastity, friendship and loyalty. The ‘accomplishments’ curriculum was developed for girls with the cultural expectation that women would make households appealing and enriched with music, fancy needlework and calligraphic writing.

This concept of a gendered curriculum would resonate with women educators and educational planners in subsequent periods of social and political instability. In particular, the pioneer bishops of Australia deemed the subjects taught in the ‘grand pensionnat’ or elite convent boarding schools of the French Ursuline tradition to be the key to ensuring that there was an equally highly educated Catholic society in the colony. Eliane Gubin argues in her study of the development of the advanced levels of schooling for girls from 18th-century France and Belgium that the existence of the dense network of private Catholic schools by the 19th century hindered the progress towards modern secondary education. Gubin illustrates from boarding school advertisements in the first half of 19th-century France that the emphasis on the accomplishments in the curriculum took up a great deal of time, to the detriment of any serious scientific knowledge.

Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers examine the extent of the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices that occurred in the development of models of schooling for girls across European and British borders in, Crossing the Borders in Girls’ Secondary Education. Studies such as Goodman’s Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland and Deirdre Raftery, Jane McDermid and Gareth Elwyn-Jones’ Social Change and Education in Ireland, Scotland and Wales: Historiography on Nineteenth Century Schooling, examine the social and historical background that

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143 Ibid. 356-359 (Appendix 3).
144 O’Farrell, The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History.
145 James Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers, eds., Girls’ Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 123.
led to the democratisation of education for Irish girls.¹⁴⁸ Twelve year-old Irish girl, Nano Nagle from the wealthy Nagle family of Cork, made the journey from Ireland to France for a convent boarding school education in the accomplishments from 1728-1734.¹⁴⁹ Later, as founder of the Presentation Sisters, her experience of a French Ursuline tradition of education had significant implications for future developments of girls’ education by her order in Ireland, America and Australia.

Deirdre Raftery and Susan Parkes analyse the rise of secondary education for girls in Ireland in *Female Education in Ireland 1700-1900: Minerva or Madonna.*¹⁵⁰ In their study, Irish women religious in 19th-century Ireland conducting convent boarding schools do not feature as active participants in the change in girls’ education that was sweeping across the British Isles. Women religious, for example, were not amongst the female witnesses called to the Palles Commission on the future of Intermediate Education in 1868. Rather, educational activists such as Isabella Tod and Margaret Byers were involved in the struggle for a woman’s right to access learning to the highest levels.¹⁵¹

Anne O’Connor’s *The Revolution in Girls’ Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910,* presents another angle in her examination of the development of secondary education in Ireland by the Mercy Sisters and the Presentation Sisters.¹⁵² She argues that their institutions of ‘select’ high schools termed ‘secondary tops’ in Ireland from 1924 were the real centres for progress towards equal educational opportunity.¹⁵³ These schools made it possible for girls from the middle and working-class to compete in the Irish public examination system.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 168.
¹⁵³ Raftery, Delaney, and Nowlan-Roebuck, *Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy.* 139 Table 8.1 the first Presentation secondary school top was at Athenry in 1924.
Gender stereotypes and the convent boarding school

This history of a Catholic girls’ convent boarding school aims to re-orient the overall history of secondary education in Australia and to situate Catholic secondary schools as an important element in Australian education history. It examines the work in girls’ education by women religious as they dealt with gender and Catholic identity in their response to developments in Australian education. This thesis broadens the focus of conventional school histories to incorporate a multiplicity of experiences and memories of students and staff which are usually marginalised. Student and staff stories are not peripheral to the research on education but are given a central role in documenting a history of Catholic education in rural Australia.

This study synthesises existing research into how women religious established authority in their foundations from their connection with centuries-old traditions in the democratisation of education for girls. James Albisetti, Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers in Girls’ Secondary Education in the Western World from the 18th to the 20th Century examine how girls’ secondary schools in individual national education systems such as Great Britain and Ireland became established. The authors suggest that in the histories of secondary education for girls in the western world there is a need for a new separate field of education history of how Great Britain and Ireland contributed to the emergence of girls’ secondary education within the colonies. They argue that much still needs to be done on the subject of colonial schools and the ways female teachers from the continent contributed to education in outposts of the British Empire.

Australian historian, Stephanie Burley advances that research about education and empire in 19th-century colonial South Australia. In Burley’s ‘Engagement with Empires: Irish Catholic Female Religious Teachers in Colonial South Australia 1868-1901’, she examines how Irish women religious established schools in Australia from the key perspectives of their own histories, their spiritual focus, the schools they established for their students and the curriculum they adopted in the

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social geographical environments in which they found themselves.\(^{155}\) Mary Rose MacGinley’s ‘Irish Women Religious and Nineteenth Century Australian Social History’ also addressed the impact of the transference of educational traditions for girls by Irish women religious. She examined the strong influence of Irish Catholicism on the curriculum of Australian Catholic schools, particularly in the areas of Catholic faith and moral formation.\(^{156}\)

By the mid-19\(^{th}\) century, English and European private and religious agencies had responded to requests from Church, state and individual families to introduce schooling for upper class young ladies into the Australian colonies based on the European and British tradition of the ‘accomplishments’. This thesis extends Burley’s recent studies that concentrate on South Australia to the histories of the foundations of the Irish Presentation Sisters in Queensland after their arrival in Australia in 1866. Anne O’Brien’s *God’s Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia* situates women religious as educators amongst the many groups of ‘church’ women. Her work broadens the contours of women’s history by locating women religious not just in education but in the social, economic and cultural context of Australian women’s lives.\(^{157}\) O’Brien argues that some Catholic schools had been preparing girls to take their place in the white-collar revolution since the 1880s, and Catholic women had slightly more chance of finding their way to university than Anglican or Methodist women. This thesis develops and extends O’Brien’s research on the work of women religious which she located mainly in densely populated areas of New South Wales.\(^{158}\)

Noelene Kyle in her history of women’s education, *Her Natural Destiny: The Education of Women in New South Wales*, describes convent high schools prior to 1920 as establishments primarily concerned with ‘domestic, moral, religious and accomplishment attainment’ with only ‘some interest in academic achievement’.\(^{159}\)

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\(^{158}\) Ibid. 214-216.

This history counters that assertion and locates its findings in the context of the early Queensland history of education. Aspects of St Ursula’s curriculum history compare with the findings from Ilana De Bare’s study. She explored the history of girls’ education in America in *Where Girls Come First: The Rise and Fall and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools*. De Bare argues that a new kind of Catholic girls’ school began to spread in the early 1900s in America that ‘jumped onto the early 20th century bandwagon of vocational education’.160

De Bare’s study reveals the similarities in the curriculum between what became American local diocesan girls’ Catholic high schools and Australian convent boarding schools like St Ursula’s during the early 20th century. De Bare probes the more comprehensive history of single-sex education in America and addresses questions that I attempt to answer throughout this thesis.161 Did the Presentation Sisters introduce a curriculum in St Ursula’s that opened doors for their female pupils from its beginnings? Did a convent boarding school education play a conservative role in society, restricting their graduate’s horizons and channelling their interests along socially acceptable lines? In this study, I argue that the founders of St Ursula’s did both.

This thesis examines how the Queensland Presentation Institute experimented with diverse approaches to deliver secondary education in uncharted territory. Did these diverse approaches challenge the Catholic Church’s social and gendered expectations for the education of girls that aimed at culture and distinctly womanly accomplishment? O’Brien identifies the progress that women religious made as they asserted independence in their ventures. In ‘Sins of Omission? Women in the History of Australian Religion and Religion in the History of Australian Women’ she argues that women were able to establish ‘islands of immunity’ that allowed them to exercise power and agency when they established independent educational institutions.162 This history of St Ursula’s traces how the Presentation Sisters

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161 Ibid. 158.
established St Ursula’s as an independent educational institution with the opportunity of creating an ‘island of immunity’.

The Presentation Order was founded in Ireland in 1775 by Irish woman Nano Nagle. It embodied in its Rule and Constitutions a commitment to the education of the poorest in society. However, as part of the missionary activities of Irish Catholic religious institutes to the colonies of the British Empire, the Presentation Sisters acceded to the Australian bishops’ requests to establish elite secondary schools for girls in Australia from the mid-19th century. The bishops supported applications by the sisters for a range of exemptions to their Rule that allowed them to vary the explicit commitment to the needs of the poor only. Despite the bishops’ initial support, the superiors of religious institutes were on their arrival in Australia, often left to their own devices to develop, administer, finance and staff elite convent boarding schools. This meant that, for financial survival, the ideal in the Presentation Sister’s Rule to educate only the poorest in society was modified often to include those who could afford a convent boarding school education.

The first Australian Catholic bishops relied on a workforce of women religious trained in a spirituality of sacrifice to fulfil their vision of a system of Catholic education that would cater eventually for all social levels. Women religious became what O’Brien describes as ‘God’s willing workers’ in the religious and social history of Australia. Eventually new establishments founded by the Presentation Sisters branched away from their initial exclusive boarding school foundations. From 1866, the Presentations Sisters established eighty-eight Catholic secondary and primary schools and their numbers of sisters grew Australia-wide to over 800 by 1980.

In Queensland in 1982 there were 151 Presentation Sisters in nineteen schools of which two were secondary boarding schools. As they moved into remote regions

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163 Killerby, Ursula Frayne: A Biography.
165 See Appendix 2 for full definition.
166 That number dropped dramatically by the early 1990s.
167 Queensland Presentation transfer list for 1982, in Maree Ganley’s personal possession.
of Australia they experienced how state provision of elementary and secondary education for boys and girls was dependent on the will of the prevailing government in power. Secondary education in rural regions of Queensland was lower in priority than in other states well into the mid-20th century. I acknowledge the active participation of middle-class and working-class parents in remote regions who disrupted the state government time-frame for secondary education in the west by paying for a better social and economic standard of life for their daughters through advanced education.

This thesis assesses to what extent the curriculum in the convent boarding school in the early 20th century challenged the gender stereotypes in societal standards for the education of girls. The curriculum at St Ursula’s in the first twenty years was a contrast to the prevailing gender stereotypes of the time for girls’ education. However, for the Queensland Presentation Sisters from the mid-1930s, a number of factors mitigated against ongoing change and progress. These included a lack of financial resources on the part of families and institutions, the loss of religious and lay qualified personnel in secondary subjects, particularly in Mathematics, and an absence of progressive leadership.

Until the early 1950s, the pressures from a conservative society also limited creativity and independence in girls’ secondary education overall. De Bare argues that in America from the early 1960s, girls’ schools had forgotten their radical roots and had retained uncritically their traditions and rules, and seemed trapped in a time warp. She demonstrates that two factors assisted a revival through the 1980s that helped girls’ schools gain new bearings and a renewed sense of purpose. One was the second-wave of feminism and the other was the emergence of social science research, in particular Carol Gilligan’s studies in the field examining female development and gender bias in schools. In this thesis, I examine how the

169 De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools. 158.
Presentation Order responded to societal and scientific influences to advance girls’ education.

**Social class and the convent boarding school**

Through archival research and oral history as key elements of the methodology, this thesis examines social class as a dynamic force that influenced attitudes to the education of girls involving families, women religious, Church and state. When St Ursula’s Yeppoon was established in 1917, the convent boarding school population constituted a mono-cultural society. Students came from some diversity in family social class on economic grounds and with some diversity in religious backgrounds. The students lived closely in an ‘extended family’ household, some for up to ten years. There were wide age differences in the first forty years of St Ursula’s when primary-aged girls lived and were schooled with secondary-aged boarders. The children of upper-middle-class society in the bush consisted of property owners or managers of large cattle and sheep stations. In Queensland, they attended the boarding schools in Brisbane or interstate rather than St Ursula’s. Their attendance at elite boarding schools reinforced and perpetuated social class differences throughout 20th-century Australia and ensured upper-middle-class children associated only with their own class both during and after school days.

The question of social class and the history of education for girls is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Craig Campbell argues that many Australians resist identifying themselves as belonging to a social class, especially if it is a ‘lower’ class. This resistance derived from the idea that ‘new’ societies such as Australia, could escape the rigidities of the feudally classed divisions of old Europe. He states:

Many people feel discomfort when they talk about social class. Somehow the idea of class presents in too raw a form of reality social difference and hierarchy. There is the idea and reality that large groups of people are routinely more powerful and wealthy than others, and that very often it is difficult for people to escape the groups that they have been born into, even if they wanted to. The ideal and existence of social classes are also disturbing for other reasons. Others argue that class in contemporary societies such as
Australia has decreasing relevance and utility – that modern society has entered a new phase and we need ways of understanding it.\textsuperscript{171}

The convent boarding school community in early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Australia was made up of students and teachers from families that had established new lives in isolated settlements. Australia became part of the movement in the western world of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century where modern notions of working, middle and ruling classes came into being. This new system of social class continued to emerge, adapt and evolve through the 20\textsuperscript{th} into the 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries.\textsuperscript{172} As modern classes could not be defined solely by birth or law, the mechanisms by which a person became defined as belonging to one class or another changed. One of the ways that this could occur was through schooling.

The history from early modern Europe is tracked in this study from when the emergence of communities of women religious in the Catholic Church formed and directed their apostolic work to the education of girls from all social classes. However, the role of women in 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Ireland was incompatible with the increasing acceptance of the need for women’s higher education. The notion of women’s role and nature prevalent at the time was derived from two influences, one rooted in the Catholic devotion to Mary, virgin and mother, and the other was drawn from the Victorian ideal of services and devotion to men.\textsuperscript{173} This thesis seeks to establish the part that St Ursula’s played in class-formation in central Queensland, and how families from different classes used St Ursula’s to effect social-class change through a convent boarding school education.

This thesis goes some way to address Raewyn Connell’s criticism in 2010 that researchers working on the significance of social class in education have spoken from the global ‘North’ and have not theorised colonialism, long-distance migration, the relations between settler and Indigenous communities or the post-colonial


\textsuperscript{172} Campbell, “Class and Competition.” 93.

situation.\footnote{Campbell, "Class and Competition." 96. These issues were addressed more comprehensively in later publications such as Campbell and Proctor’s \textit{A History of Australian Schooling} (2014) and the release of the 4th edition of \textit{Education, Class and Society} by Welch et al. 2018.} Campbell concludes that class continues to be relevant to understanding educational activity in Australia.\footnote{Ibid. 93.} The history of St Ursula’s makes an important contribution to a greater understanding of class and educational activity in remote regions of Australia. It provides an extensive historical perspective of Australian education for eighty years of the 20th century in the under-examined terrain of a convent secondary boarding school in country Queensland.

A history of St Ursula’s also adds to the history of the disappearing phenomenon of a traditional vowed lifestyle in which women religious lived in communities with a lifetime commitment to education. It gives a voice to the students who were the intended recipients of the ideology of the Catholic Church for the education of girls in convent schools; voices which have been largely excluded from the history of Catholic education in Australia.\footnote{Ronald Fogarty, \textit{Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950: Catholic Education and the Religious Orders}, 1st ed., 2 vols., vol. 2, Catholic Education under the Religious Orders (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1959); O’Farrell, \textit{The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History}.} As a school history, it extends the parameters of traditional records of the establishment of Australian educational history to include the records of the aspirations and lived experience of students and of women religious in their secondary boarding schools.

\textit{Social class and denominational differences}

O’Brien argues that many of the religious sisters who came to Australia in the mid-19th century thought that Aborigines would be an integral part of their mission. In reality, the resources of their teaching ministry were spent on the white population.\footnote{O’Brien, \textit{God’s Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia}. 211-212.} In the school registers of the first forty years of both Longreach and Yeppoon there was one only Indigenous family with children at the convent school. This family represented a tiny surviving part of the original Indigenous population. Indigenous families of central west and coastal Queensland had suffered massacre...
and disease and had been subject to policies that restricted their movements near white populations.\textsuperscript{178}

In the revised Rule of 1973, the Presentation Sisters reverted from the status of ‘Order’ to that of ‘Congregation’, which gave them more freedom to move out into the community.\textsuperscript{179} In the early 1980s, principal Sister Marion Kingston approached a central regional Indigenous community at Woorabinda 172 kilometres from Rockhampton and offered places for boarders in St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{180} The later Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Sisters of 2000 does not discriminate to whom their missionary work was to be directed outside of schooling. In general terms, the Rule continued to commit the Presentation Sisters ‘to keep their hearts open to the voices of those who are poor and oppressed’.\textsuperscript{181} A small number of students in the local region of Yeppoon of varying European ethnic origins (predominantly from Greek and German families) enrolled at St Ursula’s. Some claimed that they experienced more tolerance and acceptance at the convent school than they did at the local state school.\textsuperscript{182}

The school register of St Ursula’s reveals that students from various denominations, mainly Church of England, came as boarders and day students from its first year. Of the 105 enrolments in 1917, thirty-seven were Church of England.\textsuperscript{183} Through the 1930s, the boarders recalled being able to attend Sunday services in the Protestant churches. This practice did not continue after the 1950s as boarding numbers increased. After that time, boarders of all denominations attended all

\textsuperscript{178} Tjanara Goreng Goreng, \textit{A Long Way from No Go: A Memoir} (Melbourne: Wild Dingo Press, 2018), 24.
\textsuperscript{180} Sister Marion Kingston, interview by Maree Ganley, 30 October 2013, Written Response, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{181} The Society of Australian Congregations of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “Constitutions,” in \textit{Draft 3}, ed. The Society of Australian Congregations of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Brisbane2000).
\textsuperscript{182} Vicki (Vergados) Koveos, interview by Maree Ganley, 29 January 2015, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{183} St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.”
Catholic services predominantly for supervision purposes as the sisters were required to attend all religious ceremonies in the parish church.\textsuperscript{184}

\section*{Research methodology}

This study is a qualitative research project which deploys a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods. It involves particular individuals or groups who experienced life in a specific shared context.\textsuperscript{185} It involves collection and analysis of a variety of archival materials such as official records, personal experiences, introspection, life-story, interviews, artefacts, and cultured texts and productions.\textsuperscript{186} In this project, I structure the interview process and the environment to obtain data from subjective records of life experiences. The technique of data-gathering, especially through the interview process, is best understood through the metaphor of \textit{montage}, as there are many different factors that are considered in the course of gathering data. They are the different voices, textual formats, points of view and angles of vision. I refer to the chapter titles or \textit{montage} of this history of St Ursula’s as ‘Sea Pictures’ after Edward Elgar’s interpretation of the changing life experiences by the sea. My intent, as a researcher, is to seek to interpret the meanings others have shared about their world of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.

The thesis adopts the various research strategies of qualitative historical research.\textsuperscript{187} I undertook eighty-five interviews with students, staff and some others indirectly associated with the school. I also gathered data from three other key sources: a personal memoir by a pioneer Presentation sister, a collection of obituaries of Queensland Presentation Sisters spanning eighty years, and the recollections and memorabilia of family members of several past-pupils. St Ursula’s did not produce college annuals until the 1980s, so I relied heavily on the coverage of school activities reported in local newspapers. The Presentation Sisters frequently sent their annual reports to the local and regional printed media, but did

\textsuperscript{184} Marjorie (Godfrey) Harper, interview by Maree Ganley, 21 October 2014, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. 38.
not retain personal copies. From these newsprint sources, I surmise how the superior wished to project the image of the school to the wider community. They reported records of major events, student academic and sporting results and prize lists from submissions to the many Royal Agricultural shows throughout the state. These reports praised the overtly successful and acknowledged individual efforts; they informed parents and the wider Catholic community and offered favourable publicity to attract pupils and to cultivate a school culture.

The leaders of the Presentation Institute granted me access to the copies of the earliest versions of their Rule and Constitutions and later revised editions that were given papal approval throughout the eighty years. The Rule and Constitutions constituted for each sister the charter that guided the pursuit of spiritual life. There were broad guidelines that directed corporate and individual commitment of women religious to the Church and in the case of the Presentation Institute, through education only. I also had access to the Queensland Presentation Institute archive, the Brisbane Archdiocesan and the Rockhampton Catholic Diocesan archives, which contain pictorial files, and some official national and state education department documents forwarded to the bishop from the school.

Over much of the school’s eighty years, staffing and curriculum matters were managed by the Mother General and her councillors of the Queensland Presentation Institute. Unfortunately, the Presentation Sisters did not grant access to minutes of these council meetings which may have provided a background reference to determine the rationale behind decisions to implement curriculum changes or the plans for residential and classroom expansion at St Ursula’s. During an interview, past superior of St Ursula’s and later Mother General of the Presentation Institute in Queensland, Sister Andrea McGrath (1978-1988) could not recall that formal minute-taking had occurred at council meetings in the first place.

**Oral history theory and popular memory**

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This thesis draws on oral history where the dimensions of life within a community are illuminated by oral testimony derived from interviews in a variety of settings.\textsuperscript{189} Educational researchers Ivor Goodson and Pat Sikes argue that the rendering of lived experience into a ‘life story’ is one interpretive layer. This is just the beginning of the process for the interviewer and that the move from life story to life history involves a range of methodologies and ethical issues.\textsuperscript{190} Goodson and Sikes draw on the research in the field by Daniel Bertaux and Dale Dannefer who explore further the range of issues involved in the process of including life histories as a source of credible historical data.\textsuperscript{191} They argue that moving life story to life history which involves a move to account for historical context, is a dangerous one, for it offers the researcher considerable colonising power to locate the life story with all its inevitable selections, shifts and silences. Nonetheless, Goodson and Sikes argue that they hold to the need for providing historical contexts for reading ‘life stories’.\textsuperscript{192}

Oral historian, Paul Thompson argues that one of the great contributions made by oral history has been its role in democratising history through admitting the voices of those traditionally excluded from the ‘mainstream’.\textsuperscript{193} In this thesis, the voices of women about their childhood and those of women religious are central to the research. This thesis seeks to understand, through oral history, both the history of the school and the broader historical and social contexts in which the students and teachers lived. Biographical approaches in general, and life history methods in particular, are eminently suitable for studying many topics relating to schools, schooling and education.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{189} Valerie Yow, Recording Oral History:A Practical Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2005). 14.
\textsuperscript{190} Ivor Goodson and Pat Sikes, Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives, ed. Pat Sikes, Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001). xii. 16.
\textsuperscript{192} Goodson and Sikes, Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives. 17.
\textsuperscript{194} Goodson and Sikes, Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives. 17.
Oral history is the collection of stories and reminiscences of a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences and the collection of life stories represents the starting point of this work. Goodson and Sikes argue that there are multiple approaches and types of oral history.\textsuperscript{195} O’Donoghue and Harford define oral history as being in the life history tradition where there is extensive use of the in-depth interview in order to encourage participants to reveal, in their own words, their perspectives on their lives, experiences and situations.\textsuperscript{196} Valerie Yow describes the interaction between interviewer and storyteller as a special characteristic of oral history research, which she classifies as shared work.\textsuperscript{197} Trevor Lummis argues:

One precise advantage of oral evidence is that it is interactive and one is not left alone, as with documentary evidence to divine its significance; the ‘source’ can reflect upon the content and offer interpretation as well as facts.\textsuperscript{198}

The basic technique of oral history is in keeping with the qualitative research methodology because the goals for both the oral historian and the qualitative researcher are similar. Both seek to fashion a narrative to represent the lived experience and interpretation, and both are involved in describing and explaining someone’s memory of events and activities. Both use interviews, observations, documents, photographs, videos and drawings as evidence.\textsuperscript{199} Alessandro Portelli in \textit{Speaking of Oral History} argues that the task of the oral historian in a life story interview is to approach the exercise as a co-author of stories with an attitude of humility, openness and flexibility and to convey that you are there to give a voice to the voiceless. He proposes that there should be a ‘dialogical element’ where he

\textsuperscript{195} Janesick, \textit{Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher: Choreographing the Story}. 2.
\textsuperscript{197} Yow, \textit{Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences}. 24.
\textsuperscript{199} Janesick, \textit{Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher: Choreographing the Story}. 3.
calls on the interviewer to establish a relationship of trust and to convey the idea that ‘I can be educated’.  

**Ethical considerations**

A number of ethical issues have been addressed in relation to the research for this thesis. One issue was respect for interviewees. Each participant gave informed and written consent to being interviewed on a tape recorder.

This history of St Ursula’s incorporates personal reminiscences of girls who boarded or were day students from primary through to senior secondary, as well as the recollections of religious and lay staff. The interviewees had personal memories which they had not necessarily shared before their interview for this project. Interviewees were canvassed randomly from school registers and attendance records by letter, email, phone, word-of-mouth and by tapping into past pupil networking such as alumnae reunions. There was no public advertisement for interviews because it has been argued that participants who are likely to respond to such advertisements are more likely to support, rather than contradict, the established view of an event, person, or an institution (Appendix 3).

I have ensured that interviewees sighted the quotations from the transcript of the interview where the naming of interviewees was desired. Where a negative reflection was reported about another member of the St Ursula’s community by the interviewee, both interviewee and person spoken about are referred to anonymously. People are not named in incidents of a negative nature. Rather, their specific involvement is concealed in a more general reference to broader issues being discussed. The researcher received ethical clearance from the Australian Catholic University, having complied with all their requirements.

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200 Alessandro Portelli, interview by Riley Centre for Canadian History, April, 2016.
201 The information letter to participants which outlines the nature and purpose of this study is contained in Appendix 3; the consent form is also in Appendix 3.
203 Appendix 4 contains the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Form indicating that ethics approval was granted for this study.
I conducted eighty-five interviews between 2009 and 2016, and of those interviewees, eleven have since died (Appendix 4). They range in age from thirty-three years to centenarians. The group consisted of sixty past students, twenty-one teachers (both religious and lay), four superiors/principals in the time-frame of this thesis, two past parish priests, and two bishops (referred as ‘outsider’ input). All their stories provide accounts of a history which has not been previously documented. A limiting factor in gathering documentary data was that, in the spirit of detachment, women religious tended to shed any personal records or memorabilia when they were transferred to another school. Therefore, official documentation of their administration history and of their personal life experiences was often lost.

I discovered that the original school register of 1917 to the mid-1950s was housed in the Rockhampton Catholic diocesan archive. Prior to this discovery, its existence was not known by the school. Using the details stored in the register, combined with references to genealogical web-sites, historical societies and electoral rolls, I could contact descendants of students from 1917 until the mid-1930s. I travelled extensively throughout the state to Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Longreach and Yeppoon to conduct interviews with past students and staff in a face-to-face context. Some past students and teachers lived in remote or overseas locations, and they responded by written narrative with questionnaire prompts, or via skype or telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data was collated under key headings such as years of attendance, home locality, curriculum, extra-curricular activities and student and staff relationships in academic and boarding settings.

The record of student and staff experiences provides a valuable insight into the social order of the school and how educational practices and policies were received by students and staff. The inclusion of personal experiences of students breathes life into a history that was difficult to construct when the only available evidence, particularly for the first thirty years, came from a personal memoir, newspapers and photos. The photos I gathered provided the stimulus to search for answers. Who were these young people in the collection of uncaptioned photos (Figure 1)? How
did they manage life away from home? In the photo of a dormitory with a row of beds, where were their precious keepsakes kept in their only personal living space of a bed? In the classroom photo where was the library? Was there a library? It was obvious that I needed to operate out of a methodology that incorporated the effective use of oral history and memory recall as credible sources for the collection of data. The argument in favour of oral history is that it contributes to the construction of subjectivities and the exploration of the multiple courses of lived experiences as one other avenue to gather data.\(^{204}\)

**Figure 1 St Ursula's students circa 1920s names unknown**

*Oral history and memory*

Irish historian, Yvonne McKenna argues that oral history is also fundamentally about memory. ‘It involves giving and creating a version of the past. The dynamics of oral history including the interview itself is always contingent upon a range of factors from the mood of the interviewer and the respondent and the relationship between

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them to the present circumstances of the interviewee and their assessment at that moment of their own past.¹⁰⁵ This history of St Ursula’s thus moves away from a focus on ‘structure, macro-politics and economics and the lives of the elite’ by incorporating the lived experiences of students and teachers. It becomes an analysis of ‘education as something experienced as well as planned’.¹⁰⁶

I approached the task of establishing a continuous and cohesive record of a school history drawn from how each student and staff member composed and related their memories of school years. I considered the dynamics of interactions from four key perspectives: those between interviewer and interviewee, public memory of boarding school life, individual memory past and present, and memory and identity. The remembering that takes place in oral history will be inevitably influenced by the interview context and relationship, by the situation and identity of the narrator and by the public representations of the past that are being remembered.¹⁰⁷

I conducted just one interview session for each of the eighty-five students, staff and others. Many interviewees suggested at the outset, ‘this won’t take long’ but most were happy to go well over the allotted time of one and a half hours. This single interview did not allow me to ask difficult and searching questions. I had made the task clear for interviewees through an official letter outlining the nature of the project, and I emphasised that I was reconstructing from their recollections a chronological history through the lens of their personal experiences. I met informally and conducted one group session with eighty-year-old past students who had met often since school days.

I believe there is value in conducting individual interviews rather than conducting focus group sessions because it gave each interviewee the opportunity to recognise and value an uninterrupted telling of experiences that they may have had held secret until then. Other considerations are that each interviewee could not be silenced or

contradicted by the larger group. The contribution of personal experiences is recognised and valued by its individual focus. My interviews were empowering for so many past pupils as there was a sense of relief that they could, figuratively speaking, open the box of memories of happy and sad times in boarding school. Some students and staff found the experience challenging and difficult but none expressed regret that their stories were being gathered.

I took a lead from the experience of Australian historian, Alistair Thomson as he conducted interviews of veterans of World War I. He established that some of the men resisted a thematic questioning approach to prompt memories and preferred to retell their stories in their own form and sequence.\(^\text{208}\) I therefore adopted Trimingham-Jack’s non-thematic approach to gathering data from oral sources for her history of Kerever Park Catholic Primary boarding school, which incorporated interviews of past staff and students.\(^\text{209}\)

After the initial contact through letter and follow-up phone call to arrange the meeting and to explain the nature of my project, I was able to launch into the interview with the open-ended invitation: ‘We are here to talk about your life and experiences at St Ursula’s, where would you like to begin’. I did not attempt any thematic questioning because I preferred that the interviewees tell their stories in their own form and sequence. Instead, I drew out the major themes for a school history narrative into spread-sheet format after I had conducted the interviews. This tabulated structure allowed me to establish a chronological flow of an eighty-year history of a convent boarding school that had retained very little ‘public memory’ from either a past commissioned history or official administrative records. In the interviews, I adopted a life-history approach which explored the school-life experiences of students and staff.

In my data gathering, there was very little public memory to draw on to make a comparison between personal experiences and the public legend of this particular

\(^{208}\) Ibid. 235.
convent boarding school. By way of contrast, in Thomson’s history of the life and experiences of several Anzac veterans, he could determine readily the relationship between public and private memory as much public memory of the Anzac legend existed in literature, art and film. Having said that, in the interview with ninety-two-year-old St Ursula’s past student, Cecilia Cadell, I wondered at times if she was drawing on public legend. She described, for example, in her recollection that walking to the beach each afternoon the sisters carried a cane and could give ‘six of the best’.\footnote{Cecilia (Cadell) Page, interview by Maree Ganley, 16 February 2015, ACU Brisbane.} The telling of this recollection seemed to corroborate more with the public legend of the reputation of the nuns for corporal punishment than with the stories of the same exercise told by other students. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Cecilia had been a day student only and not a boarder.

Portelli argues that the working model of remembering is that we ‘compose’ our memories to make sense of our past and present lives. ‘Composure’ is an aptly ambiguous term to describe the process of memory making. In one sense, we compose or construct memories using the public languages and meanings of our culture. In another sense, we compose memories that help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives and identities that give us a feeling of composure.\footnote{Portelli, “Speaking of Oral History.”} The approach I have taken is to focus on the memory of an experience and then to attempt to peel away the layers of meaning that have been constructed around that experience over time and in different social contexts.

Portelli identifies the possibility of ‘mis-remembering’ in all history and warns the interviewer therefore not to take oral narratives at face value, and to check with all available sources. Portelli’s warning is a challenge for the current study because it is an eighty-year history of St. Ursula’s that lacks substantial historical records to establish possible instances of ‘mis-remembering’ throughout the many student and staff recollections.\footnote{Ibid.} Often I gained a clearer understanding of how the layers of meaning could accumulate around the recollection of school life after I had turned off the tape-recorder. At this time, I was offered some tea and I could refer to family photos on walls or listen to personal stories of relationships after school life. Once,
I was asked to turn off the tape, and I was told of an incident involving the interviewee’s deceased sister and her post-school experiences. It aligned with other stories I had been told involving the same student and her boarding-school experiences. Multiple layers of meaning had accumulated over the years of an incident involving this student and were remembered during interviews from different angles of vision by several past students and teachers.

I have also drawn upon Paula Hamilton’s guiding principles for an oral history project. Hamilton argues that spoken narrative uses more evocative imagery, and the process of interviewing elicits different content, from documented questionnaire responses. Among other features, the performance element in oral remembering makes for a more intensely emotional experience which ‘revealed more because the speaking voice was less private than the written’. Hamilton concludes that because the dynamic engages emotion through the spoken word, it could significantly affect the historian’s commitment to an abstracted narrative beyond the reach of the ‘subjective’ recall. In the course of an interview for this project, I was initially concerned when, at the close of the interview, a past staff member admitted emotional difficulties caused by surfacing memories of times at St Ursula’s that she thought long-forgotten. This experience resonated with Hamilton’s observation of the intensely emotional experience the interviewee had reported. Rather than prolonging the interview session, I contacted the interviewee a few weeks later when we discussed the interview process with greater objectivity.

This thesis recognises the distinction in the literature between memory as ‘subject of study’ and ‘memory as a source of study’. An examination of the process is crucial in order to recognise possible ways interviewee memory is constructed and how this construction shapes one’s experience of the world. O’Donoghue and Harford addressed the issue of gender differences as a factor in the memory recall process. In their interviews of past school students, a female interviewed the

214 Ibid. 9.
females and a male interviewed the males.\footnote{O’Donoghue and Harford, *Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967*. 6.} I was the sole interviewer for this project and I regarded it as essential that I engaged with all eighty-five interviewees, women and men, to establish narrative continuity (Appendix 5).

I became aware of gender differences in some of the retelling of common experiences of school life; differences that may have been missed had I not interviewed both women and men. At some point in the interview, the women surfaced feelings and personal identity more extensively than the small number of male interviewees.\footnote{Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. 236.} While not suggesting that this can be understood purely in terms of gender, I noted a difference at times between female and male recollections. While Trish Nielsen’s recollection of the actions of some St Ursula’s sisters evoked in her expressions of anger and protest, Jim Pyle’s recollection of the same actions demonstrate a similar outrage but also included humour. Jim’s narrative included the boys’ devious and alternative ways to work around the same instances of unjust treatment.\footnote{Dr. James Pyle, interview by Maree Ganley, 8 October 2015, Conversation, ACU Brisbane; Patricia Barbara (Nielsen) Latimer, ibid., 17 November 2011, Audio.}

The main thrust of criticisms of traditional documentary historians is that memory is unreliable as a historical source because it is distorted by advancing age, personal bias and nostalgia, and the influence of other subsequent versions of the past.\footnote{Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. 227.} Alistair Thomson interviewed World War I veterans for *ANZAC Memories: living with the legend*.\footnote{Ibid.} The men were a similar age to each other at the time of his interviews. In contrast, the past students and staff of St. Ursula’s that I interviewed range in age from thirty-three to one hundred.\footnote{Annette Bohn, “Generational Differences in Cultural Life Scripts and Life Story Memories of Younger and Older Adults,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 24 (2010). 1326-45.} For the older interviewees for my study, I was aware of the complexities in working through the layers of personal meanings and interpretations that had accumulated since their school days.\footnote{Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. 11.}
Australian memory theorists, such as June Crawford, Susan Kippax, Jenny Onyx, Una Gault and Pam Benton highlight the challenges of accessing the childhood recollections of adults. They argue that what appears paramount in adult memories of childhood is a search for meaning, an active attempt by adults to make sense of their experience. They argue, 'we are constructing a meaning of past events and in the recollection of our own responses we are searching for intelligibility'.  

Annette Bohn compares generational differences in autobiographical memory in what she terms the ‘reminiscence bump’ or simply ‘the bump’. She concludes that people above the age of forty recall significantly more memories from their adolescence and early childhood than from other periods in their lives.  

Dorthe Berntsen and David Rubin, however, argue that ‘the bump’ only exists for positive memories. Their conclusion that little is known about how pleasantness versus unpleasantness influences the long-term retention of autobiographical memories is noted in processing the data for this thesis. There were instances where a negative experience was described in the course of the interview in more detail than pleasant experiences. Examples are the drowning of a student and her father just hours before a school end-of-year concert, and an incident of what was considered unjust discipline metered out to a student.  

Christopher Bergland draws on neuroscientific evidence to argue that ‘when someone recalls an old memory, a representation of the entire event is instantaneously reactivated in the brain that often includes the people, location, smells, music and other trivia’. I used Bergland’s evidence to advantage with some interviewees for this study. When past student, Marjorie Harper launched into her story of recalling a seemingly insignificant single memory such as the lasting.

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224 Bohn, “Generational Differences in Cultural Life Scripts and Life Story Memories of Younger and Older Adults”. 1326.
226 Ibid. 8.
227 Ibid.
smell of the sea in swimming togs hanging perpetually in the bathing sheds, I encouraged her to extend that memory to recalling annual sporting events by the sea organised at the school.  

An ‘insider’ perspective

This thesis is written from an ‘insider’ perspective because of my role as a teacher at St Ursula’s (1974-1978). My association with the Presentation Institute began as a secondary student to senior matriculation at the Presentation Secondary College at St Rita’s in Brisbane (1957-60). At the time of my attendance, there were boarders and day students. I joined the Presentation Sisters after teacher training and remained with them for fifteen years. Five of these years were spent teaching, coordinating the Ancient History and Art departments, and supervising boarders at St Ursula’s Yeppoon (1974-78). My ongoing positive association with the institute evoked a more open level of exchange for most of the sisters. At the same time, my own past experiences gave me an awareness of the possibility that some older sisters might have been recalling aspirational versions of their experiences, since their stories at times contradicted the versions told by students and other staff.

As a member of the Presentation Institute for some years, I have the advantage of having experienced the culture of religious life. This is a valuable background for interpreting primary source material, and conducting oral history interviews with the sisters. Also, since I have not been involved with the community for forty years, I have the advantage of not being too close to events and people from the school or the Presentation Sisters. At the same time, I acknowledge that this position has brought its own biases and blindesses. I am not and cannot be neutral, but I can offer a unique perspective. By the time I was transferred to St Ursula’s, I had experienced the dramatic changes which brought new freedoms to the way an individual woman religious pursued her commitment. In the mid-1970s, the degree of independence experienced by women religious influenced my attitudes in the learning environment. They ranged from experiencing the difficulties of being unsupported by administration in the day-to-day teaching role to being able to

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229 Harper, “Interview.”
pursue creative approaches in adopting the fast-moving developments in state secondary education. It had become obvious to many women religious by the mid-1970s that the classroom no longer constituted a pioneer frontier that warranted a life-time religious commitment. However, but there was slowness on the congregational level to recognise and act on that change of perspective.

As a teacher, I could readily understand the challenges and stresses of the teaching profession and of the added commitment of teachers at St Ursula’s with boarding school duties. Significantly, my experience in education and boarding schools was broadened later by employment in both independent and state secondary schools throughout Queensland, including an academic leadership role in a boy’s secondary boarding school.

**Thesis overview**

This is a history of a convent boarding school that began in an isolated fishing town in central Queensland where 500-year-old traditions of secondary education for girls found a place. This history of St Ursula’s is structured around the major themes of origin, foundation, leadership, pedagogy, social class and convent boarding school culture. The histories of secondary education and schools in the region include Rupert Goodman’s *Secondary Education in Queensland 1860-1960* and Gregory Logan and Eddie Clarke’s *State Education in Queensland, A Brief History: Monographs on the History of Education in Queensland*. Each text is a broad historical sweep of secondary education in the state. However, these histories do not convey the fact that secondary education had been introduced into central and coastal Queensland by the Presentation Sisters from 1900.

This history of a Catholic convent boarding school is enriched by considering the cultural and religious traditions that led to convent boarding schools being established in Australia. It acknowledges that a major element of the history of secondary education was the formation of congregations of women religious founded specifically for girls’ education. On arrival in Australia, women religious
became the major providers of a model of secondary education for girls in remote regions of central Queensland in the early 20th century.

In chapter two, I trace the history of the rise of convent boarding schools established for daughters of elite families of 15th-century Renaissance Italy. I examine the origins and development of convent boarding school education that found a place in late 19th century Australia. Despite almost 500 years of change and development, some early practices were still in existence for the first St Ursula’s boarders. In chapter three, I pursue the historical pathways of the missionary work of the Church and examine the part played by institutes of women religious to introduce convent high school education for girls into colonial Australia. The historiography of communities of women religious such as the Ursulines is given attention. The development of the elite French Ursuline tradition of education of the 17th and 18th centuries was for several centuries the cornerstone for the progression into other models of high school education for girls across the western world into the 20th century.

In chapters four to seven, I examine the impact of the introduction of a high school education for girls into a remote geographical location where even elementary schooling was barely accessible for bush children in the early 20th century. In chapter four, I focus on the leadership role of the superior of a community of women religious teachers. I examine how the leadership capacity of each superior was pivotal to the school’s success given the isolation and independence of the convent high school. I consider how the superior assumed the responsibility to introduce each new student to the culture and expectations of a Catholic convent boarding school. In chapters five, six and seven, the recollections of students and staff are woven into the framework of the history of a Catholic convent boarding school from the key perspectives of Catholic faith formation and spirituality, academic endeavour and achievement, culture, companionship and student and family aspirations.

In the concluding chapter eight, I firstly bring together the history’s main threads and themes - the history of St Ursula’s as a multiplicity of experiences, perspectives,
interpretations and subjectivities. Secondly, I evaluate the contribution of this thesis to the history of Catholic boarding school education in regional Queensland and Australia. Thirdly, I summarise the impact of the establishment of St Ursula’s on the central seaside regions of Queensland.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the various fields of research that provide the conceptual framework for this thesis. It outlined the aims and methodology best suited to writing a history of a convent secondary boarding school where the lives and experiences of students and staff are essential elements in the narrative. It traced the weight of evidence in the research to support the notion that the convent boarding schools established in Australia from the mid-19th century did two things: they drew on the rich traditions of the movements for the democratisation of education for girls in continental Europe, Britain and Ireland; and they maintained upper social class standards, which can be called a distinctive ‘habitus’.

It highlighted the need to examine how the tradition of a secondary convent boarding education, its formal curriculum and lifestyle found a place in rural regions of Australia. Connell argues that contemporary sociological research reveals a diversity of household and family forms. I argue that the convent boarding school of St Ursula’s was one unique family form as some children spent as many as ten years of their childhood and adolescence there. This thesis is a history of a secondary boarding school, its social class structures, ideologies and cultural capital and how these came together to provide a unique experience for students from remote regions of Queensland.

Definitions

The term ‘institutes’ will be used throughout the thesis to refer to all religious congregations with simple vow status. Nuns with solemn vows were bound by the rule of enclosure in religious orders, committing them to a lifetime within the confines

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230 Raewyn Connell et al., eds., *Education, Change and Society*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2010).
of the one convent in which they first entered. Women in religious orders also conducted schools, but within the confines of the convent walls. The public were admitted only to limited spaces such as the chapel and parlour. When new communities of women religious formed specifically to teach or to do good works in the wider community, canonical approval was sought for a change in the rule of enclosure and for a more independent religious life outside the cloister. The members of these new ‘congregations’ of women were known as ‘sisters’ and committed also to the lifetime vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. On arrival, in Australia in 1866, the Presentation Sisters were classified as an order and were bound by the rule of enclosure.

The term ‘elite’ refers to the European-style convent boarding school model in the French Ursuline tradition. The term ‘select’ will be used to refer to a modified model of the elite convent boarding school education introduced into Australia by the Mercy and Presentation Sisters from Ireland. By the 1920s, the Queensland State Department of Public Instruction inspected and recommended St Ursula’s for registration as a ‘secondary school’ provided it included advanced subjects in the curriculum such as Euclid, Algebra and Science. The term ‘poor’ school refers to the low fee or non-fee-paying elementary school that some religious institutes introduced alongside the ‘select’ school. They were later called the ‘parish primary school’ and were incorporated into the State Diocesan Catholic Education system. In the first thirty years of its history, St Ursula’s had both a ‘poor’, low-fee paying elementary school called St Joseph’s, and the secondary school of St Ursula’s which occupied nearby classrooms.

231 Queensland Education Department, “Education Department, General Correspondence, Roman Catholic Schools; Inspectors,” ed. Education Department, Education Department, General Correspondence; Roman Catholic Schools, Inspectors (Brisbane: The Queensland State Education Department, 1875-1906; 1915-1962). St Ursula’s was registered as a secondary school in 1920 but had been operating as a ‘high school’ offering advanced subjects beyond elementary education from 1917; Mary Cath Togolo, Every Reason to Be Proud: The History of St Monica’s College Cairns 1890-2000, 1st ed. (Cairns: Trinity Press, 2000). The initial application for state registration of St Monica’s Mercy Sisters convent boarding school in Cairns was rejected in 1916.
Chapter two

The development of a convent boarding school model
- Sea Pictures from another shore

The ship went on with solemn face; To meet the darkness on the deep, The solemn ship went onward. I bowed down weary in the place; for parting tears and present sleep Had weighted mine eyelids downward … He shall assist me to look higher, He shall assist me to look higher, Where keep the saints, with harp and song, An endless Sabbath morning, An endless Sabbath morning, And on that sea commixed with fire, On that sea commixed with fire, Oft drop my eyelids raised too long To the full Godhead’s burning The full Godhead’s burning.¹

- Sabbath Morning at Sea by Edward Elgar. Words by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861).

Introduction

This chapter identifies developments in formalised approaches to schooling that occurred within the communities of Catholic women religious whose mission was girls’ education. An understanding of the foundations of formal convent schooling helps to understand the enduring convent boarding school tradition that the Presentation Sisters conducted in Australia through much of the 20th century. Historians of the foundations of girls’ secondary education, Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers argue that ‘travelling nuns made an impact not only on pupils but also on future teachers in foreign lands.’² The authors focus on Irish nuns who were influential in the English-speaking world of setting up boarding schools in foreign lands.

The two strands examined in this chapter are

¹ These lyrics (Appendix 1) reflect the experiences of the sisters who left Ireland for Australia in the mid-19th century to bring the Catholic faith and education to the new colony and never to return home in most cases.
² Goodman and Rogers, Crossing Borders in Girls’ Secondary Education. 196.
• Involvement of communities of women religious in the education of girls

• Social and cultural influences that shaped the development of non-gender specific secondary education

**Women’s religious orders and girls’ education**

Medieval historian, Walter Simons examines the various formal and informal education movements, sponsored by secular groups other than the Church, to educate girls. Educators were from diverse occupations, including the Beguines to leaders of local townships. Though motivated by the popular piety of the 12th-century Church, the Beguine movement consisted of communes of women who lived an independent lifestyle which included teaching local children for economic independence. Simons also identifies that community leaders such as the burghers, in newly formed medieval towns in the lowlands of western and northern Europe, drew on the support of the township merchants to set up schools for poor children in surrounding regions.

The education of girls, even among the nobility, remained sporadic well into the 15th century except where young women continued to be entrusted to the enclosed monasteries or to other families for schooling. Barbara Whitehead concludes that there were in fact very few educated women in early modern Europe. In Lyon, between 1490 and 1570, there were eighty-seven schoolmasters and five schoolmistresses. In Venice in 1587, there were 258 male teachers and a single female teacher. Around Florence, as early as 1304, there was a lay schoolmistress, and in 1338 a survey of the Florentine educational system noted the presence of female teachers and students. Some girls benefited from the home schooling in the form of tutoring provided for brothers or other young male relatives.

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4 Ibid.
7 Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence of the 15th Century ". 19.
Sharon Strocchia argues that one of the earliest more structured approaches to schooling for girls conducted within a convent setting can be identified from the records of an enclosed order of Augustinian nuns established at Lapo in Florence in the early 15th century. Strocchia argues that the context for conducting a school for girls in convents was as a means of financial survival for the convent rather than from an altruistic plan to educate girls. In their detailed book-keeping records spanning the 15th century, there were various formulae, headings, and financial entries that indicate the nuns were responsible for teaching young girls three things: reading, sewing and ‘the virtues’.\(^8\)

The lifestyle of nuns modelled a variety of behaviours and engaged the students in a kind of educational practice that involved the continuous co-residence of teachers and students. This closeness between teachers and students meant that the experience was intense. The convent boarding schools were sites of socialisation more than they were centres of education. The students took away with them fundamental lessons that represented mature womanhood in deportment, sewing, manners and moral behaviour and some basic ability in reading and perhaps writing.\(^9\) The skill levels of the individual nuns determined whatever training in literacy Florentine girls received. The attainment of skills also depended on the girls’ length of stay in the convent, and on the nature and type of resources in a religious house.

Jo Ann McNamara argues the practice of educating gentlewomen in convents that spread among the upper classes throughout Europe and its colonies tightened the mesh that secured nuns to the social fabric around them because the girls and young women brought in relatives and friends to visit.\(^10\) Though enclosed within the confines of the cloister, nuns maintained a connection with nearby society through the arts of music and drama. McNamara argues that music gave cloistered nuns an

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\(^8\) Ibid. 9.
\(^9\) Ibid. 36.
\(^10\) McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*. 535-537.
opportunity to communicate with the public world, sometimes from behind the grille but gradually as performers and even composers on festive occasions.¹¹

The societal expectations of a convent boarding school education were that a young woman was considered educated according to the social and cultural milieu of the age when she had skills sufficient to take her place as wife and mother, that is, if she could sew, dance, play music and run a household.¹² The pupils adopted the cultural capital of upper-class society learned inside and outside the convent as they learned how to walk at a measured pace with a dignified bearing, while keeping their eyes down, hands still, and mouths closed. When the nuns went about their daily lives and adhered steadfastly to monastic routines and regulations, they acted as exemplars for girls who learnt by imitation. This was a belief and expectation that reached down through the centuries wherever nuns were associated with girls’ education, and the convent boarding school provided that opportunity.¹³

The Company of St Ursula (the Ursulines)

The Catholic response to the Reformation formulated in the Council of Trent (1545-1547) had an influence on education for girls outside of the urban middle-class society of 15th-century Italy. A Council decree on education called The Teaching of Sacred Scripture and Liberal Arts proposed that ‘schools’ be set up for children with the express purpose of teaching Christian doctrine.¹⁴ The bishops of the Council believed that the type of religious education received as children would have a long-term influence on what they believed, and how they demonstrated that belief.¹⁵ In 1537, the Company of St Ursula (the Ursulines) began its charitable work in local communities and, by 1566, became involved in implementing the reforms in Christian teaching and literacy promulgated by the Council of Trent.¹⁶ In France,

¹¹ Ibid. 538
¹² Whitehead, Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800. xii.
¹³ Roycelyn (Wilden) Pearson, interview by Maree Ganley, 17 November 2014, Audio, ACU Brisbane. Roycelyn recalled her mother sent her to St Ursula’s because ‘the nuns were ladies and they would teach her how to become a lady’.
¹⁴ The 16th century interpretation of a ‘school’ precinct differs markedly from the modern term. Then it started as a gathering in a church building and much later progressed to a dedicated space in a village.
¹⁵ Carter, Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern Europe. 24.
¹⁶ MacGinley, A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia. 23.
independent foundations of the Ursulines also opened schools of catechetical instruction that were primary schools called _petite écoles_.

As schools (which were called the _petite écoles_ at the local level) became more widespread throughout the 17th-century French countryside, a branch of the Ursulines in Paris established a more cultured education in the tradition of the convent boarding schools of Florence. While the belief about the value of the holistic experience of education for girls in a convent setting remained unchanged, highly educated French lay and women religious introduced changes to the convent boarding school model of 16th-century Italy.

The Paris Ursulines opened schools for boarders and day students and extended the curriculum. This made significant in-roads into a pedagogy that recognised women’s intellectual capacity. These nuns came to be known as the _Grandes Ursulines_ and their work in the education of girls influenced later foundations of teaching institutes of women in France. The various new institutes of women religious which grew out of the original Ursuline inspiration developed in Ireland from the mid-18th century and later spread to Australia in the early 19th century. One such institute was founded by Jeanne de Lestonnac. It incorporated innovative features incorporated and adapted to a more contemporary teaching ministry.

**A new curriculum in the convent boarding school**

Jeanne de Lestonnac (1556-1640) introduced a further development of the convent boarding school model of Renaissance Italy in Bordeaux, France in the early 17th century. By 1607 she had founded the religious community of The Company of Mary Our Lady and incorporated an active teaching apostolate into the old form of monasticism for women. She accommodated boarders who had a different daily routine and separate living quarters from the religious community. The organised graded levels of instruction also included day students. While boarders paid for their

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17 Carter, _Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern Europe_. 24.
19 MacGinley, _A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia_. 28-29.
lodging, the education component was free, thus attracting a less affluent class to the day school.\textsuperscript{20}

Later in 1684, Madame de Maintenon, a lay woman, founded the Maison Royale de Saint-Louis as a boarding school for daughters of gentlemen who had been killed or had exhausted their health in the service of the State. The convent boarding school education for the privileged class in these separate institutions in France continued to reflect the weight of gendered cultural norms as it had for 16\textsuperscript{th}-century Italian noble society. Both Jeanne de Lestonnac and Madame de Maintenon introduced the secular subjects of reading and writing and concentrated on the study of French, Latin, numeracy and cultural studies. Cultural studies included history, literature as well as lessons in social duty, charity and the virtues of chastity, friendship and loyalty.\textsuperscript{21}

Historian, Mary Ryllis Clark traces the history of the Loreto Order in Australia. The order was founded by English woman, Mary Ward (1585-1645).\textsuperscript{22} Ward had established an English teaching religious community of women in Saint Omer in the Netherlands in 1609, but proposed to Pope Paul V in 1616 the formation of an English speaking apostolate for ladies who would emulate the male order of Jesuits by dressing and living as seculars, though consecrated to the religious state. Ward personally supervised the free public schools that she opened on the Continent.

In the 1620s in Rome, Naples, Munich and Vienna, Ward established a pattern of boarding and day schools for the upper class alongside a free school for the poor and an industrial school. By 1821, her followers, led by Teresa Ball in Ireland, founded a separate institute called the Loreto Sisters, from Ward’s original community of women religious called the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{23} The models of schooling for girls adopted by both the Ursulines and the Sisters of Charity, and later the Loreto Sisters, differed from the monastic schools by

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 29.
\textsuperscript{21} Soury-Lavergne, \textit{A Pathway in Education: Jeanne De Lestonnac, 1556-1640}. 356-359.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 47-48.
extending the possibility of education for girls from all social ranks because they included both boarders and day students. The day students came from the ranks of the professional and merchant class, not from the aristocracy as would have been the case in the older monasteries.24

The French boarding school tradition crossed continental European borders and became the preferred model of education for girls in Britain and Ireland.25 By 1759 in England, adaptations developed through the influences of Protestantism and Anglicanism, but the convent model of boarding school education for girls was so popular that a Londoner alleged two or three houses might be seen in almost every village with the inscription: ‘Young ladies boarded and educated’.26 Schools were established of variable standards where the emphasis was on English grammar, conversational French, and a group of subjects that became known as the ‘accomplishments’ of music, art, drawing and dancing. Private boarding schools in England existed alongside convent boarding schools.

English educationist, Mary Astell (1666-1731) advocated a secular interpretation of the convent boarding school model where all-women’s communities could spend their time in study and contemplation.27 While mothers and governesses provided home education, the gendered and societal stereotype of the convent boarding school curriculum with its emphasis on ‘learning the virtues’ remained in place in England. In these English boarding schools, the influence of the French Ursuline tradition emerged, with its emphasis on providing religious education with a strong moral training-base considered indispensable for the acquisition of feminine virtues, modesty and submission. Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers argue that the success of a French model of girls education was mostly striking in English-speaking and predominantly Protestant areas such as England, Canada, Australia and the United States.28

25 Goodman and Rogers, Crossing Borders in Girls’ Secondary Education. 192.
26 Lougee, "Its Frequent Visitor: Death at Boarding School in Early Modern Europe." 195.
27 Goodman, "Class and Religion: Great Britain and Ireland."
28 Goodman and Rogers, Crossing Borders in Girls’ Secondary Education. 196.
The boarding school experience

The Maison Royale de Saint-Louis was a ‘pensionnat’ or boarding school for girls set up in 1684 at St Cyr in France by Madame de Maintenon, the second wife of King Louis XIV of France. The revenues came from various government and private agencies. Mark Bryant argues that this school marked an evolution in female education from many perspectives by including secular subjects as well as religious education. For several centuries afterwards, the accommodation and classroom differed little in the tradition of the St Cyr boarding school structure. The mistresses and other ladies were not nuns, but they took simple or temporary religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as well as vows to devote their life to the education, instruction and wellbeing of the girls. The dormitories just above the classrooms held forty beds and were surrounded by two rooms for the mistresses. The class mistresses not only coordinated the different classes but were also responsible for the students outside of school hours. In the classroom, older students acted as monitors for the students aged from seven to twenty. Each student was graded according to age and wore a corresponding coloured ribbon.

Each class had a timetable and subjects deemed appropriate to the student’s age. The youngest students learned reading, writing and arithmetic and received their first lessons in the catechism. The subjects introduced to older students included history and geography, the history of the Catholic Church and more detailed teaching in morality. The daily routine started at 6am and finished at 9pm when students finally went to bed. The day was punctuated with frequent prayer, and the lunch break lasted from midday to 2pm.

Isabel Quigly argues that there are fifteen types of boarding school stories ranging from the school story as moral tale, to the school story as allegory, and from these narratives the broader community has established its imaginative reconstruction or

30 Ibid. 83.
31 Ibid. 83.
picture of boarding school life. Female novelists in continental Europe and England explored the consequences of long periods of childhood spent in a boarding school. They recounted experiences of the exposure to sickness and reduced life expectancy.

Carolyn Lougee argues that two key aspects of modernisation, the educational revolution and the health revolution, were timed differently. Even Madame de Maintenon’s well organised and comfortable boarding school of Saint-Cyr faced issues of water supply, drainage, refuse disposal, ventilation, and heating which contributed to severe health breakdown and death in some cases. Charlotte Bronte maintained that the description of life in the 19th-century English Clergy Daughter’s Boarding School in Jane Eyre, in which two of her sisters died, was historical and autobiographical in that she described first-hand the actual conditions and treatment for girls in the school.

Conditions in boarding schools were greatly improved by the end of the 19th century because of new scientific understanding about the spread of contagious disease and because of a growing awareness of the benefits of learning in more pleasant surroundings. Populist literature about experiences in boarding schools, such as Leonid Bely’s, Destination, portrayed English public-school life as an institution of cruelty and indifference. Such literature perpetuated the idea that grim boarding school treatment was an essential accompaniment to the formation of religious faith and social propriety. There are descriptions in the literature of austere living conditions and the deprived emotional lives of children sent away to school for long periods, and some characters never experienced family life again. From the mid-19th century, Australian boarding school students experienced the results of healthier and more hygienic conditions. However, the culture of boarding schools changed slowly, particularly with regard to daily routine and discipline.

33 Lougee, "Its Frequent Visitor: Death at Boarding School in Early Modern Europe." 213.
34 Ibid. 213.
Secondary education for girls

In the early 19th century, Jeanne Campan was headmistress of the first of the Napoleonic Lycees in France in what could be considered ‘secondary education’ for girls. In her school, lessons went beyond religious reading, writing, and arithmetic to include literature, history, geography, foreign languages and the arts. This state system of French education made a distinction between primary schools and secondary courses for girls. This was similar to the boy’s secondary system. Progress was hindered by the fact that the girls’ schools received no direct state funding. The state secondary school curriculum was the same as in the larger convent boarding schools but the ‘accomplishment’ subjects in both systems continued to occupy a great deal of time, to the detriment of the pursuit of serious scientific knowledge. As moral instruction replaced religion in the state system, the Catholic bourgeois generally stayed with the convent boarding school system.36

Throughout the 19th century, women’s movements took formalised steps to change the curriculum for girls. These steps were a way of tackling the widespread social expectation that girls need only know how to sew and write their names. More liberal attitudes to girls’ education developed in the form of the secondary or continuing schooling model. The tension between forms of modernity favourable to women’s emancipation and conservative forces defending the traditional gender role affected the evolution of girls’ education and delayed change throughout what has been described as the long nineteenth century in girls’ education.37 Rebecca Rogers argues that male philosophers continued to adhere to the idea that biological differences influenced moral differences between the sexes and consequently the modern vision of gender equality remained isolated.38

The establishment of the Presentation Sisters

Irish Catholics were forbidden to conduct schools in Ireland until after the abolition of the British Penal Law in 1829. In the 17th and 18th centuries, wealthy young Irish women were sent to the elite convent ‘grand pensionnat’ (grand boarding houses) in France. Some women returned to Ireland and educated the poor population by drawing on their financial resources, personal faith enlightenment and experiences of education and life as exiles in France. One of these Irish women was Nano Nagle from County Cork (1718-1784) who founded the Presentation Sisters in 1775. She came from a wealthy Catholic Irish family that had survived the restrictions of British penal law on land ownership by Catholic families.39

Irish historian, Deirdre Raftery argues that there were two strong lessons learned in the Nagle household: attention to learning, and how to live the life of a virtuous Catholic woman.40 Nano Nagle applied her financial acumen and property management astuteness to establish the order of the Presentation Sisters. Raftery points out that the French Cardinal Francois Fenelon had a strong influence on girls’ education. In 1687, Fenelon published a treatise, De L’Education des Feilles, an approach to the education of girls of rank. It included practical knowledge of book-keeping, how to improve the lot of the poor and the recommendation that women should even be able to set up schools for their tenants. He argued that women should also understand the law relating to land and business matters concerning their estates.41

Nano Nagle began her education on the continent as a ten year old. There are no records of her schooling, though she may have attended the Benedictine Abbey at Ypres in Belgium about fifty kilometres West of Brussels.42 Nano Nagle’s parents may have chosen Ypres because they wanted a Catholic education for their

41 Ibid. 19. Bryant, "Partner, Matriarch, and Minister: Mme De Maintenon of France, Clandestine Consort, 1680-1715." Cardinal Fenelon acted as an adviser and guide to Madame de Maintenon at her boarding school of Saint Cyr in France.
daughter and English was the language spoken in the Benedictine Abbey there. This could account for Nano Nagle’s poor knowledge of French, a disadvantage of which she later wrote.\textsuperscript{43}

Around 1746, Nano Nagle came back to Ireland but returned to France to become a nun. Acting on advice from her spiritual director, she again returned to Ireland in 1750 and began to devote herself to teaching catechism to poor children. Although forbidden under British penal law, she began clandestine charitable work in her hometown of Cork, mainly to bring vagrant children off the streets for food and religious instruction.\textsuperscript{44} Nano Nagle built up a number of primary schools with a comprehensive program of religious instruction that would unify and systematise Irish Catholic practices similar in curriculum to the French petites écoles.\textsuperscript{45} Between 1749 and 1750, she set up a series of ‘little schools’ around the southern city of Cork, in rooms with dirt floors which became known as ‘cabin schools’.\textsuperscript{46} In her Irish schools, girls learned to read from the catechism and were trained in vocational domestic crafts such as lacemaking to supplement the family economy through work at home.\textsuperscript{47}

Irish historian, Catriona Clear argues that the lives of poor women changed as a result of these domestic industries. A lace-making industry that developed in and around the Presentation convent of Youghal in 1847 was still operating in 1900.\textsuperscript{48} On 24 December, 1775, Nano Nagle named her followers, the Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Later, her community was recognised as a Church approved Congregation (Institute) entitled the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{49} Her followers committed to educating only the poorest

\textsuperscript{43} Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy. 20
\textsuperscript{44} Walsh, Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters. 2.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. 47. They became known as the ‘petty’ schools in England and Ireland.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. 44.
\textsuperscript{49} Walsh, Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters. XV.
girls, thereby extending the prevailing social boundaries that determined which children would receive the benefits of an elementary education.

Nano Nagle adhered to the class distinction of her time and did not attempt to introduce girls of the poor class from the streets of Cork to an upper middle-class ‘accomplishments curriculum’. Instead, she invited nuns from the French Ursulines in Paris to conduct a convent boarding school (pension) for wealthy Irish girls. While the pensions were restricted to those who could afford fees, there was often a free school attached. In a letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons, she outlined the rationale behind her decision to introduce this elite level of education for girls in Ireland, distinct from her schools for the poor. Fitzsimmons had assisted Nano Nagle in negotiating the introduction of an Ursuline convent boarding school in Cork.

I hope you’ll act in regard of the young ladies as you think proper, and be sure I shall always approve of it. I must say I was desirous they would learn what is proper to teach young ladies hereafter, as there is a general complaint both in this kingdom and in England that the children are taught only to say their prayers.

A curriculum for daughters of the Irish merchant class

Raftery argues that Nano Nagle would have witnessed the examples of how small groups of wealthy women formed in France in the mid-17th century to serve God by walking the streets in the poorest quarters and catechising and teaching children to read. This witness not only increased Nano Nagle’s awareness of poverty, but it also showed her ways in which free education could change the lives of the poor. Some of these French groups of women formed into official congregations with a religious rule of life. Nano Nagle’s convent in Cork became the first of the ‘modern’ congregations and the first congregation of Irish women in Ireland. The Presentation Sisters’ Rule and Constitutions stated that the goal of the institute was exclusively

for ‘the instruction of poor female children in the principles of religion and Christian piety’.\textsuperscript{54}

The Presentation schools were incorporated into the Irish National Education system, and almost all Presentation schools were placed in connection with the National Education Board between 1834 and 1871.\textsuperscript{55} The schools were subject to visits from the national inspector. An Irish inspector’s report of a Presentation convent school in 1864 stated that ‘most of the nuns have had a liberal education of a high order and are highly accomplished; some draw and paint admirably, and know music and French … having been educated in France’.\textsuperscript{56} Another report from the Presentation convent in County Offaly stated ‘(the nuns) received a liberal education, being members of responsible, and some of them very high families’.\textsuperscript{57} The public perception of the sisters themselves was that they represented the pinnacle of educated bourgeois femininity.\textsuperscript{58} They became involved in secondary education in Ireland during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century after requests from the emerging Catholic middle class who could not afford the elite boarding school fees, but wished to be considered in another social class distinct from the working class poor.

Irish Protestant headmistresses in Ireland formed associations that by the 1880s exerted a great deal of influence in the progress of girls’ secondary education. The Irish Schoolmistress’ associations set about downgrading the accomplishments curriculum of the convent boarding schools and raising the academic standard of girls’ secondary education.\textsuperscript{59} However, female emancipation through secondary

\textsuperscript{55} Raftery, Delaney, and Nowlan-Roeck, Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy, 98-99.
\textsuperscript{56} H.C. Commissioners of National Education, "Special Report Made to the Commissioners of National Education, H.C. On Convent Schools in Connection with the Board, H.C.,” (Dublin 1864-65).
\textsuperscript{57} Tony Fahey, "Nuns in the Catholic Church in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century,” in Girls Don't Do Honours: Irish Women in Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 2-21.
\textsuperscript{59} Raftery and Parkes, Female Education in Ireland 1700-1900: Minerva or Madonna, 168; O’Connor, "The Revolution in Girls’ Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910.”}
education continued to benefit only those who could afford to attend either state or religious institutions. The most effective movement towards the democratisation of education for girls in continental Europe or Britain and Ireland occurred in the 19th century with the introduction of state aid and scholarships. By 1879, Irish girls were allowed to sit for public competitive examinations and also to undertake university degrees. However, girls from the middle and working classes were not schooled to such an advanced level to take advantage of either the scholarships granted from the Intermediate Education Act of 1878 or the Royal University of Ireland Act of 1879.

The Presentation Sisters continued to conduct day schools of elementary education for the poor, but they began to establish some fee-paying elementary schools incorporating the ‘accomplishments’ subjects. In the late 19th century, Nano Nagle’s followers combined the curriculum of the convent boarding school with that of the ‘cabin’ school to establish a rudimentary model of secondary education for girls. These ‘secondary tops’ attached to their elementary schools were registered to offer secondary subjects that qualified girls for public examination. The ‘select’ or secondary day school opened up career opportunities for girls from families of moderate income in the late 19th century. It prepared them to obtain scholarships through the competitive public examination system and to have the opportunity to move upwards in society. The Presentation Sisters had pioneered a secondary education system that was seen as a passport to status, privilege, and power for middle-class girls.

Secondary education in the new French and British colonies in America, Canada and Australia remained associated with costly boarding schools throughout the 19th century, and the distinction between primary and secondary education was not clearly defined. Girls’ secondary education was never a primary concern in the foreign missions initially, and the schools for girls introduced by Irish women

60 Ibid. 44.
61 Ibid. 44.
62 Ibid. 42.
63 Ibid. 54.
64 Goodman and Rogers, Crossing Borders in Girls’ Secondary Education. 196.
religious reflected the prevailing social reality of class distinction. In Tasmania, in 1866, the Irishman, Bishop Murphy wished to establish a Catholic upper class in Tasmanian society and regarded the presence of a convent boarding school in the French Ursuline tradition as a starting point. He was the first of several Australian bishops to request the Presentation Sisters to assist in establishing this model of education for privileged girls in the new colonies of Australia.  

Australian historian, Sophie McGrath argues that three European religious orders that emerged from the long history of Catholic girls’ education have been significant in the history of Australia. The three orders are the Ursulines, founded by Angela Merici at Brescia in northern Italy in 1535; the Loreto sisters, founded from Mary Ward’s original order of the Sisters of Charity at St Omer Flanders in 1609 for the education of English Catholic girls; and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) founded in France in 1800 by Madeleine Sophie Barat.

McGrath argues that these three orders had a direct impact on the education of girls in Australia because all three orders of women religious opened girls boarding schools in Australia. The Loreto Sisters came to Australia in 1875, and both the Ursuline and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus came in 1882. All three orders were founded in highly classed social situations in Europe and the Britain Isles and favoured the separate education of the rich and poor. However, the three orders also indirectly influenced Catholic education in Australia, because these older order taught the newer orders which included the Presentation Sisters (firstly in Tasmania in 1866) and the Mercy Sisters (in Western Australia in 1849).

The traditions of lifestyle and curriculum of the Catholic boarding school of St Ursula’s Yeppoon from the early 20th century reflected a cross-fertilisation of the convent boarding school model in the accomplishments for the social elite to the beginnings of a curriculum for middle-class and working-class girls. The history of St Ursula’s is shaped by the degree to which the Presentation Sisters responded to

65 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 87.
state developments and local needs and made steps to close the gender and class gap through educational opportunities.

Conclusion

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) described a woman’s function as ‘not fitted for certain occupations’… arguing that ‘a woman is by nature fitted for home work, and it is that which is best adapted to preserve her modesty’.⁶⁷ It was evident from his statements that the values and principles of 15th century Italy that defined the place of women in society in terms of class and gender had not changed in three centuries for the universal Church. Irish historian, Catriona Clear argues that the ‘traditional misogyny of institutional Christianity’ persisted into 19th century Ireland, with almost all religious staff conducting private schools that seldom strayed from ‘the holy triad of prayer, catechism and women’s domestic tasks’.⁶⁸

During the last decades of the 19th century, women’s movements addressed standards of education for girls with their primary goal of establishing social and economic equality. Although most work in the democratisation of education for girls was initiated outside the convent boarding school system, there were gains made by some female religious institutes such as the Presentation and Mercy Sisters through their avowed commitment to the education of the poor. They introduced a secondary education model of ‘select’ day school for girls from the middle and lower classes as an alternative to the advantages of an elite convent boarding school education.⁶⁹

The elite convent boarding school would be one of the last institutions to phase out the accomplishments curriculum that came to be regarded more as a means of ‘fitting our souls for good rather than a preparation for life’.⁷⁰ Feminist voices in 19th-century France argued that for women to have an impact in civil society there was

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⁶⁷ Clear, Nuns in Nineteenth Century Ireland. 31-35.
⁶⁹ O’Connor, "The Revolution in Girls' Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910."
⁷⁰ Ibid. 41.
a need for instruction that paralleled, if not equalled, that of men’s.\textsuperscript{71} This impact was tempered where women religious upheld a conservative church view and maintained a curriculum for young bourgeois women to become good Christians, wives and mothers.\textsuperscript{72}

In Australia, Catholic education and the Church developed together. For example, as a religious order within the Church, what motivated the Presentation Sisters to accept an invitation to open St Ursula’s was their commitment to the mission of the local Church of the Rockhampton diocese. Historian, Jo Ann McNamara, argues that, in their commitment, nuns shared also the prejudices, the will to domination, and the fanaticism that characterised the Church they served.\textsuperscript{73} McNamara describes their commitment in military terms: the ‘nuns were and are part of an army among the soldiers of Christ’.\textsuperscript{74} Their life and actions were characterised by self-control, obedience, and self-sacrifice – the virtues of soldiers.\textsuperscript{75} The past students and teachers of St Ursula’s in their interviews often described the routine in the boarding school and religious community in military terms such as ‘regimented’ and ‘rule driven’.\textsuperscript{76}

When the Irish Presentation Sisters arrived in Australia in 1866, they established the boarding school practices and curriculum of the elite convent boarding schools of Paris from the 17th century, which had maintained many of the religious practices of life in a medieval monastic society.\textsuperscript{77} This was in part the model of a boarding school that the Presentation Sisters established in St Ursula’s Yeppoon in 1917. Parents from the working and middle-class society of early 20th century Australia valued the advantages of a convent boarding school education for social prestige, quality teaching, discipline and human values.

\textsuperscript{71} Rogers, "Culture and Catholicism: France."
\textsuperscript{72} Gubin, "Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to 20th Century." 122.
\textsuperscript{73} McNamara, \textit{Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia}. ix.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. ix
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. ix.
\textsuperscript{76} Williams, "Interview."; Bernadette Fleming, ibid., 23 February Judy Williams described the nuns’ way of running the school as strict but fair. Sister Bernadette Fleming regretted the regimentation of the boarders’ lives being down to the smallest detail such as the day and time to wash hair.
Chapter three

Secondary education for girls in Australia - Sea Pictures of old traditions in a new land

Introduction

This chapter traces the work of Catholic female religious and their contribution to the development of secondary education for girls in Australia. It examines their involvement in introducing the European model of the convent boarding school, which, by the mid-19th century, had become a ‘hardy transplant’ to all parts of the British Empire.¹ Some of the earliest institutes of women religious in the colony adapted the European convent school model in a response to new social and educational pressures. Convent high schools played a distinct role in the consolidation of a broadly based Australian Catholic middle class.

O’Brien argues that despite the similarities between schools, the education of Catholic girls was marked by diversity, most of it the result of class inequality.² The diversity was reflected in the curriculum, the capacity of the religious institute and the practices of individual sisters in the classroom to deliver according to the educational expectations placed on them by bishops and institute leaders. This chapter examines the work of the Presentation Sisters and how they dealt with the issues of social class, wealth and gender in their convent boarding schools.

This chapter explores the histories of women religious, their spiritual aspirations, the schools they established and the curriculum they adopted in the social and geographic environments in which they found themselves.³ In England, by the 1840s there was a growing number of ‘ladies schools’, which prepared young women to compete for public examinations and to enter university. This led to a diaspora of highly educated independent British women to other parts of the Empire. The Female Middle-Class Education Society (London) assisted 300 of these women

¹ MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 113.
³ Burley, "Engagement with Empires: Irish Catholic Female Religious Teachers in Colonial South Australia 1868-1901." 175.
to immigrate to Australia in the 19th century. Teaching for educated women, offered employment opportunities and financial independence. As a result, in Australia, the ‘accomplishments’ model of education for girls ‘developed sooner, was more coherent, more widespread and more profitable than high school education for middle class boys’.5

The curriculum for girls covered a range of subject areas such as English literature and grammar, arithmetic, history, geography, and classics with an additional emphasis on the recognised cultural accomplishment subjects such as music, dance, art and languages. These accomplishments were highly prized and their widespread attainment was an indicator of education, culture and a civilised society. The contribution of women religious to the development of education in Australia from the early 20th century occurred against a backdrop of the perceived value of an advanced education for girls along with ideas gaining popularity and promulgated by educationists such as G.S. Browne in *Education in Australia* (1927).6 Browne’s key solution to the issues of education relevant to this study was the idea of centralisation of administration to provide uniformity of access to educational resources for country and city districts. In the large state of Queensland, the implementation of centralisation of administration proved to be the least effective for remote regions.7

From the mid-19th century, the first wave of Irish and European based women religious also introduced ‘ladies schools’ into Australia. The diversity and adaptations in their schools reflected how the institutes of women religious attempted to retain the original purpose for their founding to educate the poor along with the establishment of fee-paying convent high schools. The earliest Catholic convent boarding schools shared similarities with other church and private high school institutions for girls in 19th century Australia in curriculum and lifestyle. The convent institutions too were defined by social class as they complied with the

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7 Ibid. 145-46.
Catholic Bishops’ social agenda to establish and maintain a Catholic social elite. In the context of the Catholic Church, the authority of the bishops influenced the endeavours of church approved organisations such as women’s religious institutes. MacGinley argues that a key factor in the evolution of the corporate entity of independent institutes such as the Presentation Sisters was to negotiate its relationship with local bishops.

Following the 1900 document, Conditae a Christo, Leo XIII established the Sacred Congregation of Religious in 1908, which placed religious institutes under the direct authority of a cardinal protector as the pope’s representative rather than that of the local bishop. O’Brien argues that the line between internal religious institute and diocesan affairs remained open to interpretations. The 1927 Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Institute articulated the supreme authority of the ‘Mother General’ to conduct the institute from a centralised base of administration such as in the Queensland foundation of the order. Authors of the histories of women religious institutes in Australia have recorded instances of conflict over the jurisdiction of the bishops in the administration of the affairs of independent institutes of women religious. MacGinley argues there was widespread active collaboration between church authorities and religiously committed women. However, as women religious became involved in more works such as teaching there was greater scope for conflicts. This conflict often occurred when new initiatives were suggested by teachers and they were met with resistance from the bishops in each diocese and the religious institutes in the area of legal demarcation.

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10 MacGinley, "Irish Women Religious and Nineteenth Century Australian Social History." 138-139.
The reality of girls' education in Australia at the start of the 20th century, however, was more complex than the elite boarding school stereotype of school, family, social engagements, and volunteer work. Private and convent schools sought to build character in girls and offered a broad liberal arts education that would eventually be reintroduced as essential components of secondary education in the latter part of the 20th century. A memoir of a schoolgirl in 1910 who attended two different convent boarding schools illustrates the variety of adaptations that were emerging by the early 20th century. One was conducted by the Presentation Sisters in Windsor, Melbourne (1875) and the other was the elite convent school conducted by the French founded Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) in nearby Glen Iris (1888). The student described the RSCJ School as “the nearest thing to a fashionable school the Catholics had, where they all spoke Lah-de-dah instead of the good broad Australian accent I had acquired at the Presentation school in Windsor”.

Religious and private agencies, whether the Benedictines at Subiaco, Sydney (1848), Mrs Ponsonby’s independent Scotch College, Melbourne (1862), the Presentation Sisters in St Mary’s College, Tasmania (1866) or Mrs Janet O’Connor’s Duporth in Brisbane (1888), introduced the ‘accomplishments’ curriculum. This model aimed to reflect an English boarding school education that was ‘liberal and accomplished and of a strictly moral and religious character’. Each of the establishments reinforced social class interests in their moral and religious training. There were exclusive enrolment conditions that favoured the admission of young women who were not expected to seek employment after their schooling. By the end of the 19th century, throughout the British Isles, reforms in favour of economic and political freedom for women brought about changes that threatened to challenge the class and gender barriers maintained by the private agencies and the elite convent boarding schools. These reforms included the move towards

15 De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools. 74.
17 Selzer, Educating Women in Australia. From the Convict Era to the 1920s. 92-93.
education for girls as a necessary prerequisite for jobs, rather than as a preparation for marriage.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{The elite convent boarding school tradition in Australia}

From the earliest years of settlement in the New South Wales colony, the Catholic bishops, as their priority, established boys’ secondary schools. Historian, Ronald Fogarty argues that the intention was clear that they ‘that would transcend the mere bread-and-butter preoccupations of the masses, and prepare a Catholic elite from among whom the offices of church and state could eventually be filled’.\textsuperscript{19} In 1837, the first recognised Catholic secondary school for boys was established in the bishop’s own house at Woolloomooloo, Sydney.\textsuperscript{20} This was the Catholic Church’s attempt to establish a ‘learned and cultured Catholic laity which would further its interests and uphold its prestige’.\textsuperscript{21} There was no urgency to establish secondary education for girls, beyond the accomplishments curriculum offered in a convent boarding school education. Women were not accepted into civic life at this time and universities in Australia did not open their doors to women until 1881.\textsuperscript{22}

Between 1848 and 1910, women religious established over 200 elite convent high schools to prepare the daughters of wealthy Catholics to take their place alongside their husbands, and so complete the plan for a Catholic social elite.\textsuperscript{23} The bishops placed a particular emphasis on the education of Catholic women who would provide the new nation with ‘wives and mothers to set the religious tone of the household as prominent women in their social milieu’.\textsuperscript{24} They believed that providing quality education ‘was the means of social advancement for Catholic women, and subsequently the entire Catholic population’.\textsuperscript{25} James Quinn, the first Irish Catholic bishop of the new colony of Queensland (1861-1881), asserted that ‘the solid

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} O’Connor, “The Revolution in Girls’ Secondary Education in Ireland 1860-1910.” 32.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Fogarty, Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950: Catholic Education and the Religious Orders, 2. 312.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 312.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Marie Forster, ”Lyndhurst and Benedictine Education,” Australasian Catholic Record 3, no. April (1947). 119.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Universities in Australia opened in Sydney (1852), Melbourne (1853) and Brisbane (1910).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Fogarty, Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950: Catholic Education and the Religious Orders, 2. 332, 342. See Figures 18 and 19.
\item \textsuperscript{24} O’Farrell, The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History. 165.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 165.
\end{itemize}
establishment of religion in this colony must depend on the education of the female children who will be the future mothers’.  

26 Church historian, Patrick O’Farrell argues that logically this would imply a commitment to universal education for girls of all social classes. Instead, the first Australian Catholic bishops established, as their primary focus, the elite convent boarding schools for the education of wealthy girls who would not be expected to work or study further.  

In 1835, the Benedictine abbot, John Bede Polding was appointed Vicar Apostolic of New Holland, Van Diemen’s Land and the adjoining islands. At this time, there was already an established Catholic population that was pyramidal in its social profile.  

28 The wealthier levels of the Catholic social pyramid sought education for their children and some were sent back to boarding schools in Europe and Britain to complete their schooling.  

29 In 1848, the English Benedictine Order of nuns (Table 1) opened Subiaco along the Parramatta River, the first elite boarding school for girls in Sydney. Girls from around the colony and the Pacific Islands attended, but the boarding school fees were forty guineas per annum, well beyond the means of the ordinary wage-earner.  

The Benedictines conducted Subiaco as an enclosed monastic convent and school for boarders only, with the ‘accomplishments’ curriculum of the French Ursuline tradition. The delivery of this curriculum was reliant on the advanced education accomplishments of the nuns in the community. The German language was included in the curriculum because of the German national origin of the members of the first Subiaco Benedictine community.  

31 The subjects taught were English and French languages, writing, arithmetic, geography and the use of globes, history, and plain and ornamental needlework. Later, Italian, dancing and music were added to the curriculum. On exhibition days, girls performed recitations and plays which were

26 Ibid. 165.
27 Ibid. 165. Bishop Quinn may have been genuine in his support for women’s further education as he advised the Mercy sisters of All Hallows convent boarding school for girls in Brisbane, to introduce Mathematics into the curriculum.
29 Ibid. Fn. 12, 368.
30 Ibid. 77-79.
31 Ibid.
drawn from current popular literature as well as classical continental literature in various foreign languages, including French, Italian, Spanish and German.\(^{32}\)

Privately owned schools for girls, offered a similar curriculum in the ‘graceful accomplishments proper to ladies’ in the French Ursuline tradition. This occurred, for example, at East Melbourne Ladies College run by Julie and Lewis Vieuveux and the private Scotch College for Young Ladies in Melbourne conducted by principal, novelist and journalist, Mrs Caroline Ponsonby. At Mrs O’Connor’s Duporth in Brisbane, the school had capacity for thirty-five boarders, and girls came from all over Queensland and northern New South Wales, particularly from rural properties and pastoral stations.\(^{33}\)

These schools, together with Catholic convent boarding schools, accepted children of the gentry who enjoyed a school life that afforded them an entrance into all that was most cultured in colonial society of the time.\(^{34}\) Mrs Ponsonby, who opened her school in 1862, stated that ‘the curriculum is intended to provide a course of tuition calculated to elevate the standard of female education in these colonies’.\(^{35}\) Although it was an independent institution at the time, Mrs Ponsonby presented a rationale for the inclusion of religious instruction in the curriculum. She referred to ‘the improving effect of religion, that religion improves and enlarges the mind, softens and refines the manner, and strengthens and elevates the moral principles’.\(^{36}\) She argued that ‘this is peculiarly the case with young ladies and arises perhaps from the acknowledged influence of the female mind and example over good in society. Never is the character of a woman more lovely and attractive than when it is the transcript not only of high intelligence but of a religious mind’.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{32}\) Ibid. 213. These subjects were included also in the curriculum advertised for the elite Ursuline Order convent boarding school in Armidale NSW in 1885.

\(^{33}\) Wheeler, “Mrs Janet O’Connor: Educator and the Duporth School for Young Women- a Melba Connection.” 261.

\(^{34}\) At All Hallows in Brisbane in the 1860s and St Ursula’s Yeppoon as late as 1933, the age range of senior girls was 18-23 years. Register All Hallows (Archives All Hallows Brisbane); Archive St Ursula’s Yeppoon.

\(^{35}\) Selzer, Educating Women in Australia. From the Convict Era to the 1920s. 92.

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 92.

\(^{37}\) Ibid. 92.
In 1868, Bishop Laurence Shiel of South Australia’s diocese (1844-1851) recruited the Dominican Order from Dublin (Table 1) to open an elite convent boarding school in Adelaide. Three orders of nuns - the Loreto Sisters, the Ursulines and the French Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ)(Table1) - also conducted convent boarding schools exclusively for boarders from within the enclosure of their monasteries, mostly around the cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Enrolments were restricted to the small percentage of the early Australian population that could afford the fees.\(^{38}\) Mother Gonzaga Barry led a foundation of the Irish Loreto nuns to Ballarat, Victoria in 1875 to open Mary’s Mount convent school. In 1883, she employed Julia Guerin, the first female graduate of the University of Melbourne and later activist for women’s’ suffrage, to teach at the school. The Loreto nuns had initiated education reform for Catholic women in England and Ireland by the late 19\(^{th}\) century and were instrumental in establishing Catholic university colleges. Loreto College Ballarat is the first known convent boarding school in Australia to introduce the educational reforms that were also being implemented in England and Ireland to prepare women for university entrance. The presence of Julia Guerin in academic dress was a statement that Catholic girls were being encouraged to emulate her and to be academically trained whilst also pursuing their domestic goals.\(^{39}\)

Bishop James Quinn had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Irish Dominican nuns from Sion Hill, Dublin to establish an elite convent boarding school in his new diocese in Brisbane (1859). Wealthy Brisbane Catholic families had begun to send their daughters to Subiaco in Sydney, or overseas to a ‘finishing school’.\(^{40}\) The Australian bishops thus turned to the Mercy and Presentation Sisters to found similar elite convent schools.\(^{41}\) In Australia, these two Irish-founded congregations were successful in conducting convent boarding schools for girls, even though they did not have a history of commitment or experience in elite boarding school education in Europe or Ireland. They relied on personal schooling from their own privileged backgrounds as well as their prior experience of founding and conducting


\(^{41}\) From the mid-1800s, Tasmanian bishops, Willson and Murphy, expressed the wish for an order of nuns to open an elite boarding school for young ladies in their new dioceses.
new non-elite schools throughout Ireland and in Irish foreign missions such as Newfoundland (1833).\textsuperscript{42} In the late 1830s in Ireland, both of these institutes allowed for post-elementary paying day schools for the lower middle class.

In 1861, the Mercy Sisters (Table 1), led by Mother Vincent Whitty from Dublin, came to Brisbane and in 1863, opened All Hallows Convent Boarding and Day School in the elite French Ursuline tradition. Although there were small private establishments that offered schooling in the accomplishments around Brisbane, All Hallows was the first Queensland school dedicated to the education of girls to high school level. Pupils at All Hallows ranged in age from five to the mid-twenties.\textsuperscript{43} By 1880, the Mercy Sisters had introduced into All Hallows Mathematics and Latin along with the accomplishments subjects. In that same year, five All Hallows pupils were presented for the junior examination set by the University of Sydney (as the University of Queensland did not open until 1910). This decision was at the urging of Bishop Quinn who wished to refute the statements sometimes heard in the colony that ‘only music and painting excelled in the (sisters’) schools’.\textsuperscript{44} Church and private institutions that exclusively maintained the 18\textsuperscript{th} century accomplishments curriculum, such as Subiaco Convent Boarding School, would close by the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The Benedictine nuns of Subiaco withdrew from conducting schools as their ancient rule of enclosure prevented them or their students from engaging publicly with the demands of a modern secondary education.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Presentation Sister Xavier Lynch founded a mission in Newfoundland in 1833. Also Irish Mercy Sister Ursula Frayne came to Australia in 1842 from a Mercy Sisters’ Newfoundland mission.
\item \textsuperscript{43} School Register, Sisters of Mercy archive, All Hallows Brisbane.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Mahoney, \textit{Dieu Et Devoir: The Story of All Hallows’ School Brisbane 1861-1981}. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{45} MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia}. 252.
\end{itemize}
Table 1 Summary of key female religious institutes active in Australia from the 19th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female religious Institute</th>
<th>Foundations and style of school opened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benedictine Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations 1848-1921&lt;br&gt;- Founded one elite boarding school - Subiaco in the NSW colony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations from 1848&lt;br&gt;- 51 independent foundations: 13 directly from Ireland, 2 from England, one each from New Zealand and Argentina&lt;br&gt;- By 1907 had convent high schools attached to all foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations from 1866&lt;br&gt;- 8 independent foundations from Ireland before 1900&lt;br&gt;- Opened convent high schools and parish elementary schools in all states except South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dominican Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations from 1867 in Maitland New South Wales, in Adelaide in 1868 and Western Australia in 1899&lt;br&gt;- Opened elite convent high schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Loreto Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations from 1875 in Ballarat&lt;br&gt;- Established elite convent high schools and some parish elementary schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Charity Sisters</td>
<td>- Charitable work in prisons and hospitals from 1836&lt;br&gt;- Convent high schools from 1882 in Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Brigidine Sisters</td>
<td>- Foundations from Ireland from 1883&lt;br&gt;- Opened convent high schools</td>
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The Presentation and Mercy Sisters’ high schools

This section focuses on the early histories of the Presentation and Mercy institutes in Australia. Both institutes shared a similar ideology in their Rule and Constitutions of commitment to the poorest in society. This commitment of both institutes motivated their endeavours to be the first to introduce the ‘select’ high school model in Australia for girls for the middle and working classes. Historian of Catholic education in Australia, Ronald Fogarty describes the widespread incidence of convent high schools in Australia as the only systematised provision of further
education for girls before Federation. After Federation in 1901, state governments entered the field of secondary education as a public responsibility.\textsuperscript{46}

The pioneer Irishman, Bishop Brady in the Colony of Western Australian (1845-1871) invited the Irish Mercy Sisters to Perth in 1845 to establish an elite convent boarding school, but this attempt failed because of lack of funds. This was mostly due to the bishop’s financial mismanagement of substantial donations from the Vatican office of the Propagation of the Faith.\textsuperscript{47} He claimed that there were 4000 children that needed education, but on arrival in Western Australia, the Mercy Sisters, led by Mother Ursula Frayne, discovered that they had come 16,000 miles by sea for five Catholic students. The sisters resorted to walking miles into the bush each evening in search of pupils, so that from February to August of 1845 they had enrolled 100 girls of all religions in a ‘poor’ school.\textsuperscript{48} Many Catholics in the West Australian colony were not wealthy, and the wealthy Protestant families initially feared proselytising by the Catholic sisters. In May 1849, Ursula Frayne began a vigorous fundraising campaign and was successful in opening the first fee-paying high school for girls with the ‘accomplishments’ subjects a feature of the curriculum.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1857, Bishop Gould of Melbourne invited Mother Ursula Frayne to leave Perth to establish the Mercy sisters in his diocese. However, he directed her away from her plan to educate the Catholic poor in the city. He argued that the ‘poor rich girls’ of Melbourne Catholic society were more in need of a convent boarding school education.\textsuperscript{50} On arrival in Melbourne, Ursula Frayne discovered that the promised convent building had been mortgaged to pay for the bishop’s episcopal palace, and that the responsibility of fundraising to pay the debt on her convent was hers. Her decision to build a fee-paying convent boarding school for girls in Melbourne emerged more from a need to pay the debt on the convent mortgage, than from a vision to provide affordable education for children of the middle-class in mid-19th

\textsuperscript{46} Fogarty, \textit{Catholic Education in Australia, 1806-1950}, 2. 348.  
\textsuperscript{47} Killerby, \textit{Ursula Frayne: A Biography}. 127-128.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 127.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 127.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. 226.
Chapter 3: Secondary education for girls in Australia - Sea Pictures of old traditions in a new land

century Australia. The establishment of a ‘select’ secondary education for girls in Victoria in April 1857 is an example of the haphazard beginnings of Catholic secondary education for girls in Australia. Ursula Frayne placed advertisements in two leading Melbourne newspapers, the Age and the Argus, where she outlined her plans to open a ‘Boarding School for Young Ladies and a House of Mercy of standard select school fare’. She thought that a boarding school would appeal to families in country districts of Geelong and Warrnambool. 51

The first Presentation Sisters to arrive in Australia in 1866 were not specifically experienced in conducting convent boarding schools. Women who entered religious life to become Choir Sisters were usually educated women who could be trained for professional work such as teaching and to assume leadership roles in their order such as that of superior or bursar (Appendix 2). 52 At the invitation of Bishop Murphy, the Presentation Sisters from Fermoy, Ireland, led by the bishop’s sister, Mother Xavier Murphy, supplied members for the foundation in Tasmania. Bishop Murphy’s plan was that the well-respected sisters would open a convent boarding school in Hobart to draw pupils from families of the highest social circles in Tasmania and from all religious persuasions for moral formation and training in the refinements of female decorum. 53

Mother Xavier Murphy’s public advertisement in the Tasmanian Catholic Standard in 1868 promulgated the foundation principles for future secondary schools of the Presentation Sisters in Australia. 54 She stated that ‘St. Mary’s would comprise two schools, a free school for poor and destitute children, and a fee paying convent

51 Ibid. 226.
52 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 64. fn. 32. Only the daughters of wealthy families could afford the dowry to enter the Presentation Order as a choir nun. The Presentation dowry was generally £500, and the Dominican Order dowry in Dublin was £1000. Mary Aherne of Fermoy Presentation convent was refused profession until her mother paid her dowry. Raftery, Delaney, and Nowlan-Roebuck, Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy. 9-11. Raftery argues from research in 19th-century Presentation convent annals, that the dowry was waived at times to ensure sufficient numbers to staff schools.
53 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 68-70. The Fermoy Presentation Convent was founded in 1838 and its founding sisters were all educated at Ursuline elite convent boarding schools either at Blackrock or Thurles; ibid. 52. fn. 32. Hobart and Fermoy Presentation Sisters Annals.
boarding and day school for the upper and middle classes. The course of instruction in the fee-paying school would embrace the usual branch of a thorough English education as well as plain and fancy needlework'.

Both the Mercy and Presentation Sisters adapted their Rules when they responded to requests to establish educational institutions for the upper class in Australian society. The Mercy Institute as a ‘Congregation’ of sisters could move more freely in the community than the Presentation Sisters. On arrival in Australia in 1866, the Presentation Sisters’ Rule bound them to the canonical status of a ‘religious order’. They were hampered in their work by the rule of enclosure which restricted their movements outside the convent and which even precluded boarders from living in the convent precinct. The Presentation Rule and Constitutions, which had been formulated in a different age and culture, a century earlier in Ireland, did not allow the pioneer sisters to adapt readily to all the contingencies that confronted them. On arrival in Australia, the Presentation Sisters applied for papal rescripts to release them from the strict rules of enclosure and to modify their vow to teach only the poor, in order to respond to the bishop’s requests to conduct elite boarding and day schools.

As Australia progressed in the post-gold-rush economy of the 1870s a new middle class of small traders placed demands for further education as a pathway to employment and the possibility of social mobility for themselves and their children. New models of secondary education were created similar to those being established for the new middle-class of Ireland that paid more attention to the task of training girls to earn a living. From the latter part of the 19th century in Australia, the Mercy and Presentation Sisters established this model of a ‘select’ day and boarding convent school in urban middle-class districts and country regions. The two religious institutes worked independently and at times competitively in the same dioceses,

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55 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 69. fn. T.C.S. April 13, 1868.
56 Ibid. 75-76. The curriculum in Ireland in the Presentation poor schools was directed more to vocational training for trades that befitted the working-class status of those students in society.
rather than forming a coordinated systemic blue-print for girls’ Catholic secondary education.

Later, as an example of the competitiveness between the Mercy and the Presentation Institutes, the Mercy sisters conducting the girls’ convent boarding school in Rockhampton attempted to purchase property in Yeppoon in 1916 as the Presentation Sisters began the construction of St Ursula’s. Their attempt was denied by Bishop Joseph Shiel of Rockhampton.\textsuperscript{57} The consequence of this independent approach was that institutes of women religious relied initially on staffing personnel from their mother house in Ireland, and on the teaching competencies and standard of teacher training from within their own institute.

The rule of enclosure placed near impossible restrictions on the Presentation Sisters who had to seek episcopal permission by exchange of letters for each departure from normal routine, even for visits to the doctor and dentist. At official opening events for new convents, for example, whether in Wagga Wagga or the Victorian country town of Rutherglen in 1901, the Presentation Sisters were allowed to view the proceedings only through the cyclone fence on the other side of the road.\textsuperscript{58} Presentation Institute historian, Mary Rose MacGinley argues that the restrictions of enclosure disappeared as each foundation moved further away into remote regions of Australia.\textsuperscript{59} One example was that the Presentation Sisters in Queensland never implemented the rule that they were to travel in a carriage with the curtains drawn when they moved outside the convent.\textsuperscript{60}

In 1874, Presentation Sister Paul Mulquin led a community of sisters to Melbourne from the Irish Presentation convent in Limerick. In 1875, she advertised for prospective students to attend a ‘Select Day School of the Sacred Heart for Young Ladies’ in St Kilda, Melbourne. The curriculum was similar to that of the elite convent

\textsuperscript{57} Murtagh, “Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1.”
\textsuperscript{58} Dunlop-Kane, \textit{The Presentation Sisters in Victoria: Adventure in Faith}, 1873-1974, 85-89.
\textsuperscript{59} Mary Rose MacGinley, interview by Maree Ganley, 7 February 2011, Audio; Written response, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{A Place of Springs}, 286. One of Mother Ursula Kennedy’s recorded public appearances was up beside Mr Mellick of Longreach in a horse and cart riding out to the Thomson River to bring boys back to school who had gone swimming in the flooded river for the day.
boarding school and included English, French, and Italian Literature, music, drawing, geography, use of globes, and plain and ornamental needlework. The timetable was flexible to accommodate extra time preparing for ‘Soirees’. The purpose of the ‘Soirees’ was basically educational as ‘appropriate dress, the art of conversation, poise, good taste and the social graces were judged according to accepted standards’.61

In the 1880s, the Presentation convent of East St Kilda was surrounded by the great estates of landowners, barristers and politicians who assisted the parish priest, Father Corbett to raise funds to purchase property and buildings, and later stately convent chapels and high-walled fences.62 In 1876, the Presentation Sisters in Wagga Wagga, the regional centre of southern New South Wales, were able to occupy a Tudor-style convent, much of it funded by wealthy Irish pastoralists in the district.63 The Melbourne and Wagga Wagga Presentation Sisters could also afford to employ men and women lay subject specialists in Mathematics, sciences and the arts. Their secondary schools began to prepare girls to apply for university entrance when the University of Melbourne allowed women to attend in 1881. Into the mid-1880s, as well as matriculation classes, the Star of the Sea Presentation convent boarding school in Windsor, Melbourne (1883) continued to offer separate classes for those girls whose parents wished them to finish their schooling with the ‘accomplishments’.64

By the end of 1889, ten girls had completed university exams and matriculated from the Star of the Sea Presentation School. By the end of the 19th century, public examinations in Australia enabled girls to enter a wider range of professions than the traditional female professions of teaching, nursing and the public service. Well before the expansion of state secondary education throughout Australia, Catholic

61 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 177. MacGinley noted that the annual ‘High Tea’ organised at St Ursula’s in the 1950s emulated the Soirees of the first Presentation convent high schools in Melbourne.
62 Margaret Stewart Bullock, "Memories of School Days at "Star of the Sea" 1898-1907 " (Melbourne1969); MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 106-07.
63 Dowd and Tearle, Centenary, Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Wagga Wagga, Nsw, 1874-1974. 42.
64 Dunlop-Kane, The Presentation Sisters in Victoria: Adventure in Faith, 1873-1974. 64.
convent high schools and private ladies’ schools pioneered curriculum pathways for women to study at university and enter the male dominated professions.\textsuperscript{65}

O’Brien argues that, in the 1920s, when only a tiny fragment of the female population attended university, Catholic women had slightly more chance of finding their way to university than women from other church sponsored institutions.\textsuperscript{66} The prospect that a high school education sponsored by the state would reach beyond privileged social circles was yet to be readily accepted in early Australian society. The spread of state high schools was initially slow; a number of regional convent schools continued to offer – to boys as well as girls and to all religious affiliations – the only post-primary schooling available.\textsuperscript{67}

In 1905, Frank Tate, the Director of Education in Victoria, established Victoria’s first state post-elementary co-education school called the Melbourne Continuation School, renamed Melbourne High School in 1912. He had in mind the state’s answer to the exclusive boarding schools of the Protestant churches, and the convent boarding schools of the Catholic orders. The co-educational school started with 135 girls, most of whom would go on to the teaching profession and very few would go on to university.\textsuperscript{68} The public debate about the establishment of a state high school in Melbourne highlighted the class bias that persisted in Australian society. Protestant church leaders engaged in protracted bitter debates regarding whether the provision of secondary education should remain the prerogative of the church-sponsored exclusive schools and the upper classes.\textsuperscript{69}

Dr W H Fitchett, headmaster of the Methodist Ladies College in Melbourne, publicly argued that ‘the state’s entry into secondary education was a far too tangible manifestation of the radical social theory that affordable schooling should, and could, be available to the masses’. He argued ‘until that time, the independent

\textsuperscript{65} Theobald, \textit{Knowing Women: Origins of Women’s Education in Nineteenth Century Australia}. 94.
\textsuperscript{67} Mary Rose MacGinley, “Irish Women Religious and Their Convent High Schools in Nineteenth Century Australia,” \textit{Australian Catholic Record} 1 (2010). fn. 47. 16.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. 231-32.
schools had carved out a highly segregated post-elementary (secondary) education market niche by excluding those who could not afford their fees’. He concluded ‘that the deserving and intelligent poor, however, could be given a lift up the social and economic ladder through the allocation of a number of scholarships’.70

While most public statements from convents from the late 19th and early 20th century left no doubt that they vigorously defended traditional gender roles, prescribing the domestic life as natural for women, the difference in curriculum offerings for girls and boys at Melbourne High school confirmed that Australian society reinforced gender bias in education well into the 20th century. The ‘masculine’ subjects such as Mathematics and the sciences were timetabled against the compulsory cookery classes for girls. Female past pupils recorded that they hid their pots and pans under their long aprons and, with the help of a female science teacher, went to science classes instead of cookery.71 Girls had to be coached for university matriculation subjects outside of normal school hours and during Christmas holidays to qualify to sit the senior public university examinations.72

Melbourne High School catered for an emerging middle-class society and enrolments were selective, dependent on academic merit and the capacity of the family to pay the considerable fee of £6 per annum.73 Despite these limitations, it played a significant part in breaking down the social barriers that excluded middle and working-class girls from social mobility. The children of farmers, shopkeepers, engine drivers, carpenters and clerical workers wanted to become teachers or take on the higher level clerical positions in the banks, commerce and industry.74 In 1905, parents from regional areas of Victoria who sought state secondary education for their daughters had to meet school fees plus boarding charges as country girls had to have somewhere safe and respectable to live in Melbourne.75

70 Ibid. 49.
71 Ibid. 57.
72 Ibid. 71-72.
73 See Appendix 2 for full definition.
75 Ibid. 41.
From 1900, the Presentation Sisters established a number of secondary schools for girls in remote regions of Victoria and Queensland that also offered a curriculum that began to break down social barriers. In 1901, the Presentation Sisters from Elsternwick, Melbourne opened country convent schools in the mining towns of Rutherglen and Chiltern in northern Victoria. They prepared children for both the New South Wales and Victorian public examinations because of the schools’ proximity to both state borders. The sisters established Rutherglen convent and school as a new community and not as a branch house of their original convent in Elsternwick.

This independence came at a price, as the Rutherglen Presentation Sisters were left to finance and staff their schools. They had to recruit new members for the Rutherglen convent, and they relied on an income from music lessons and bazaars for financial survival. They experienced poverty, anxiety, and deprivation to maintain the school. In country Victoria in the early 20th century, when mines failed and outlying state schools closed, parents sent their children on buses each day to the Presentation school that remained open in Rutherglen. The Rutherglen and Chiltern schools were seen as models for the style of convent secondary education in country regions, as the Presentation Sisters began to establish schools from 1900 in central Queensland.

Queensland - a most isolated outpost for schooling

Longreach

On 13 February, 1900, five Presentation Sisters came from Wagga Wagga to Longreach in Central Queensland at the request of Bishop Higgins of the Rockhampton Diocese. They began elementary classes with eighty-nine pupils in the church building with a corrugated iron roof and just six desks and a blackboard. The number of pupils increased to 150 in a few weeks. At this time, Longreach was a remote rural town in central Queensland where there was no Catholic school

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77 Dunlop-Kane, *The Presentation Sisters in Victoria: Adventure in Faith, 1873-1974*. 87. Packing cases formed the major part of the furnishings in the convent.
and there would be no state high school established until the 1960s. The town population had grown significantly from 1892 when the railway line was completed. Families that had lived in tents and worked along the central western railway line for several years took up permanent residence. The Queensland foundation of the Presentation Sisters made several adaptations to the rule of enclosure after they opened their first convent school. One was that each new Presentation convent in Queensland would be a branch house of this Longreach ‘mother house’ and would be governed by a Mother General and four councillors.

All Queensland branch houses of the Presentation Sisters would share in the benefits of financial support from a central motherhouse, and there would be interchanges of personnel and ideas between their schools scattered around the state. The new Longreach Queensland Presentation foundation made a significant adaptation to the structure that existed within religious orders by distinguishing between two distinct social groups of ‘choir sisters’ and ‘lay sisters’. The choir sisters had a privileged place in the community, and they were admitted with a substantial dowry. They were the educators who could move up through the ranks to be superiors.

The lay sisters came from the ranks of women who wanted to follow a religious life in community and serve its aims in some useful capacity but who did not possess the education or the required dowry. Their religious life was confined to domestic work and they did not participate in the recital of liturgical office in the chapel or associate in community life with the choir sisters. Even though the distinction was retained in the southern Presentation convents of Australia well into the 20th century, it was abolished in Longreach soon after 1900. MacGinley argues that the sisters determined very early after arrival in Longreach that, if they were to survive in their work at all, a social class distinction in their ranks would not fit into the egalitarianism of the floating population of the Queensland inland.

79 MacGinley, Roads to Sion. 34.
80 MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 66.
The Presentation Sisters had gained a wealth of experience from establishing educational facilities for young ladies in Melbourne and New South Wales to senior matriculation level. In Longreach, they began classes for children of all ages and social classes, some of whom had earned a reputation as the most untamed children in the country.\(^{81}\) In 1912, on their own initiative, the pioneer sisters, then with Ursula Kennedy as superior, \textit{Error! Reference source not found.} eventually introduced secondary education to these boys and girls and included night school for post school-age men. Ursula Kennedy had been educated at the Holy Cross Presentation Convent School in Daylesford outside of Melbourne where she completed matriculation exams for Melbourne University and obtained a teacher certification.\(^{82}\)

Early Queensland Catholic church historian, Victor Gray records that, in Longreach in 1910, the Presentation Sisters conducted a ‘select’ convent high school for girls called Sacred Heart School for Young Ladies, and a ‘charitable institution’ called St Joseph’s Industrial School.\(^{83}\) The St Joseph’s ‘poor’ school offered basic literacy and numeracy, and vocational subjects such as dressmaking, needlework and shorthand. From 1912, Ursula Kennedy prepared candidates to sit for the new Queensland junior university public exams just two years after the University of Queensland opened.\(^{84}\) The curriculum was a combination of the accomplishment subjects of music and the arts, literature and languages, such as French and Latin, and vocation oriented subjects such as bookkeeping and typing. Through the public examination system both boys and girls secured work in the public service in the town or secured scholarships to the elite boarding schools in Brisbane and Rockhampton for further education.\(^{85}\) In 1914, children in Longreach were prepared

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\(^{81}\) Ibid. 50. (19). A missionary priest who travelled throughout Australia to parishes stated, “Of all the young heathens and untamed children I have met...the youth of Longreach is \textit{facile princeps}.”

\(^{82}\) MacGinley, \textit{Roads to Sion}. 142-47.


\(^{84}\) Murtagh, “Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1.”

\(^{85}\) Tom Boland, \textit{Nudgee 1891-1991: St Joseph’s College Nudgee} (Brisbane: Booralong Publicatons, 1991), History.; W.T. Southerwood, \textit{The Wisdom of Guilford Young} (Tasmania: Bookprint Pty Ltd, 1989). William Ahern was a local Longreach student who won a Scholarship to Nudgee College, Brisbane and topped his Senior Year 1914. Archbishop Guilford Young attained a scholarship to Christian Brothers’ School Rockhampton. He stated that he was never aware of his parents ever being able to pay fees.
for examinations for the Royal Academies of Music in London, a school orchestra gave public performances and an adult choir and town band were formed.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{mother_ursula_kennedy_circa_1920s.jpg}
\caption{Mother Ursula Kennedy circa 1920s}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{86} MacGinley, \textit{A Place of Springs}. 138. Student Muriel O’Malley had a successful international musical career.
Yeppoon (1917)

In 1913, the Presentation Sisters accepted an invitation from Bishop Joseph Shiel of Rockhampton (1913-1931) to establish a convent boarding and day school for girls in Yeppoon on the central coast of Queensland. In 1916, they purchased land in Yeppoon for a school and convent independently of Bishop Shiel and the Rockhampton Catholic diocese (Figure 3). This was the first sole ownership of private land and buildings by any of the Presentation foundations since their arrival in Australia in 1866. In a handwritten memoir, Mother Ursula Kennedy stated that the expenditure on land and buildings came from private funds and declared that St Ursula’s is ‘entirely the property of the Congregation in Queensland’. She went on to assert very carefully that the property ‘cannot be claimed as diocesan or parish property’. A handwritten note by Bishop Shiel on a transfer of deed in 1918 from Mr Henry Somerset Leeke of an acre of land declared that the land was purchased by the Presentation Sisters for £1150. The declarations of ownership of land and buildings in Yeppoon were even more momentous because of the treatment of the Presentation Sisters in Wagga Wagga regarding ownership of property. Wealthy laity had built the Sacred Heart Presentation Convent Mount Erin in 1874 for the sisters there, but the sisters were denied ownership of the property by Bishop Lanigan who appropriated the deeds of title.

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87 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon." Bishop James Duhig was appointed Archbishop of Brisbane in 1912.
88 Later in 1926 Sisters Patrick Madden and Ursula Kennedy jointly purchased land and buildings in Clayfield, Brisbane for a secondary college they called St. Rita's.
Figure 3 Map of Queensland, Australia, showing the Diocese of Rockhampton

1. Our Lady's College, Longreach.
2. Range Convent High School, Rockhampton.
3. St Brendan's College, Yeppoon.
4. St Ursulas College, Yeppoon.

Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden joined the ranks of women educators establishing private schools, and before beginning the work of teaching, supervised the construction of buildings (Figure 4). They also oversaw the installation and maintenance of utilities such as an independent water supply and a Delco gas lighting plant.\(^{93}\) In February 1917, the first advertisements calling for enrolments in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* referred to St Ursula’s Yeppoon as an educational institution for young ladies of equal standing in curriculum and conditions to the established church and independent academies in capital and regional cities.\(^{94}\)

![Figure 4 Picture of St Ursula’s in 1917](image)

St Ursula’s annalist, Sister Evangelist Murtagh, referred specifically to the enrolments of five young ladies ranging in age from ten to sixteen years as the first

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\(^{94}\) The *Morning Bulletin*, “St Ursula’s ”.10.
boarders. They were graduates from Our Lady’s Presentation Convent High School Longreach. Their enrolment at St Ursula’s suggests the Presentation Sisters intended that St Ursula’s was a superior ‘finishing school’ that would prepare young ladies for advanced levels in the accomplishments and for public examinations. From the records of enrolments in the St Ursula’s register from 1917, parents from middle and working-class backgrounds responded by enrolling for this advanced level of education for their daughters and sons. The Presentation Sisters expansion into new schools brought an added urgency to recruit applicants to join the order as Presentation Sisters and to be trained as teachers. In 1925, the Queensland Presentation Institute consisted of just thirty members. They had opened five schools, three in the Rockhampton diocese and two in Brisbane.

As a secondary boarding school in a small isolated seaside settlement, St Ursula’s could offer the attraction of a change of environment for children from the drier and sometimes harsher climate of the central west. The disadvantage was that those who could afford to send their daughter’s long distances for schooling continued to judge the convent boarding schools in the capital cities established by teaching orders from continental Europe to be more superior, both socially and educationally. The value placed on the perceived social and academic benefits of these city elite convent boarding schools continued to influence enrolment prospects at St Ursula’s as it attempted to establish comparable secondary education standards for young ladies in Central Queensland.

As St Ursula’s was becoming established, Archbishop James Duhig (1912-1965) expanded the number of elite convent boarding school institutions in his archdiocese of Brisbane. In 1924, he encouraged the Ursulines to purchase the private ladies’ college of Duporth at Oxley, previously owned and conducted by Mrs Janet O’Connor. In 1926, he purchased a property in Toowong for the French Order of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) as an exclusive Catholic

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95 Our lady of Good Counsel Girls College (The Range) Rockhampton opened in 1895. Rockhampton Girls Grammar School opened in 1892.
96 MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 178.
97 The Morning Bulletin, “St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.” The Morning Bulletin. 2; St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon." Day student enrolments included children staying temporarily with parents holidaying in Yeppoon to escape the heat of the outback.
boarding school for girls called Stuartholme. Families sought to be associated with the exclusive social experiences provided in these institutions rather than the less well-known St Ursula’s Yeppoon. In 1927, for example, Archbishop Duhig invited Dame Nellie Melba to sing at Stuartholme for the young ladies, assuring her that ‘they represent our best families’. He ensured, through such high-profile events, that a class distinction in Catholic education in Queensland was perpetuated well into the 20th century. The reputation for exclusivity at Stuartholme and All Hallows brought with it a presumption that they alone could deliver a superior standard of secondary education. The wealthier families of the west, with their potential to invest in their daughters’ education, sent their daughters to the more elite Brisbane convent boarding schools and St Ursula’s Yeppoon struggled without the financial benefits of more fee-paying students.

The St Ursula’s official school register of 1917 recorded a wide range of parents’ occupations and home addresses of those who were largely settled middle-class and working-class families in the bush. St Ursula’s provided an advantage as an affordable opportunity for a high school education by its being closer to isolated settlements. Except for rail travel, access to country regions was difficult up to World War II. St Ursula’s location saved the added expense of long distance travel several times a year and the prospect of girls returning home just once a year. The Presentation Sisters had experimented with adaptations to the curriculum from the elite French Ursuline tradition to accommodate the needs of isolated communities such as Longreach, and they applied that adapted model at St Ursula’s in its first year of opening. At the same time, the retention of much of the accomplishments curriculum in music, art and needlework, proved advantageous as it enriched the lives of country children and their local communities culturally.

The Presentation Sisters extended an accomplishments curriculum which originally prepared upper-class women for leading roles in society to other class levels in the Australian population. The girls from working-class and middle-class backgrounds experienced the complexity of blending the social class phenomenon of a

98 Boland, James Duhig. 204. fn. The Age Newspaper 8 November 1928.
99 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon." 1-2.
curriculum and lifestyle for the upper-class with their own backgrounds. It has not been possible to locate ideological statements regarding whether the Presentation Sisters intended to be agents of social change by offering a curriculum that originally was intended for an upper middle-class society.

In my research, I combined the data in the enrolment register, with the interviews and the newspaper reports of results to draw several conclusions. I concluded that, on the one hand, the sisters adopted a pragmatic approach to conducting a fee-paying convent boarding school for financial survival. The ideal to include the needs of the poorest in society economically and socially was limited by lack of financial support and the prevailing social restrictions enshrined in law that prevented minority groups such as the Indigenous population to access a convent boarding school education. However, the Presentation Sisters established the foundations of an education tradition at St Ursula’s that was based less on class, wealth or gender, and more towards an egalitarian society based on merit, skills and contribution to society. The significant beneficiaries of this education tradition were the working-class families in isolated regions of the central west of Queensland who did not have access to free state secondary education until the mid-1960s. From the interviews, I gathered stories of the sacrifices these families made to access advanced education in their region.

Conclusion

O’Brien argues that a characteristic of the education of girls introduced by institutes of women religious in Australia was one of diversity – most of it the result of class inequality.\(^\text{100}\) This approach in Australia replicated the work of institutes of women religious in Ireland from the late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century. There, some convent schools diversified the traditional convent school curriculum by introducing subjects for middle-class and some working-class girls that enabled these students to qualify for clerical and further education. The schools were introduced in response to new social and educational pressures in the colony. For the first Presentation Sisters from Ireland, to have come at all indicated a willingness to take chances and

welcome change to improve the spiritual and material circumstances for the people they came to serve. They were a part of the Irish missionary effort as they went into exile in the new colonies of the British Empire ‘for the sake of the kingdom’. The initiative they had shown did not remove the very real challenges presented by colonial life, which included the different climate, the alien landscape, the slowness of communication, the sparseness of rural settlement and the rudimentary character of the towns.

The secondary education model introduced into St Ursula’s Yeppoon had emerged from the cross currents of social and pedagogical change experienced over several centuries by the Presentation Sisters whose initial focus was a basic education for poor girls. Their contribution in Queensland to the education for girls in particular is that they extended their original commitment of basic education for the poor and established secondary education in rural regions up to fifty years before state run institutions. Their contribution to the development of rural secondary education was, in fact, valued because working-class and middle-class children were introduced to the accomplishments curriculum which was highly prized and seen as an indicator of education, culture and a civilised society.

The sisters initially introduced and maintained a curriculum with an emphasis on the recognised cultural accomplishments such as music, art and languages. It also included a range of subject areas such as English literature, grammar, arithmetic, history, geography and classics. By 1910, most Catholic girls’ secondary schools offered an increasing diversity of subjects including domestic science and commercial studies that equipped girls for clerical and public service. However, the value placed on the perceived social and academic benefits of attending a city-based elite convent boarding school for education in high culture continued to affect enrolment prospects at St Ursula’s from its earliest years.

The essential nature of the Australian colonial experience varied considerably between more affluent societies to those living barely above subsistence level. The

geographical and social settings into which women religious were introduced were not the only challenges. Much resistance to the corporate and personal initiative required for missionary work in education came from within the Church itself. There were allowances made by bishops for adaptations during the pioneering phases of new foundations such as when the Presentation Sisters were being established in Queensland from 1900. However, throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Church renewed and imposed further restrictions which were enshrined in canonical law. It aimed to centralise authority and give stronger judicial rights to bishops and major religious superiors to monitor the function of groups of women religious.102

From 1917, the Presentation Sisters adopted state and public standards in secular subjects in their ‘select’ convent high schools. Fogarty argues that the general direction of Catholic education in Australia was influenced by the determination of religious teaching orders to ensure a guarantee of efficiency and an assurance to parents that the Catholic school was meeting state standards.103 Historians of Australian Catholic girls’ secondary education, Anne McLay and Sophie McGrath, have argued that much of the cultural capital of the accomplishments curriculum was lost in the commitment to the public examination system.104

A competitive mentality developed in relation to examination results between Catholic and state institutions, and even between different religious institutes for the sake of maintaining student numbers and to attract whatever government funding was available. As a result, non-examinable subjects such as the creative arts, literature and domestic crafts, which had been significant features of a convent boarding school education, were phased out in the secondary school curriculum. These were the rich cultural traditions in the arts, built up over centuries and nurtured in the monasteries and convents of Europe and the British Isles.105 The

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onus was on religious communities to survive financially, and the creative arts of music, visual art and dance, that were once core subjects in the convent school curriculum, were taught for an extra cost delivered by the sisters after hours. In turn, parents made extra financial sacrifices to pay for these lessons in the arts.\textsuperscript{106}

By 1920, St Ursula's established its place in the central west as a registered secondary school that had pushed the social boundaries by accepting students from diverse white socio-economic backgrounds. Sister Teresita Ahern trained as a teacher in the state system in Brisbane and joined the Presentation Sisters in 1933. She taught for three months at St Ursula's as a postulant in the order before moving to Longreach to begin her training as a religious sister. This was Sister Teresita's first exposure to the work of the Presentation Sisters as she was educated by the Mercy Sisters. She observed that the superior Mother Evangelist Murtagh seemed to have adopted the policy that ‘no-one is turned away’.\textsuperscript{107} Maintaining this policy threatened St Ursula’s economic survival, particularly in the difficult years of depression and World War II.

Despite some diversity of social and cultural differences in the life experiences of students who came to boarding school, St Ursula’s retained the traditional character in the lifestyle of a Catholic convent boarding school of past ages during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Sally Kennedy argues that by the end of the 1920s, the entry of Catholic girls into university and the preparation of larger numbers for the workforce contributed to a shift in Catholic imagery from the 19\textsuperscript{th} century cult of the lady, to ‘the true woman’ of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{106} Jane (Fraser) Jordison, interview by Maree Ganley, 3 February 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane; Harper, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{107} Ahern, "Interview."
Chapter four

The keeper of the keys - Sea Pictures from the superiors’ window

Introduction

This chapter explores the traditions of leadership of superior and principal introduced by the first two pioneer major superiors of the Presentation Sisters after their arrival in Queensland in 1900. Mother Ursula Kennedy and Mother Patrick Madden were the Queensland major superiors (termed Mother Generals) responsible for the establishment of two secondary girls’ colleges, St Ursula’s in 1917 and St Rita’s in Clayfield, Brisbane in 1926. By 1959, they had opened twenty-two schools both primary and secondary throughout the state.¹

At Ursula Kennedy’s state-like funeral in St Stephen’s Cathedral Brisbane in May 1960, past pupil from Longreach, Archbishop Guildford Young DD referred to her as a ‘nation builder’ and the ‘pillar of the order’.² The pioneer founders of St Ursula’s, Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden, as women religious leaders, performed their role with the full force of the canonical authority of the Church. As such, the superior of a religious community could command the respect of bishops, priests and the wider community. This chapter will investigate the specific context of the practice of the leadership roles of superior and principal at St Ursula’s in so far as it impacted on the daily lives of students and staff.

The popular view of the ‘Mother Superior’ of a religious community has portrayed a woman in this role as a powerful figure and the ‘keeper of the keys’ of the seeming impenetrable fortress of a convent and boarding school precinct.³ This portrayal has been largely a feudal construct and stems from the enduring organisational mould of early female religious life and by the growing precision of Catholic Canon Law

¹ MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 287.
regarding religious life from the 12th century onwards. The Rule and Constitutions approved by the Church for the Presentation Sisters in 1775, invested in the superior the authority to direct a structured and rule-driven lifestyle for religious women that had not changed from the beginnings of monasticism in early modern Europe.

The Canon Law of the Catholic Church is the system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by its hierarchical authorities. Through Canon Law, the Church can regulate its external organisation and government and can order and direct the activities of Catholic organisations towards the mission of the Church. St Ursula’s opened in the same year as the release of the new Code of Canon Law in the Catholic Church of 1917 which crystallised the emphasis on centralised control and standardisation of institutes of women religious and consecrated life. The new Code was characteristic of a church that was hierarchical and whose techniques of balancing power tended to be vertical. American religious sister, Rose McDermott argues that in the post Vatican II era, the revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 continued to be discriminatory towards women in the church but gave women religious an improved autonomy in the government of their respective institutes.

The systems of convent and school administration at St Ursula’s for the first eighty years operated very much the same as the inner workings of a religious order. In that era, the religious order’s structure was democratic only at its highest level. That is, the structure was based on government by leading officials elected in General Chapter by elected delegates of all the professed members every six years. This democratic form of elections, however, did not extend to other aspects of governance in a religious institute until the revisions occurred of the Rule and Constitutions into the 21st century. The highest superior (Mother General) was assisted by an assistant Mother General next in order of importance and power, followed by four members who formed the rest of the governing council and who were definitely lower on the hierarchical ladder. Local officials such as the superior

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6 Ibid. 9.
of each convent were appointed by the Mother General and her Councillors. In each house of the Presentation Institute, the sisters sat in order of seniority at table, in chapel and in the community room. The quality of bedrooms, for example, were received in order of seniority.

Historian and member of the Mercy Sisters, Anne Mc Lay argues that, ‘All in all, maintaining the hierarchical structures of a religious institute seemed at times more important than developing the Kingdom’. The energy to maintain rules and regulations overshadowed the effort to perform the missionary works. In 2000, the draft Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Sisters, Queensland reflected the shift in the understanding of leadership and authority in a religious community. It stated that ‘the responsible exercise of authority is characterised by the principle of subsidiarity: that is, decisions are made at an appropriate level’. Mc Lay asserts that ‘when the structures were finally made more flexible in the wake of Vatican II the many departures from religious life were an indication of an underlying hidden rebellion over time against the restrictions imposed by the multitude of rules and regulations.’

**School administration leadership - selection criteria, formation and structure**

Staff and students in religious communities such as St Ursula’s recalled from their schooling and boarding experiences that the discipline in both school and convent was at times similar to that of an army. The many regulations for women religious became part of the school life of students and staff so that an organisation such as a secondary boarding school functioned in a disciplined way without too much overt conflict. Retired sister-superiors reported that there was an absence of training and appropriate selection criteria for their role of superior and principal, and they were

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expected to apply the highly regulated system of convent rule to school administration.¹²

The Queensland Presentation Mother General and her councillors (Figure 5) acted with the authority of a school board of directors by appointing the superior/principal to St Ursula’s and formulating major policies for incoming superiors for the administration of convent and school.¹³ They appointed superiors from the ranks of Queensland Presentation Sisters and, as far as can be established, the criteria for the appointment of a religious sister to the position of superior/principal until the mid-20th century were: a commitment to the core values of the Catholic Church, the Rule and Constitutions of the religious institute; and some personal maturity.¹⁴ The sister-principal was appointed for a period of three years which could be extended to a further three years but not for a third term in the same convent. The unchallengeable power invested in the role of superior had consequences for students and staff as they at times experienced the consequences of women religious exercising their authority in ways that caused widespread unhappiness.¹⁵

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¹² Sister Patricia McCarthy, interview by Maree Ganley, 21 September 2009.; McGrath, "Interview."
¹⁴ MacGinley, "Interview."
¹⁵ Noelle Melrose, ibid., 18 February 2015, Audio.
There were just seventeen members in the Queensland Presentation Institute when St Ursula’s opened in 1917.\textsuperscript{16} Mother Patrick Madden (1876-1962) was the first superior and leader of St Ursula’s. Mary Madden (Mother Patrick) was forty-one years old when she was appointed St Ursula’s first Superior in 1917. She was educated in the primary school conducted by the Presentation Sisters in Galway City, Ireland. She was seventeen when she came alone to Australia to join the Presentation Sisters in Wagga Wagga where her aunt Sister Alphonsus Burke was in the community. Mother Patrick volunteered to be one of the founding members in Longreach in 1900 from Wagga Wagga and was later a founding member of St Patrick’s convent and school in Emerald in 1902.\textsuperscript{17}

Her role of superior was challenging as she pioneered secondary boarding school education in the remote township of Yeppoon in 1917. The 1917 Code of Canon Law re-affirmed a seeming permanence and constriction in religious customs, mode

\textsuperscript{16} Murtagh, “Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1.” 67.
\textsuperscript{17} MacGinley, \textit{A Place of Springs}. 58.
of dress and expressions of spirituality characteristic of the recorded beginnings of female monastic life in the Western Church. It seemingly left very little room for personal initiative for the superior or her community members to establish an independent educational enterprise. From the reports of the progress in building programs and curriculum implementation during the time of appointment of each superior, however, I gathered that the superior/principals exercised considerable independence as they attempted to fulfil the mission of their order and the needs of the local Catholic diocese. Newspaper reports and the oral histories have been at times the only record of how each of the superiors interpreted the broad, general statements in the Presentation Institute’s Rule and Constitutions about a commitment to the poor and the education of girls in modern 20th-century contexts.

Superior and principal roles, coordination and conflict

The combination of the roles of superior of a convent with that of principal of the school was a common practice in both women and men’s religious institutes involved in secondary education. The lists of the principals of All Hallows Catholic boarding school from 1861-1984 illustrate that, until 1933, the Reverend Mother (superior) of All Hallows or her deputy, fulfilled the role of principal assisted by a sister-in-charge. As a contrast, the official history of Rockhampton Girls Grammar, records the names of principals of the college from 1892. It is not until 1956 that there is mention of a matron of the school and supervisor of its boarding house. The appendices in the history of Rockhampton Girls Grammar does not acknowledge any official role of director or supervisor of the boarding house, so it is presumed that initially the principal filled that role also, as did the superior/principal of St Ursula’s.18

The superior/principal of a religious community of women such as St Ursula’s came from the ranks of the community of sisters themselves. In contrast, the Trustees of Rockhampton Grammar School would advertise widely for a new headmistress throughout Australia and England and with no set period of appointment. The headmistress was selected from an international pool, according to the highest

academic qualifications and experience possible. This process did not always guarantee the desired outcomes of higher student academic results or an increase in student numbers.\textsuperscript{19}

The performance of the principal in the Grammar school was under constant scrutiny from an external agency. This agency was the employing authority of the School Board of Trustees. Miss Helen Downes (1892-1897) was the founding headmistress of Rockhampton Girls Grammar. The school opened in 1892, and Helen Downes impressed the school board with her educational philosophy and practice, to the extent that she was granted leave after five years to study the latest educational developments in Britain.\textsuperscript{20} At St Ursula’s, it was not until 1979, that Sister Bernadette Fleming was appointed as the first principal with secondary school administrative qualifications.\textsuperscript{21}

The Rockhampton Grammar School Trustees were responsible for the financing of buildings, and the employment of the principal. The principal conducted her school according to her education philosophy and practice. However, the finances were not always available as numbers fluctuated in the boarding school during drought and the depression. Headmistress, Miss Smith (1925-1948) publicly complained of the short-sightedness of the Trustees’ decision not to support the construction of suitable science facilities for the girls.\textsuperscript{22} Longevity in office for some of the headmistresses of Rockhampton Girls Grammar contrasted with the obligatory six years of the superior-principals of a convent boarding school. Longevity in the position was an advantage as two long-serving Headmistresses of Rockhampton Girls Grammar, Miss Margaret Smith (1925-1948) and Miss Millicent Jackson (1958-70) administered the school through some of the most troublesome times of the great depression and World War II.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Fleming, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{22} Cosgrove, \textit{The Wider View: Rockhampton Girls Grammar: A Social History}. 63.
Each superior of St Ursula’s filled the dual role of superior and principal until a sister principal, Sister Rosa MacGinley was appointed as administrator of school affairs in 1954. Though newly professed as a young Presentation sister in her early twenties, Rosa MacGinley came to St Ursula’s with an educational background in science and maths to senior matriculation level. While at St Ursula’s, she completed her first university degree in Arts by external studies and upgraded her science qualifications at the newly established Institute of Advanced Education Rockhampton. There was an undocumented expectation that she would guide St Ursula’s into the next stage of secondary education development in Queensland. In the mid-1950s, there were larger numbers of students seeking public service positions that required further training before leaving school, and more students than in previous years in St Ursula’s history sought senior matriculation to qualify for teaching and undergraduate studies at the University of Queensland.

The separation of the roles of superior and principal in 1954 was the result of the recognition by the Queensland Presentation Sisters that the superior could no longer rely on her authoritative position alone to administer a secondary school. However, the independence of the principal extended only to the timetable, official documentation for state department communication, assessment procedures, and the daily routine of the school. The superior, not the principal, retained control of the school budget and student discipline, both in the classroom and boarding house. Before 1954, the superior managed the juxtaposition between superior and principal. On the one hand, she was required to be a restrictive authoritarian model of leadership as superior reinforced by Church law. On the other hand, in order for the school to remain relevant, she was required to be a principal who addressed the need for adaptation and change.

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23 MacGinley, "Interview."
24 Ibid.
The St Ursula’s experience of administrative leadership – convent and school

The superior exercised authority in two major areas that impacted on the daily life and experiences of students and staff: the administrative tasks of superior, as leader of a religious community, and of principal, as the leader of an educational institution. The role of principal as administrator of a public educational institution required a different orientation from the pastoral role of superior.26 From earliest eyewitness accounts from St Ursula’s, we learn that the superior maintained a strong supervisory presence in classrooms and dormitories. Sister Teresita Ahern recalled the superior’s daily activities:

Mother Evangelist Murtagh (1933-1939; 1946-1948) was always looking in and checking up and let teachers know if things were not right. All decisions went through her and she met the public for business, did the books and was meticulous in keeping accounts. At the end of each year she finalised business dealings and made sure everyone had been paid.27

Issues and tensions emerged for both staff and students in the mid-1960s when there was a need for radical changes to the traditional exercise of an authoritarian model of leadership by the superior.28 The authoritarian model of leadership by a religious superior was gradually dismantled by the late 1970s, in line with the recommendations of Vatican II (1962-65).29 This movement in religious life coincided with the need to establish a specialised principal role at St Ursula’s because of steep increases in student enrolments and the complexities of implementing change in the Australian secondary school curriculum.

The key responsibilities of the superior of St Ursula’s Yeppoon from the early 20th century were numerous. They included financing the resourcing of infrastructure

26 MacGinley, A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia, 340.
27 Ahern, "Interview." Experiences during Mother Evangelist’s term of office (1933-39).
28 De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools, 158. De Bare argues on a more universal scale, that by the 1960s, girls’ secondary schools in America, having forgotten their radical roots, had retained uncritically their traditions and rules, and seemed trapped in a time warp, while other aspects of American society broke open around them.
29 Vatican Council (1962-65) was the most significant event in the modern era of the Catholic Church.
and school supplies, overseeing the commitment of an independent educational institution to state educational standards and curriculum development, being accountable to the local bishop as leader of the local Catholic diocese, and caring for and supervising the sisters and students in their extended household. Throughout much of St Ursula’s history, the superior was also director of boarding school affairs and had ultimate responsibility for adequate living conditions and for ensuring each girl returned to her family safely. The history of boarding schools in Europe and the British Isles into the 19th century reveals that these outcomes were not always guaranteed for boarders. Every superior in the history of St Ursula’s dealt with critical occurrences involving children or distant family members, some more than 700 kilometres away. There were no fatalities amongst the boarders throughout its history, but there were near misses, most related to boarders from the bush with little experience in the water.

Students rarely caught a glimpse behind the scenes of their larger than usual family in which the head of the house balanced the budget, looked after the well-being of everyone in the household and administered the curriculum of a secondary school. Education theorist, Clive Dimmock summarised effective leadership under three ‘metaphors of purpose’ – maintenance, survival and vision. The superiors maintained St Ursula’s as a convent boarding school that opened in the middle of one world war, survived through a depression and another world war, and adapted to keep pace with the rapidly changing developments in secondary education across eighty years. Ultimately, the superiors managed St Ursula’s as both a large household for students who came from a wide range of family situations and an affordable secondary school.

The combined responsibilities in the role of superior/principal were in place at St Ursula’s from 1917 until 1953, after which time there was an unofficial appointment

30 Presentation, Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Virgin Mary, 71-73.
31 McCarthy, “Interview.” Patricia McCarthy escorted the boarders on the long train journeys home.
32 Lougee, “Its Frequent Visitor: Death at Boarding School in Early Modern Europe.”
33 A young boarder and her father were drowned when they went for a picnic to a nearby beach in 1951.
of a principal to administer school affairs.  

One sister reassumed both roles in 1983 until 1995 when, in keeping with the spirit of the new Rule and Constitutions of 1983, sisters could choose to fill administrative roles in their schools. No one volunteered to be principal of St Ursula’s, except Sister Marion Kingston. From 1983, a lay deputy principal administered the curriculum, assessment procedures and the daily function of school life, and Sister Marion assumed the role of superior as well as principal.  

The search for a leader of convent and school

The leadership role is examined from the perspectives of ‘the nature of the organisation, the goals pursued, individuals involved, time frames, and personal traits of the leaders themselves’; factors which had an impact on the daily lives of staff and students.  

Sister Evangelist Murtagh completed a memoir in the 1960s of the first fifty years of St Ursula’s history, focusing particularly on her own role as religious superior/principal (1930-1939 and 1946-1948).  

Rosa MacGinley wrote a history of the Presentation Sisters in Queensland (1900-1960) that included some eyewitness accounts of the personal leadership style of the early superiors.  

An examination of these documents reveals that Ursula Kennedy, the Mother General of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, for much of the first fifty years of St Ursula’s, frequently visited the school and gave strong direction to the superiors in all aspects of the school’s development. She adapted the traditional role of ‘mother superior’, with its privileged status of administration only, to one in which the superiors/principals of St Ursula’s also taught and performed domestic work.  

Because of the small numbers of sisters and their total independence and isolation

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35 Mahoney, *Dieu Et Devoir: The Story of All Hallows’ School Brisbane 1861-1981.* 334. Sister Jean-Marie Mahoney notes that, until 1933, ‘the Reverend Mother of All Hallows Congregation of the Mercy Sisters also fulfilled the role of principal’.

36 Veronica Pedwell, interview by Maree Ganley, 3 November 2014, ACU Brisbane.


38 Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”

39 MacGinley, *A Place of Springs.*

40 Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”

41 “Biographies of the Founding Sisters.”
from southern Australian foundations, there were few candidates for selection for a superior/principal from within the Queensland Presentation Sisters. The sisters could gain practical experience in administration of secondary education only at St Rita’s, Queensland’s other Presentation secondary school (founded in Brisbane in 1926).

There were thirteen superiors and one lay principal appointed over eighty years (Table 1). The first superior, Mother Patrick Madden (1917-1923) was born and educated in Ireland in a convent boarding school, but all the superiors that followed her were Australian born and educated. The first three superiors/principals (1917-1932) Mothers Patrick Madden, Clare McMahon (1923-1927) and Aloysius Ryan (1928-1932) had received similar standards in the French Ursuline tradition of elite education, and all taught accomplishment subjects at St Ursula’s such as art, violin, singing and some school classes.

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42 The idea that a lay principal in a Catholic school could fulfil the role as adequately as a religious sister would not be considered until the second half of the 20th century in Australia.

43 After the Yeppoon foundation in 1917, the Presentation sisters began to commit more to opening primary schools throughout Queensland.
### Table 2 Superiors/Principals of St Ursula's Yeppoon from 1917 to current

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superiors/Principals</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Patrick Madden</td>
<td>1917-1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Clare McMahon</td>
<td>1923-1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Aloysius Ryan</td>
<td>1928-1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Evangelist Murtagh</td>
<td>1933-1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Angela Murtagh</td>
<td>1940-1945</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother Evangelist Murtagh</td>
<td>1946-1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother Angela Murtagh</td>
<td>1949-1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Dorothea Hegarty</td>
<td>1952-1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Rosa MacGinley (Principal)</td>
<td>1954-1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Raymond Lloyd (Superior)</td>
<td>1958-1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Patricia McCarthy (Superior)</td>
<td>1962-1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Barbara Houlihan (Superior/Principal)</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Loyola McGrath (Principal)</td>
<td>1968-1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Aileen Fahey (Superior)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marie Therese Dwyer (Principal)</td>
<td>1974-1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Andrea McGrath (Superior)</td>
<td>1974-1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marie Therese Dwyer (Superior)</td>
<td>1979-1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Bernadette Fleming &amp; Sister Kathleen Tynan (Principals)</td>
<td>1979-1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marie Therese Dwyer (Superior)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Peta Anne Molloy (Principal)</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marion Kingston (Principal)</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Peta Anne Molloy (Principal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marion Kingston (Principal/Superior)</td>
<td>1984-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Patrice Cuthbert (Director of boarding)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marion Kingston (Principal/Superior)</td>
<td>1989-1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Suzanne Gentle (Director of boarding)</td>
<td>1989-1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Marion Kingston (Principal/Superior)</td>
<td>1992-1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Margaret Ramsay (Principal)</td>
<td>1996-2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Catherine Dunbar (Principal)</td>
<td>2005-current</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the first thirty-four years, the leadership of St Ursula’s was shared by women, some of whom were blood relations. Kathleen McMahon (Sister Clare 1923-1927) and Catherine Ryan (Sister Aloysius Ryan 1928-1932) were cousins and were related to sisters in the pioneer community of Longreach. Clara Murtagh (Sister Evangelist 1933-1939; 1946-1948) and Norah Murtagh (Sister Angela 1940-1945;
1949-1951) were sisters and were amongst the early boarder pupils of Mother Ursula Kennedy in Longreach. Between 1933 and 1952, the leadership of St Ursula’s alternated every three years between the two superiors, Mother Evangelist Murtagh and Mother Angela Murtagh. Mother Angela Murtagh was a founding member of St Rita’s boarding school for girls in Brisbane from 1926, before she took up her role as superior of St Ursula’s in 1940.

Figure 6 Presentation Superiors, Aloysius Ryan, Clare McMahon and Michael McMahon circa 1920s
These pioneer sisters, firstly as pupils of Ursula Kennedy and later as superiors, gave loyal support to Ursula Kennedy in the Mother General role throughout her life-time, despite her ill-health and advanced age. When new leadership models were required to guide St Ursula’s and the Queensland Presentation Institute into the future, the pioneer sisters would continue to vote Ursula Kennedy into power as mother general.¹ Ursula Kennedy’s influence on the foundation and progress of schools like St Ursula’s is evident from the fact that she was the mother general of the Queensland Presentation Institute for thirty-two of the first forty-seven years of St Ursula’s, until 1960 when she died at age eighty-four.

**Funding an affordable convent boarding school**

St Ursula’s was the Presentation Institute’s first experience of owning property and buildings since its arrival in Australia in 1866. This new venture presented financial challenges for the first superiors as their first schools and convents Australia-wide had been built at the expense of the local Catholic parishioners. The Queensland Presentation Sisters purchased the Yeppoon property, organised construction and were responsible for the ‘maintenance, survival and vision’ of an independent educational venture.² Revenue from school fees was the first and obvious source of income for a private school, but economic survival depended on the sisters’ capacity to offer extra fee-paying specialised lessons of music, painting and art of speech.³

Throughout its eighty-year history, St Ursula’s was not the beneficiary of any significant monetary donations or bequests except from the Martin brothers who were property owners from Emerald. The Martin families had three daughters (Figure 7) at St Ursula’s from 1918-1924 and donated money to St Ursula’s at its opening.⁴ The superiors raised the funds themselves to clear the major debts from the construction of two buildings in the first thirty years of St Ursula’s without any financial support from the bishops of the diocese. Account books for Longreach and

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¹ Tynan, “Interview.”
³ Doris Whitwell, Personal Collection of Margaret (Whitwell) Cooper, 1918-1923.
⁴ Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”
Emerald held in the Queensland Presentation archives record that between 1916 and 1921, both the Longreach and Emerald convents contributed to a Yeppoon Building Fund. There was the sum of £1386 from Longreach and £433 from Emerald convents.5

Figure 7 The three Martin girls from Emerald (1918-1924)

5 Presentation Sisters Longreach, "Account's Record," ed. Longreach Convent Archive (Longreach: Presentation Sisters, 1900). The source of the funds is not identified e.g. whether the funds came from donations or local fundraising.
Mother Patrick Madden joined the ranks of those women who became the nation’s early fundraisers. At the end of the school’s first year, a small band of sisters supported her to conduct the first fundraising bazaar and concert in Yeppoon. This was a traditional church fundraising activity, initially known as a ‘bazaar’ and later called a ‘fete’. Mother Patrick was a gifted musician who trained solo singers and staged orchestral entertainment in the Yeppoon Myola Hall with all the stringed instruments used in those days. Ursula Kennedy and Sister Aloysius Ryan, who was also a gifted musician, travelled the long steam train journey of 638 kilometres from Longreach to Yeppoon to assist with the first concert preparations.

The opportunity for raising funds at the seaside of Yeppoon occurred during the Christmas period when the students had returned to their homes, freeing the sisters to begin their fundraising. The sisters capitalised on the increase in population by holding the bazaars, concerts and dances in peak times between Boxing Day and New Year. In 1919, for example, a bazaar held in the grounds of Mr J. O’Brien in Yeppoon over two nights, beginning on Boxing night, was followed by a dance in the newly opened Myola Hall. The proceeds helped the sisters clear a debt of £900 on the convent building. By 1923, the sisters had expanded the facilities with another two-storey building to provide accommodation and a small chapel for the sisters, and a classroom refectory and maid’s facilities at a cost of £8000.

St Ursula’s was debt-free from 1929, but the income from school and boarding fees and annual bazaars alone could not support the ongoing needs for extensions to classrooms and the employment of extra lay teachers. The fees for the boarders in the select convent school section of St Ursula’s were £34 per annum and £8.10 per term, and there was an entrance fee of £2.2. The fees for The Range Catholic Girls Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies in Rockhampton were comparable

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8 Sister Evangelist Murtagh, 24 October 1984.
9 “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”
11 £8000 in 1923 is equivalent to over $500,000 in 2016.
12 The annual basic wage in 1917 was £2012 or £47 per week.
at £36 per annum.\textsuperscript{13} As a comparison, the school fees for Nudgee College Catholic Boys Boarding College conducted by the Christian Brothers in Brisbane was approximately £44 per annum plus the cost of travel to and from Brisbane.\textsuperscript{14} St Ursula’s managed financially through the income from boarding and school fees, after-hour’s music and art of speech lessons by the sisters, and donations of food from local farms.\textsuperscript{15} A coordinated financial management plan on a diocesan level, for the growing number of Catholic educational institutions in central Queensland, did not emerge until the mid-1960s when there were fifty-seven Catholic schools in the diocese.\textsuperscript{16}

The superior as principal of a secondary school (1917-1951)

The first superior/principal, Mary Madden (Mother Patrick, 1918-1923) signed herself as School Headmistress on the first report cards. She introduced a range of state approved subjects, so that, by 1920, on application to the Department of Public Instruction, St Ursula’s was awarded registration as a secondary college.\textsuperscript{17} Madden and Kennedy had high expectations of drawing students from middle and upper class ranks of rural society, judging by the early advertisements and the formal declaration of St Ursula’s as a ‘high school’ in 1918. They embarked on an educational experiment to transplant the ‘accomplishments’ curriculum and lifestyle to the remote and challenging surroundings of Central Queensland at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The school register, beginning in 1917, records that the greatest number of enrolments came from day students for elementary schooling. This, however, which was not a source of constant income.\textsuperscript{18}

The enrolment register records parents’ diverse social backgrounds. These parents enrolled girls and boys from bush settlements as boarders or day students and in

\textsuperscript{14} Boland, \textit{Nudgee 1891-1991: St Joseph’s College Nudgee}. 46.
\textsuperscript{15} Browning, \textit{Always Mindful: A History of Catholic Education in Central Queensland 1863-1990}. 92.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 188-89.
\textsuperscript{17} Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”
\textsuperscript{18} Presentation Sisters Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s Convent,” in \textit{Photocopied file}, ed. Presentation Sisters Archive (St Ursula’s Yeppoon1917). 1-2.
Chapter 4: The keeper of the keys - Sea Pictures from the superiors’ window

some cases with little or no previous schooling.\textsuperscript{19} The fee-paying boarders and some day students were introduced to a curriculum with an emphasis on French and Latin, music, art and ornate needlework alongside the basics of English, arithmetic and bookkeeping.\textsuperscript{20} Madden retained some of the refinement subjects from the accomplishments curriculum of a 19\textsuperscript{th}-century convent school tradition, and, as a result, country girls were introduced to the possibility of advanced levels of music, art and sewing. \textsuperscript{21} They were expected to adopt a level of lady-like behaviour and decorum of an upper-class daughter of society. However, Madden also changed the curriculum to give the girls opportunities for employment. She introduced vocational subjects and registered St Ursula’s for examination by business colleges in Brisbane. This accreditation afforded employment for clerical work throughout the state.

There was obviously a wider national interest in the progress of Catholic secondary education in Queensland as evidenced in \textit{The Catholic Press}, in Sydney in September 1921. The paper reported that ‘St Ursula’s was one of the institutions whose success was conspicuous at the Royal Brisbane Exhibition’ and that it carried off sixteen prizes for the school section.\textsuperscript{22} These were prizes for subjects in the accomplishments of drawing, painting and needlework. The Sydney paper also reported St Ursula’s prize list for music results, which ranged from the highest division of diplomas to preparatory division for music theory and performance from the Royal Academy of Music, London. The academic prize list featured results for commercial subjects such as Intermediate and Advanced grades in Bookkeeping, Typewriting and Shorthand, awarded by the Queensland Shorthand Writers’ and Bookkeeping Association.\textsuperscript{23} However, in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the ‘accomplishment’ subjects in St Ursula’s secondary curriculum had a practical value

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\textsuperscript{19} Jena Woodhouse, “Interview.” 2014. Jena Woodhouse’s mother arrived as an eleven-year-old day student at St Ursula’s in the early 1930s and had never been to school because of the parents’ itinerant lifestyle. The only memory of her schooldays was that she was schooled one-on-one by a sister until she was able to be in a class.
\textsuperscript{20} Whitwell.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.” 43.
\end{flushleft}
for girls from all social levels. They were taught to sew, draw and write using calligraphic skills in demand in clerical positions in the early 20th century.

**Enrolment history**

In 1917, Mother Patrick Madden enrolled the daughters and sons of both property owners and shearers. There were publicans, selectors, saw millers, business owners, soldiers, drovers, a domestic servant and engine drivers.\(^{24}\) The register of parents’ occupations, their religion and home location indicates a clear direction to St Ursula’s enrolment policy. It was non-selective enrolment designed to meet the educational needs of the region and perhaps also reflected the school’s need to maintain student numbers.

The day school students came predominantly from families who were farmers or fishermen who sometimes took the sisters and boarders out in their boats.\(^{25}\) Families had set up pineapple farms around Yeppoon, but many struggled to make a living and children arrived at school barefoot.\(^{26}\) Anne Vaggelas described how they came to be at the convent school: ‘Our parents took us away from the local state school where we were called dagos and we felt safe at St Ursula’s’.\(^{27}\) Non-Catholic families enrolled in a Catholic institution for economic reasons, as St Ursula’s could offer less expensive secondary boarding school education than the Anglican secondary school for girls that was established in Yeppoon in 1923.\(^{28}\)

Although one girl gained senior matriculation and pursued advanced music in 1924, it was not until the years between 1934 and 1939, that a small number of girls excelled in the arts and pursued senior public university studies for entry to tertiary education. In the workplace, women would continue to be confined to employment

\(^{24}\) Presentation Sisters Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's Convent." Five year old, Mary Hickey is a first day boarder. Under 'parent', only her mother is listed. Her mother’s occupation is 'domestic servant'. She had a Yeppoon address.

\(^{25}\) Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon." The fisherman Mr Barton sent three of his daughters to St Ursula’s as day students from 1917.

\(^{26}\) McGrath, "Interview."

\(^{27}\) Anne (Hellen) Vaggelas, ibid., 7 October 2014.

\(^{28}\) Harper, "Interview."
as domestics, teachers, nurses and clerical workers, and the St Ursula’s curriculum opened up that opportunity for girls from all social classes to fill those roles.

From 1917, superiors also admitted boys from remote regions. These boys did not have access to affordable secondary education in central Queensland until St Brendan’s boys’ boarding school opened in Yeppoon in 1940. For the first twenty-three years, boys were enrolled at St Ursula’s from primary through to senior public university matriculation, but not as boarders.\(^2^9\) From 1920, St Ursula’s published academic prize lists that supported a public image of a convent boarding school for young ladies with a vocation-based orientation. Until the early 1930s, boys’ names appear only in the Scholarship classes of St Joseph’s, but from 1934, boys also achieved results in junior and senior university classes.\(^3^0\).

Boys and girls featured on the 1930 St Ursula’s prize list in all subjects from lower primary to junior university. Two seniors for 1934 at St Ursula’s were Louis Church who became a dentist and Ian Ralfe who, in 1939, joined the RAAF and then became a Qantas pilot. Both shared the St Ursula’s senior university A class Maths prizes along with James Wilson, who won the Geometry prize in the junior university B Class.\(^3^1\) The number of boy enrolments at St Ursula’s from 1917, challenges any assumption that only girls were disadvantaged by the lack of secondary educational opportunities in the central west of Queensland. The superiors adapted from what would have previously been regarded as a significant breach of the rule of convent enclosure to allow boys into a convent boarding school.

**Leadership practices in convent and school**

The superiors’ annual reports demonstrate several of their goals for St Ursula’s. Firstly, the superiors aimed to promote St Ursula’s as a progressive and competitive girls’ school for education in academic pursuits, sport, music and art of speech. Secondly, they also aimed to foster in their students an ongoing commitment to the

\(^{29}\) It has not been possible to establish where distance boys stayed, except perhaps with relatives or special hostels in Yeppoon for boy students.


beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith. Additionally, they aimed to continue to implement the latest developments in the academic curriculum. Finally, the superior’s aimed to support the wellbeing of the boarders through sport and recreation by the sea.\textsuperscript{32}

Often superiors directed statements of encouragement to parents to help girls to assume their right to advance to the highest level of secondary education.\textsuperscript{33} In 1956, Archbishop Duhig, on a visit to Rockhampton, also publicly urged parents to send their daughters to university ‘to give them the education to which they had an equal right’.\textsuperscript{34} At times, other bishops, who attended St Ursula’s prize-giving functions, offered more conservative gendered views. In 1958, for example, Bishop Andrew Tynan of Rockhampton, in his speech night address, stated that the primary purpose of a Catholic girls’ school was ‘to prepare the girls to live as good Catholic mothers in their lives’.\textsuperscript{35} Former Principal of All Hallows, Sister Jean-Marie Mahoney, records in her history of All Hallows Catholic Girls’ Secondary School (founded in Brisbane in 1861) that her efforts to encourage parents to support access to post-secondary education in the latter part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was still met with some resistance. She noted that parents continued to support the idea that education to year ten was the pinnacle for girls’ schooling.\textsuperscript{36}

While the superior of St Ursula’s performed administrative and pastoral duties to support the work of the local Catholic diocese of Rockhampton, she retained an independence to manage the school’s internal affairs. The mother general of the Presentation Sisters and the superior utilised their independence to conduct the educational institution as a private enterprise, especially in key areas of property ownership, management of a boarding school and developments in the curriculum. The superiors invited and welcomed the bishops to all major school events at St

\textsuperscript{32} The Morning Bulletin, "Successful Year," \textit{The Morning Bulletin}, Friday December 9 1932; "St Ursula’s College 14th Annual Report," \textit{The Morning Bulletin}, Tuesday 10 December 1935. These reports were printed until the 1970s, when there were too many schools in the Rockhampton region to include all annual reports.

\textsuperscript{33} "Successful Year." \textit{The Morning Bulletin}.

\textsuperscript{34} The Central Queensland Herald, "Archbishop Duhig Blesses and Opens Range College Chapel,” \textit{The Central Queensland Herald}, Thursday 22 November 1956. 11.


\textsuperscript{36} Mahoney, \textit{Dieu Et Devoir: The Story of All Hallows’ School Brisbane 1861-1981}. 137
Ursula’s and annually forwarded to them the reports after each inspection by the State District Inspector while the primary school was attached to St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{37} The greetings in the letters between superiors and bishops of ‘My Lord’ and ‘Your obedient child in J+C’ acknowledged the conventional terms of address, but they also demonstrated the submissive status of the superior/principal in the hierarchy of the church, despite her responsible leadership role in education in the state and diocese.\textsuperscript{38}

The working relationship of the bishop in his local diocese with the superiors has been well documented in Australian Catholic Church histories.\textsuperscript{39} The superior of St Ursula’s and the mother general of the Presentation Sisters were accountable to the bishop for formation in the Catholic faith and for academic standards as a Catholic institution. St Ursula’s became established at the invitation of Bishop Joseph Shiel, the third bishop of Rockhampton (1913-1931). The Presentation Sisters worked in close association with him, and it was reported that he maintained a presence at St Ursula’s as friend and supporter. He gave prizes for sport’s events, played tennis with the students and spoke highly of the sisters’ work in public events.\textsuperscript{40}

Later bishops of Rockhampton adopted a more formal supervisory role. In 1948, Bishop Andrew Tynan (1946-1960) formally admonished Mother Patrick Madden, then the Queensland Mother General of the Presentation Sisters, for the seeming trivial act of omitting some verses from a hymn used during a Mass ceremony at St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{41} In a more serious issue in 1938, Bishop Romuald Hayes (1932-1945) refused to return to the Queensland Presentation Sisters the title deeds of their own property at Yeppoon, even though these deeds were required as surety to continue payments on the mortgage of the St Rita’s property in Brisbane. It is not known which superior had lodged the title deeds with the diocese of Rockhampton in the

\textsuperscript{37} Department of Public Instruction, "Inspector’s Report," (Rockhampton: Department of Public Instruction, 1947).

\textsuperscript{38} Bishops of Rockhampton. Letter from Bishop Tynan to Mother Patrick Madden, 18 Feb 1948.


\textsuperscript{40} The Morning Bulletin, "The Churches," \textit{The Morning Bulletin} 1918. 7.

\textsuperscript{41} Bishops of Rockhampton.
first place. The Queensland Presentation mother general of 1934 was Mother Patrick Madden. From the exchange of correspondence in the Rockhampton diocesan archive, she pursued the issue successfully through legal channels and secured the deeds from Bishop Hayes.42

In 1958, Bishop Tynan appointed a priest, Father Kevin Castles, as Director of Catholic Education in the Rockhampton diocese, followed in 1963 by another priest, Dr Cecil Ballard.43 The capacity for a woman to be in a leadership role of principal in a secondary school had been handed on at St Ursula’s from a long line of superiors/principals who were among the earliest female educators to adapt and refine the curriculum for girls’ secondary education in Queensland. Yet, although they had proven their administrative capacity, they had no place in the leadership hierarchy of the Rockhampton diocese, even in the field of education administration.

In 1968, Sister Loyola McGrath was formally appointed the principal of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.44 At the annual prize-giving event, she delivered the speech night report in the Yeppoon Town Hall. She did this, despite the traditional practice of having a male substitute, such as the parish priest or local Catholic parishioner, deliver the report. Bishop Rush, in his reply to her first speech night report as principal, referred only to St Ursula’s being ‘under the guidance of Doctor Grove Johnson’ who was parish priest of Yeppoon at the time. This, in effect, was a refusal to recognise publicly the responsible leadership role of the women who were the school’s administrators. It was also a lost opportunity for the young female students to witness the female leaders in their school be recognised at a public event for their authority and achievements.45

42 The reason for the transfer of deeds to the diocese in the first place is not recorded.
44 The separate roles of superior and principal were established after fifty years, not as the result of new directions in administration for St Ursula’s but following the tragic death of Sister Barbara Houlihan who had been appointed under the dual role of superior/principal.
Leadership in times of crisis: The Depression years (1928-1939)

Superiors appear to have enacted the spirit of their Rule and Constitutions best in times of pioneering and crisis. Some superiors were called on in times of crisis to maintain St Ursula’s as a stronghold for a stable educational and residential environment. The effects of the depression years of 1928-1939 were exacerbated by periods of severe drought that affected Central Queensland more than any other region in the state. In the face of such conditions, families in central and far west Queensland did not consider secondary education a priority. Despite all the advertising, good academic results and much publicised successes in music and the arts, boarder numbers at St Ursula’s dropped below fifty, the lowest since 1924, although primary school numbers continued to increase.

The itinerant nature of some residents of the seaside township also proved frustrating for school enrolments when the summer months brought an influx of day students and then a decline in student numbers in winter. From the start of the Depression in 1929, church-run schools were forced to continue to rely on their own resources as the Queensland Government pursued a philosophy that the current needs of the workers (excluding post-primary education for their children) must be addressed before there could be any investment in the education of its future citizens. When the teachers of St Ursula’s were unable to travel throughout the central west to promote their school, a network of priests and bishops of Rockhampton encouraged parents to consider St Ursula’s. Evangelist Murtagh reflected in her memoir ‘There was the sense that in these difficult times all members of the Catholic community were in it together and needed to support one another in all forms whether with money donations or in kind from their farms’.

Mother Aloysius Ryan (1928-1932) managed the school throughout the early depression years and adopted an optimistic style of management. She was faced with the task of keeping St Ursula’s relevant, attractive and within financial reach of

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46 McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District.*
47 St Ursula's College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's College Yeppoon."
49 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon."
families. She established many of the recreational facilities that remained permanent features in the grounds and at the beach for most of the eighty years. At the end of her first year of office, as the debt on the buildings was cleared, she worked with the public curator of the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens to transform the convent grounds. She oversaw the construction of wooden bathing sheds for the girls and the sisters on the main beach of Yeppoon. She began the practice of inviting the journalists from the Rockhampton Morning Bulletin to report on the sport’s days and high teas as well as on the end of year prize giving events.\textsuperscript{50}

In February 1930, she negotiated an electrical power connection to the two convent and school buildings in exchange for their Delco engine-generated power-plant which had been installed in 1917. In 1932, Ryan announced that despite ‘one of the most depressing years in the history of Australia the sub-senior class of 1932 had six students’. She also reported that ‘there was a 100 percent success in the junior university examinations and state scholarships and that one student had secured a scholarship to the Training College’.\textsuperscript{51} Marjorie Harper won the Mathematics prize in the senior university class B of 1933, and she remembered superior Mother Aloysius as ‘a very nice person with a beautiful voice who delivered weekly talks on appropriate moral behaviour for girls’. Marjorie described the food as ‘adequate and edible’ and the conditions of the teaching sisters as ‘very tough’. Sister Evangelist was her teacher by day and her dormitory supervisor by night. Sister Evangelist slept on the verandah, separated from the girls’ beds by a sheet.\textsuperscript{52}

Leading up to the war years, superior Evangelist Murtagh (1933-1939) continued to encourage parents to consider the benefits of secondary education for their daughters. In the annual report of 1935 she ‘deplored the situation that no senior had elected to complete the senior public examination, a concern she repeated publicly two years later’.\textsuperscript{53} St Ursula’s was not an exception in this situation. The principals of Rockhampton Girls Grammar and the Range Catholic Girls’ Boarding

\textsuperscript{50} "Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1." 134.
\textsuperscript{52} Harper, "Interview."
School reported that it was not until 1940 that any of their girls were graduating with senior matriculation. In Brisbane secondary schools such as St Rita’s College in Clayfield, which opened in 1926, the first candidates for senior university examinations were not presented until 1941.

Leadership in the war years (1939-1945)

World War II (1939-1945) disrupted school and boarding life daily because of its seaside location. Between 1933 and 1951, two sisters, Clara (Mother Evangelist) and Norah Murtagh (Mother Angela) alternated in the position of superior/principal. Despite the threat of bombing and invasion for coastal settlements such as Yeppoon, the two superiors kept St Ursula’s functioning through the war years. School-life then is captured more graphically through the experiences of students and staff in chapter five of this thesis. The Presentation Sisters maintained a normal school routine and kept a day school operating for local people, but boarders were sent for schooling further inland during much of 1942.

Mother Angela Murtagh was superior/principal of St Ursula’s from 1940-1945 and faced the problem of maintenance of a boarding school facility in war-time. One problem was the provision of an adequate water supply. She sought the services of a water diviner who struck a good supply of water in the grounds, and a bore was put down. However, the girls still showered in bathing blocks with no roof. Despite the strain on resources as a result of the war effort, Mother Angela Murtagh reported that, in 1941, ‘because of increasing numbers, extra accommodation was designed on the top floor of the 1923 building and further classroom space was constructed on the lower floor’.

57 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon."
All schools, whether state or independent, between 1939 and 1945, suffered from a lack of guidance from state and federal government authorities with regards to developing the secondary curriculum. However, maintaining numbers was a more pressing problem. In 1943, Murtagh conveyed the wider impact of the war in her annual report, noting that there were no students for sub-senior because there are so many offices and business places needing female clerical positions. She also noted that ‘because of the disturbed year in 1942, when the boarding students were evacuated, there was even a reduced number of students for junior public examinations for 1943’. The Rockhampton Catholic directory in 1945 listed seventy-eight boarders of primary and secondary age for St Ursula’s, of which just thirty-four were secondary school students.

The era of the Murtagh sisters as superiors at St Ursula’s concluded in 1951. During their era, they had maintained an educational and boarding institution for central and coastal Queensland. The progress of St Ursula’s as an effective secondary educational institution relied on two conditions: the recruitment of sufficient numbers of girls to the Presentation Institute of Queensland, and the school’s commitment to employing university-standard teachers in specialised subject areas and expert staff in administration. Progress in both these areas was hindered while Ursula Kennedy and the Presentation Sisters continued to respond rather to the growing pressure from the Queensland bishops for primary education. The Presentation Sisters opened twelve new primary schools in city and country regions throughout Queensland from 1947 to 1959.

**A new age of leadership (1952)**

In 1952, the long tradition of the superior as head of the religious community and principal of the school changed. Eileen Hegarty (Mother Dorothea) was appointed superior, and, in 1954, Sister Rosa MacGinley was appointed the first principal of

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62 Ahern, "Interview."
63 MacGinley, *A Place of Springs.* 287.
St Ursula’s. Rosa MacGinley described how she was appointed to take up both principal-ship and full-time teaching roles in Yeppoon. Her acceptance of the role occurred informally before the start of the school year with a verbal exchange. The Queensland Presentation mother general, Ursula Kennedy, merely asked her, ‘Did you do Latin, missy?’

Hegarty had grown up as a daughter of a policeman in Yeppoon for some years and sought support from the local Yeppoon people to conduct fundraising and cultural events for parents and the townspeople. She addressed the problem of drastically reduced boarder enrolments through the war years by embarking on a marketing campaign in the growth areas of mining and pastoral development in the Dawson and Callide regions, and Mt. Morgan. She continued the tradition of former superiors of controlling the budget for both school and community and she set about building extensions to assist the expansion of science and dormitory facilities. She assisted Rosa MacGinley with the meagre financial resources available to purchase science equipment.

Rosa MacGinley (1954-1967) and the three superiors, Dorothea Hegarty (1952-57), Raymond Lloyd (1958-1961) and Patricia McCarthy (1962-67) established a partnership of superior and principal to conduct an efficient delivery of the curriculum and organisation of the boarding house. Rosa MacGinley as principal taught a full-day teaching load, and in the evenings, she tutored senior students, carried out dormitory supervision, and pursued university studies. Such commitment was normal for all members of the St Ursula’s community, and it came at the expense of their physical and mental well-being.

The progress in infrastructure projects by Dorothea Hegarty and in curriculum by MacGinley, demonstrated how women religious in administrative roles could

64 “Interview.”
67 The MacGinley family’s contribution towards the purchase of science equipment was a typical example of how the sisters survived, often on donations of money, food and equipment from family and friends.
68 Fleming, "Interview."
exercise a degree of creativity and be entrepreneurial in their leadership roles. However, Hegarty’s success was neither recognised nor rewarded, as she was transferred according to the regulatory transfer for superiors after her six-year term of office. By contrast, MacGinley remained in the unofficial role of principal for fourteen years and could continue to develop the standard of secondary education offered to the girls at St Ursula’s. MacGinley broadened the curriculum to include the sciences for girls to senior matriculation at St Ursula’s. In the speech night report of 1959, she encouraged parents to consider sending their daughters on to senior ‘not only to give extra qualifications but to enable girls to acquire an additional two years’ maturity and judgment before they assumed the responsibility of earning their own living and directing their own life’s course’.

The tone and focus of MacGinley’s speech night address was different from that of previous superior/principal’s presentations, which gave assurances of the girls’ ongoing commitment to the faith and moral traditions of St Ursula’s. She encouraged girls to access a wider range of subjects in the secondary curriculum because of the ‘significant changes that were occurring in secondary education’ and she stated that ‘higher education was a necessity if Australians were to keep pace with scientific and technical advances that were demanding more and more trained minds’. In 1958, the Australian National Education Conference of Directors of Catholic Education and Diocesan Inspectors of Schools resolved to form Diocesan Directorates of Education and Diocesan Development Funds. This meant that Commonwealth or State funding for education had an easier formal pathway to benefit individual schools in the Rockhampton Catholic diocese, even the independently owned St Ursula’s.

Mother Patricia McCarthy was appointed superior (1962-1967) and was the first of the living superiors I could interview. She was regarded as a mature leader who could draw the members of her community behind her from natural leadership qualities in the absence of formal training in administrative skills. However,

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70 The Morning Bulletin, “St Ursula’s Speech Day.” 12
72 MacGinley, “Interview.”
McCarthy made no changes to the taxing roles in school and dormitory of the members of her community. From 1962, Sister Margaret Conway was a member of the St Ursula’s religious community during McCarthy’s term of office. She taught and supervised the primary school boarders numbering up to thirty and from as young as five years. Several of the five and six-year-old students would remain as boarders for up to ten years. Conway’s role was to supervise the small girls for all their activities. She did their laundry and supervised them personally in their out-of-school hours. She came back from her full-time teaching role in the primary school across the road to supervise their main midday meal, and her bed was separated from the children by a curtain. She knew the children were awake when often a small finger was poked through a hole in the curtain separating her from the boarders. The fulfilment in Conway’s life as a religious was defined by the encouragement she received from McCarthy and from the other members of the community who themselves were stretched to the limit with schooling and boarding.

Patricia McCarthy and Rosa MacGinley established a working partnership for school administration but ultimately each teacher was ‘left to herself’ to fulfil her teaching duties as there were no formal staff meetings conducted for subject or class year coordination. McCarthy adopted Hegarty’s marketing campaigns and advertised in State and Catholic schools in the Central West. McCarthy initiated a pastoral practice of being the first superior to travel on the 600-kilometre train-ride west with the boarders and to stop off at railway sidings to meet with parents of current and potential students. To have the ‘mother superior’ travel on the train overnight for the first time ‘was a huge shock to the students’ but was met with gratitude by the parents.

By 1964, the number of boarders had risen from eighteen to sixty-one. These numbers increased even more when McCarthy linked St Ursula’s into a government sponsored scheme to take Papua New Guinea girls as boarders so that by 1968

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73 Kay (Pitman) Condon, ibid., 1 February 2015, Skype.
74 Sister Margaret Conway, ibid., 24 October 2014, Audio.
75 McCarthy, "Interview."
76 Ibid.
the number of boarders exceeded 100. On the completion of her appointment at St Ursula’s, she declared that she was ‘absolutely exhausted’ from the responsibility of supervising students for twenty-four hours a day. In 1967, she and MacGinley were transferred from St Ursula’s, leaving their positions of principal and superior open. The roles of superior and principal were combined in one person once again when, in 1968, Mother Barbara Houlihan was appointed as superior and principal. In tragic circumstances, and during cyclonic weather, Houlihan was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident just three weeks after taking office in Yeppoon.

The school maintained its commitment to keep fees to a minimum, although there was ongoing concern that there were so little capital funds. In 1970, the Australian Commonwealth Government introduced per capita grants for students in independent schools. St Ursula’s continued to receive Australian government grants for the growing number of PNG students. The government funding for these girls covered schooling and accommodation only, and the convent finances covered their school clothing, personal needs and spending money. The government grants for Australian children were also not sufficient to cover the expenses of conducting a boarding school, where ‘numbers of children paid no fees’. Families with more means were approached to purchase extra uniforms for other students. The Presentation Sisters continued to operate precariously on the older monastic model of reliance on the goodwill of supporters and family. They continued to supplement the inadequate income from school fees and government grants with music and art of speech lessons.

Sister Aileen Fahey was appointed superior from 1968 to 1973, and Sister Loyola McGrath, an experienced high school teacher from St Rita’s, was appointed principal. From McGrath’s experience in both city and country boarding schools, she noted the impact of the difference in schooling opportunities for city children compared with the students from rural regions. She reported that there were still

77 Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”; St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon." 36-43.
78 Sister Loreto Gregory, interview by Maree Ganley, 12 September 2011, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
79 Ibid.
80 Sister Aileen Fahey, ibid., 22 September 2009.
81 Sister Loyola McGrath, ibid., 21 September 2009.
country children enrolling at St Ursula’s who had not had the benefit of continuous educational opportunities throughout their primary schooling.

More financial relief came for Catholic schools from external sources in 1972, when the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton established a Central Education Fund and began to standardise school fees. Colleges owned by religious institutes like St Ursula’s pooled their financial resources with the central Catholic diocesan fund and could provide tuition fee concessions for families with more than one child attending. Lay teachers’ salaries were set at eighty-five percent of the State Education rate, and, by 1973, the Commonwealth and State funding had increased to sixty-two pounds per student. Also, Commonwealth grants were available for infrastructure in independent schools after the national Karmel Report (1973), “Schools in Australia”.

St Ursula’s received valuable grants for a library, science rooms and resources to assist students with special learning needs. These were much needed building resources that St Ursula’s could never have constructed without government financial assistance. The State and Federal government funding and Catholic diocesan financial investments in St Ursula’s required a more sophisticated and informed level of administration. MacGinley continued as principal of St Ursula’s until 1967. However, despite her encouragement and the development of Mathematics and science in the senior curriculum, only a small number of girls continued to senior. It would not be until 1974 that, under the Federal Government funding scheme, there was an adequately equipped science block at St Ursula’s as more post-senior secondary opportunities became available for girls in work and study.

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84 Carmel Bourke, “Interview,” 18 July, 2017. As late as 1976, a student transferred from St Ursula’s to a Brisbane Catholic girls’ secondary school and found that science subjects such as biology were still not in the curriculum.
Boarding school enrolments reached 100 by 1967, and that number included increased instances of students with special needs and yearly intakes of indigenous girls from Papua New Guinea.\(^{85}\) The belief remained that once appointed superior, a religious sister assumed unquestioned authority in matters of pastoral care and management of a secondary boarding school. There was no appropriate professional development to help a superior to fill the dual roles of administering school and convent.

There were consequences also for the absence of appropriate screening for suitability of women religious for the role of superior/principal. There seems to have been no forum for an appraisal process by the mother general and councilors of a superior’s ongoing capacity to function in that role. Student and staff experienced difficulties in their day to day lives when a superior as leader of the college was not able to establish a balance in her role.\(^{86}\)

**Vatican II (1962-1965) - implications for leadership in religious life and the Catholic school (1970s).**

Vatican II is the name given to the second meeting of the Catholic Church’s Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965. Yvonne McKenna and Jo Anne McNamara, historians of women religious, argue that the greater freedoms brought about within religious life as a result of the cycle of change and the modernisation that it heralded, did not always equate to greater liberty. Rather, such change exposed inequalities which served to threaten the sense of community within congregations.\(^{87}\) These tensions, highlighted by McKenna and McNamara, were experienced where women religious continued to administer and staff education institutions in the post Vatican II years.

Rapid developments in modern society, including state secondary education, impacted on the traditional religious leadership model in a convent boarding school.

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\(^{85}\) McCarthy, "Interview."

\(^{86}\) Toni (Trost) Condon, Word Attachment, 14 August 2015 2015; Fleming, "Interview."

From the early 1970s, Queensland’s State Education Department embarked on progressive developments in the secondary school curriculum and promoted a culture of post-secondary school education as the norm for all students. An extra year of secondary schooling was added to Queensland secondary education and more girls were staying on to senior matriculation. A major feeder region for St Ursula’s boarder enrolments was around the central highlands town of Emerald.

The Presentation Sisters had conducted a primary school in Emerald from 1902, and graduates from the school often continued with the Presentation Sisters for secondary school. The first state high school was not established there until 1969 as the coal mining industry developed. The population of Emerald trebled in the 1970s as it became a base town for the nearby mining settlements. The student population of St Ursula’s reflected that population growth in rural central Queensland. Queensland historian, William Johnston argues that by the end of the 1970s, coal from the Bowen basin, which extended through north and south of Rockhampton and the inland region of the central west out to Emerald, had established itself as the main mineral resource of the state.\textsuperscript{88} Mineral wealth brought in modernisation. Johnston observed that, in 1982, the government often lagged behind needs in providing social utilities, especially schools and hospitals in these remote regions. St Ursula’s struggled financially because of the government’s lack of recognition that boarding schools provided an ongoing essential service to these growing country communities.\textsuperscript{89}

Johnston refers also to the build-up, by the end of the 1970s, of the tourist industry. This industry also had an impact on the Yeppoon district and the day student population of St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{90} Student enrolments had grown from 100 students, in 1967, to 300 by 1974.\textsuperscript{91} In 1974, Sister Andrea McGrath was appointed superior (1974-1978) and Sister Marie Therese Dwyer was appointed principal (1974-1978). McGrath had been on staff at St Ursula’s for nine years previously and had graduate

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. 194.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. 195.
\textsuperscript{91} Tynan, “Interview.”
qualifications in Home Science. Dwyer was a secondary school teacher at St Rita’s girls’ college in Brisbane. They worked together to reform the curriculum of St Ursula’s, particularly in the areas of the sciences and languages in line with advances in the state secondary curriculum. These developments in curriculum coincided with the post Vatican II recommendations, which called for religious institutes to shed irrelevant traditions of religious life, including outdated models of leadership.

Throughout the 1970s, the Institute of the Presentation Sisters in Queensland began to implement the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church (1963-1965). The seventh document of the Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* (Of Perfect Charity) called for religious institutes of women and men to update and renew their mission. They were called to make their religious life and practices relevant and meaningful.\(^92\) The idea of a ‘personal choice’ was given to women religious who had only ever experienced a tradition of unquestioning obedience to the precepts of their Rule and Constitutions. This had an impact on the way in which the sisters approached their future teaching lives.\(^93\)

In the early 1970s, successive waves of newly professed young Presentation Sisters studied in tertiary institutions full-time. They were taking up teaching commitments on university campuses and at advanced theological institutions and were exposed to more free thought and debate.\(^94\) However, change came gradually after centuries-old traditions of religious life, and each sister viewed the changes with varying degrees of expectation. In 1974, Sister Veronica Cruice, who came straight to St Ursula’s after a full-time year completing a university degree, noted that ‘There was no wall around the convent and boarding school precinct but the rule of enclosure was still intact so I still did not feel any part of the community outside of St Ursula’s’.\(^95\) In 1979, Sister Therese Collins reflected on the changes

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\(^93\) McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*. 636. In 1996, McNamara quoted an American nun-scholar who urged her readers to consider the probability that the sisterhood as it now exists will not survive into the new millennium.


\(^95\) Veronica Cruice, interview by Maree Ganley, 27 November 2014, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
in her experiences of religious life and teaching with the new thinking: ‘The changes were noticeable not just with the kids; it was just as much in a community’.96 In other words, as she saw it, change was occurring, not just in individuals, but in the community as a whole.

The revised Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Institute approved in 1973, redefined the role of superior as the ‘leader’ of each community and redefined the title with the name ‘sister superior’ rather than ‘mother superior’. She was to ‘co-ordinate’, rather than direct, ‘the efforts of all and to safeguard the rights and uniqueness of the individual’. She was ‘to exercise her leadership by seeking to build a community of love and trust’ as individuals in an institute moving out into the wider community.97 The Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Sisters had progressed through several redrafts in that renewal process, and, by 1982, there were significant changes in the lifestyle of women religious in the Church. There began an exodus of women religious out of teaching and into other apostolates. The document asserted: ‘The sisters are reminded that, while the way they present the Christian message of salvation has an important influence, its ultimate acceptance or rejection by those to whom it is given depends on a personal choice.’98

Those Presentation Sisters who remained in education experienced the dilemmas of being enabled to be more creative in their approaches to education and in the new order of life for them as women religious, but still having to operate under outmoded models of a hierarchical and authoritarian convent leadership.99 Although there was a commitment to building up the intellectual capital required for staff to conduct competitive secondary institutions, the hierarchical model of the authority of ‘superior’ remained in place until the early 1980s.100 In 1983, although the revised Code of Canon Law for women religious reaffirmed the recommendations that

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99 Collins, “Interview.”
religious institutes update their constitutions, St Ursula’s’ newly appointed principals remained accountable to the superior in financial administration and in the overlap of pastoral care and behaviour management of boarders as students.¹⁰¹

Sister Bernadette Fleming was appointed principal (1979-1981). She had completed postgraduate studies in science and educational administration, but the leadership roles of superior and principal in convent and school were still not properly co-ordinated. The superior of the convent continued to control the school budget, the discipline of all students and staff appointments.¹⁰² Two past principals described instances where the absence of clearly defined role descriptions for superior and principal denied them self-esteem and status in fulfilling their tasks. Fleming was required to inform a well-qualified and efficient lay teacher from St Ursula’s that she’d been dismissed by Mother Gabriel Hogan, Queensland mother general of the Presentation Institute. This was necessary, apparently, for religious community reasons, to make room for a sister in the same subject area from St Rita’s.¹⁰³ Sister Kathleen Tynan was acting principal (1979-1980) and lived through the humiliating experience of completing her allotted task of cleaning the whole school with the boarders on a Saturday morning, only to be followed by the superior who would gather the group of boarders and clean the school again without explanation.¹⁰⁴

In the Federal census of 1985, the enrolment figures for St Ursula’s were 353 students of which 132 were boarders.¹⁰⁵ Sister Marion Kingston was appointed the last religious principal of St Ursula’s from 1983 to 1995. The fact that she volunteered for the role signalled a significant shift from the practice in religious institutes where members were transferred with unquestioning acceptance.¹⁰⁶ The Presentation Institute was not yet ready to consider a lay principal at St Ursula’s, nor were the mechanisms in place to introduce an ‘outsider’ to an institution in which

¹⁰¹ Fleming, "Interview."
¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Tynan, "Interview."
¹⁰⁶ Kingston, "Interview."
the day-to-day administration of the school for the most part was still conducted relatively informally. Kingston was familiar with the history of St Ursula’s as she and her mother had been boarders. Given that she would be the last religious principal, she took on the task of determining which of the academic and pastoral traditions that had characterised almost 100 years of education at St Ursula’s needed to be preserved. It is not known how much of the history of the administration of the college was known to her, as so much history behind past actions by superiors and principals had been passed on orally.

Long-term experienced lay staff of St Ursula’s, including Mrs Veronica Pedwell, assisted Kingston as she administered the school in the centralised position of superior/principal, just as it had been before the 1950s. Kingston took responsibility for the budget, the administration and supervision of boarders, contact with parents and the overall responsibility for the day to day running of the schooling and boarding facilities. This responsibility was symbolised by the fact that Kingston maintained possession of all the keys which gave her sole access to the boarding school, the classrooms and the administration offices. She faced the challenge of being a primary school principal stepping into the role of secondary principal and being accepted by the secondary school staff, parents and students. Kingston assumed more of a pastoral role as principal and appointed the first lay deputy-principal, Veronica Pedwell as administrator of the secondary school. A boarding student from years eight to twelve, who had only known schooling on her property by distance education, recalled that even though ‘Mrs Pedwell had a bad bark’ she was respected for her administrative capabilities.

Kingston and the Director of Boarders, Sister Suzanne Gentle, used the holiday periods to visit parents and students in isolated regions. The Commonwealth Government provided funding for Indigenous children to access boarding school education and St Ursula’s was one destination sought after by the people in the

107 Ramsay, "Interview."
109 Pedwell, "Interview."
110 Ramsay, "Interview."
111 Loretta McKeering, ibid., 12 September Telephone.
Indigenous settlement of Woorabinda because it was near the sea. The Director of Catholic Education in Rockhampton commissioned a report on the needs of isolated secondary school students within the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton. The report highlighted the need for adequate boarding staff training and accommodation for the increasing numbers of children from indigenous families and students with special needs seeking places in boarding schools. This need had financial implications once unpaid women religious were no longer present. Staffing of the Catholic school systems throughout Australia by various religious institutes of women and men religious had ceased by the end of the 20th century.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law recommended that members of all religious institutes move to address the needs of those on the margins of society. The Australian Presentation Sisters chose to move out of the classrooms, and their institute placed a greater emphasis on direct service to those in need. In the late 20th century, the Catholic Church in Australia experienced a cultural shift when young people sought other ways to contribute in a volunteer capacity to community action and were no longer attracted to the centuries old model of lifetime vowed commitment of traditional religious institutes. In 1982, there were 151 Presentation Sisters in Queensland and, of those, thirty-two had left the order by 1987.

In 1987, the Presentation Sisters formally redefined the future of the Presentation Institute in Queensland to acknowledge that education would no longer be its ‘sole ministry’. In 1989, the Queensland Presentation Sisters decided to incorporate the two secondary girls’ colleges of St Rita’s and St Ursula’s as companies limited by guarantee. After 1991, they established a transition period to a nonreligious governance model that would ensure that the two colleges developed educationally.

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112 Kingston, "Interview."
117 Congregation, "Queensland Presentation Congregation Archives, Clayfield."
118 Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives, "Presentation Sisters," in Presentation Sisters Correspondence File, ed. BAA (Brisbane2015).
By 1992, a lay college board was formed at St Ursula’s and under the direction of the Presentation Institute leadership team, and in its first years of operation, it established a new leadership model with governance rights.

From the early 1990s, very few women had applied to join the centuries old traditional religious orders and congregations of sisters in the western Catholic Church, and this trend affected the numbers of Presentation Sisters. The leaders of religious institutes took the resolution throughout Australia to withdraw from the ownership and administration of their institutions. Kingston remained as principal/superior for thirteen years until the Presentation Sisters were prepared to put in place a governance model that would position St Ursula’s beyond their jurisdiction and ownership. Religious institutes began the long-term process of closing down, and the Presentation Institute of Queensland put in place formal procedures to phase out its institute of women religious in Queensland by ceasing to accept applications for membership. Leaders of the Queensland Presentation Institute placed St Ursula’s into a transition phase of administration, as there were fewer sisters able to take up the responsibility of principal of a secondary boarding school.

Kingston completed her term of administration, and, in 1996, Mrs Margaret Ramsay was appointed the first lay principal of St Ursula’s and remained in the role for nine years. The lay principal and her leadership team of the boarding and the day school were accountable to a newly appointed College Board. Ramsay and the board entered into a new model of governance, finance and administration for a convent boarding school that no longer included the authority figure of superior. They established a model of leadership which clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of all members of a complex organisation, including the boarding school.119

The St Ursula’s College Board would be the new ‘keepers of the gate’ to assist in the development of the knowledge and skills to conduct a successful education institution with the spiritual dimensions of a Catholic school in the Presentation

119 Ramsay, "Interview."
Institute tradition. The framework included the obligation to commit administrators and staff to ongoing formation in the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith. Ramsay believed that the Presentation tradition valued a strong sense of community engendered in the boarders, and had placed an emphasis on feminine perspectives related to the development of the intellectual capacity of girls, and on eco-spirituality, justice and creativity.\textsuperscript{120}

In 2012, the Presentation Institute took one final step and began the transfer of canonical sponsorship of St Ursula’s from the Presentation Institute to a Church approved legal entity or public juridic person known as Mercy Partners. Mercy Partners was approved by the Holy See in November 2008 as a public juridic person (PJP), which meant that it was recognised as a legal entity within the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{121} PJPs allow various like-minded Church entities to come together to form a shared identity as a church organisation. As institute leader in 2012, Sister Kathleen Tynan stated that ‘When the Presentation Sisters transfer canonical sponsorship, we will let go of St Ursula’s as a cherished apostolic work. In choosing to transfer the sponsorship to Mercy Partners we believe we have chosen the best option to ensure that Catholic education in the Presentation tradition will continue into the future’.\textsuperscript{122}

Conclusion

This chapter has examined, through the brief biographies of superiors and principals, the common ideologies that motivated them as leaders of a convent boarding school. It is clear they drew on two very broad guiding principles contained in the Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Institute. One was that the sisters ‘give serious application to the Christian Education of children, particularly the poor’, and the other was that, ‘according to the requirements of the age and country, that in mental training, as well as the accomplishments expected of women, their

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} Canon law defines a PJP as ‘an aggregate of persons or things constituted by the competent ecclesiastical authority to fulfil a proper function given them in view of the common good’ (Can.114.1).

\textsuperscript{122} Tynan, “Interview.”
Catholic girls may be in no way inferior. The Rule had not, however, given the superiors the authority to challenge the broad social definition of the ‘poor’ in Australian society, nor to redefine the role of Catholic women in society other than in a domestic capacity.

Successive superiors maintained and developed the independent Catholic secondary school with a model of leadership unique to a convent boarding school. It combined the role of superior as leader of a community of women religious with that of headmistress of a secondary boarding school. By the late 1960s, the growth in numbers of boarders and day students necessitated a remodelling of the traditional structure of leadership of superior/principal in a convent boarding school. The distinction between the pastoral and spiritual leadership of the superior, on one hand, and that of administrative leadership in a secondary school, on the other, required separate sets of leadership skills.

At St Ursula’s, it proved difficult for a superior to accept that a member of the community would have an authoritative role as principal. Throughout the 1970s, the whole system involving convent and school administration suffered considerably and relied too much on the personal enterprise of individual superiors. Some superiors exhibited leadership skills with strategies to increase student numbers but were transferred according to institute rules and would be replaced by a new superior who lacked experience to sustain previous initiatives.

There was always inadequate financial management to resource the secondary school and boarding house. With the absence of ongoing management plans and official guidelines, outdated models of authority for the role of superior remained in place at St Ursula’s well into the late 1970s. Clearly defined roles of leadership were put in place only when a lay principal was appointed in 1996. Despite there being inconsistent levels of leadership capacity, women religious appointed to St Ursula’s undertook personal postgraduate qualifications and kept pace with academic standards to deliver secondary education, often under trying circumstances. This

endeavour may explain why the school remains relevant as a girls’ secondary college into the 21st century.
Chapter five

St Ursula’s-academic curriculum, culture and faith

Introduction

This chapter tracks the development of the academic curriculum of St Ursula’s and its contribution to the enhancement of social and economic prospects for girls, particularly from middle-class and working-class families. The next three chapters are interconnected in that they focus, from different perspectives, on girls’ secondary education and boarding school life over a period of eighty years. Much of the background data incorporated into the narrative comes from the recollections of schooling by students and teachers. This chapter five reveals aspects of the intended learning experiences in the classroom curriculum, while chapters six and seven recognise the influence of the ‘hidden curriculum’ of daily life, peculiar to a convent boarding school.

The students were mostly from middle-class and working-class families and familiar with upper-middle class expectations of daily behaviour from the 19th century French Ursuline tradition. Through the data from the interviews of boarders and day students, I examine the consequences and advantages of having experienced a convent boarding school education. From the early 20th century, gender determined St Ursula’s girls’ post-school access to work and further study opportunities, despite the advanced learning experiences of some students. From the student interviews, I gathered evidence that mothers of students worked for extra sources of income to give their daughters the experience of advanced levels of schooling well beyond those of their own level of education in some cases.

The St Ursula’s campus differed from an exclusively all-female convent boarding school in that boys were enrolled through the years, until two changes occurred: St Brendan’s Catholic boarding school took the small secondary cohort of boys from St Ursula’s in 1940; and St Ursula’s primary boys and girls moved off the St Ursula’s property to the new parish school nearby in 1957. I gathered records of boys’ presence in the secondary school and their post-school occupations from sources
such as the school register, the oral histories of students from that era and newspaper reports. Later short monographs by Presentation Sisters covering this historical period omit the acknowledgement of the secondary school co-education status of St Ursula’s.¹

Until 1957, boys studied some subjects of the accomplishments curriculum such as music, with their names appearing on annual Trinity College examination results. Boys’ names also appear in Royal Agricultural Show entries as prize-winners in handwriting and copybook.² Boys’ names do not appear in the business courses, including accounting. In the early 1930s, the employment of a specialist in senior matriculation Mathematics, Miss Marjory Popple, seemed to coincide with the progression of small numbers of girls and boys from junior to senior matriculation studies at St Ursula’s.³ After 1940, when the boys no longer attended the secondary school, the ongoing development in Mathematics and science did not continue. Then, in 1954, when a sister with an advanced maths and science background was appointed to St Ursula’s, this development resumed. In this chapter, I focus on the development of the academic curriculum and the intended learning outcomes for girls and boys at St Ursula’s.⁴

The face-to-face interviews began with past students and teachers from the early 1930s, some of whom were centenarians. In the search for information about the students of St Ursula’s from the first twenty years, I relied on the interviews of the Rossberg family from Longreach. The family were the descendants of the Rossberg sisters, Susanne and Sophie, two of the first boarders enrolled in 1917.⁵ Three Whitwell sisters enrolled in 1918 and their brother, Vivian, attended in later years. Doris Whitwell’s daughter, Margaret Cooper, had preserved Doris’ report cards and exercise pads which have provided invaluable background information about the

¹ Sister Concilia Ring, “The Story of St Ursula’s Yeppoon,” in St Ursula’s College, ed. St Ursula’s College Yeppoon (Yeppoon2008).
⁴ Papworth, “Attending Boarding School: A Longitudinal Study of Its Role in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes.” Brad Papworth concluded from his research that there was parity between day students and boarders in terms of gains and declines in academic and non-academic outcomes in a boarding school setting.
⁵ Ann Rossberg, interview by Maree Ganley, 2015, ACU Brisbane.
school curriculum, particularly the ongoing presence of the accomplishment subjects when the school was first established. The family also provided a history of the post-school experiences of the Whitwell’s.\(^6\) From these surviving family records, I developed a profile of school life and post-school opportunities in the early twentieth century. I also drew from newspapers the reports of early St Ursula’s past students whose post-school careers were well publicised. These reports and the testimonies of family descendants will be the ‘voices’ for the first twenty years of St Ursula’s history.

In this chapter, I will examine key periods of development in Queensland state secondary education and the part that St Ursula’s played to give children in remote regions the benefits of a curriculum that was in line with state department syllabi and assessments standards (Table 3). These changes in state education, and the progression in St Ursula’s’ own academic history, are examined in two-time frames: 1917-1953 and 1954-1998. The division into these phases is relevant to St Ursula’s academic history because of the division of the roles of superior and principal in 1954. In 1954, the university-trained Sister Rosa MacGinley was appointed a principal of the secondary school in an independent capacity from the role of superior. Rosa MacGinley was qualified in science, history and literature when she began teaching and administering the curriculum of St Ursula’s.\(^7\)

This administrative change coincided with the beginnings of a new decade of progress in state secondary education. One factor that influenced change on a state education level was that, from 1952, there was a sharp increase in retention rates of those completing primary education. In Queensland, the retention rate increased from forty-nine per cent in 1952 to eighty-five percent by 1959, and there was a larger proportion of the student population seeking post-primary schooling.\(^8\) The years of the Great Depression (1929–1939) and World War II (1939–1945) are given more specific focus in the history of St Ursula’s because of the impact of those

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\(^6\) Margaret Cooper, interview by Maree Ganley, 2015, ACU Brisbane.

\(^7\) MacGinley, “Interview.”

\(^8\) Logan and Clarke, “Development of State Secondary Schools 1912-1957.”
events on the progress and survival of a secondary boarding school on the central coast of Queensland.

Table 3 A summary of developments of the Queensland secondary school curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>The Common Schools Act of Victoria established the national school curriculum which offered a basic education of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, geography and singing. This elementary curriculum content became established in all the colonies. The uniform classification of classes was preparatory, then first to fifth class in which the children would be expected to exit schooling at an average age of 11 to 13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Subjects, texts and examinations for junior and senior set by the University of Queensland. The University senate used senior and junior public examinations as entrance examinations for its various faculties. For entry to the Faculty of Arts, the candidate had to pass six junior subjects and two senior subjects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>In 1914, two-year secondary scholarships were offered at approved secondary schools to: • all students who obtained a mark of 50% or more in the annual State Scholarship examination • parents and guardians received a living allowance of £12 a year if a student child lived at home and £30 if the child lived away from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Queensland secondary education dominated by university-controlled public examinations. English, Mathematics and a foreign language formed the basis of the five subjects. Most students took history and geography to make up the total number of subjects for matriculation. Noticeable emphasis on commercial courses for girls after 1919, with the introduction of the Commercial Junior as an alternative to the academic university entrance subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919–1939</td>
<td>Little change in secondary education in this twenty-year period. Textbooks set by university; the only change to history textbook content is a section on Australian history in 1939. Population in QLD grew from 736,000 in 1919 to 1,020,000 in 1939.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924–1939</td>
<td>No new state high schools opened in Queensland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Queensland secondary students could complete a University Commercial Junior Certificate; students could also complete a University Commercial Senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Education Act secondary school curricula and examinations became the responsibility of two new administrative bodies, the Board of Junior Secondary School Studies and the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. Completely new courses were introduced for senior science subjects, such as physics, biology and chemistry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>A range of modified junior courses was introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Institutes of technology were opened in Toowoomba and Rockhampton. A remote area allowance was introduced for all secondary students in isolated areas. Queensland’s first rural training school was opened at Longreach. Per capita grants to non-State schools were reintroduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969–1972</td>
<td>The Radford Committee recommended that public examinations be replaced by a system of internal school assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Tertiary Entrance Scores (TE) replaced with Student Education Profile (OP).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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9 Whitwell, “Personal Collection of Margaret (Whitwell) Cooper”.
First day at school

On Sunday, December 9, 1923, Bishop Shiel opened an extension to St Ursula’s convent boarding school. The school had been operating for six years and Bishop Shiel outlined his assessment of the work of the Presentation Sisters in Yeppoon. He stated that,

St Ursula’s might be fittingly termed a training ground for the daughters of sunny Queensland, where all that is noble and beautiful in womanhood is cultivated and moulded under the kindly influence of gentler generous natures … such is the work done by the sisters of the Presentation Order in the spread of Christ’s kingdom among the people of Queensland. They have striven to implant a deep practical faith while they have not failed to impress onto their many pupils the civil duties of the true Australian citizens.\(^\text{11}\)

As the leader of the Catholic Church in the diocese of Rockhampton, the bishop presented his beliefs of the value of education for girls. They were: 1) that a convent school education was the most effective means to educate girls in the culture and faith of the Catholic Church; 2) that it prepared girls to take their place in society as educated Australian women and; 3) that it was an optimum setting for students to learn from the example of women religious as the ideal model of womanhood. However, within students and staff who were the recipients of those ideals in the classroom and boarding house, the situation was more complicated. The next three chapters capture the interplay between the ideals and the reality in the daily life of St Ursula’s over an eighty-year period.

The Presentation Sisters adapted the traditional convent boarding school environment of the northern hemisphere of the late 19\(^\text{th}\) century in several ways. They were accommodating students of all ages who were leaving home for an extended period and in some cases were beginning school for the first time. Initially, they accepted day students, including boys, from elementary, and by the early

1930s, they accepted students through to senior matriculation. Bishop Shiel presented the ‘ideal’ of convent boarding school education for women, but the sisters in their ongoing enrolment policy did not seem to have considered coeducation a conflict of ideals, and they maintained the practice until St Brendan’s opened.

The architecture and seaside location of the first three-storey building of St Ursula’s was a major selling point in the early advertisements inviting enrolments. The open tropical-style building presented a contrast to the traditional European fortress-like, walled structures of the Presentation Institute’s convent boarding schools established in southern states in Australia from 1866. The first boarders of St Ursula’s slept in a large pink dormitory surrounded by an open verandah on the top floor, and they were cared for by Sister Stanislaus. As a contrast, Margaret Stewart Bullock attended Star of the Sea Presentation convent boarding school in Melbourne (1898–1907) and was escorted to the school each day. She recorded that ‘On school days the gate in the wall surrounding the convent and school was left open so that the day pupils could enter for the school day and it was then locked soon after nine am’.

When St Ursula’s was opened on the fifth of February, 1917, it had very little of the traditional Catholic ‘family album’ of statues, pictures and stained glass chapel windows. There was no parish church until 1929, and there was no chaplain appointed specifically to the convent boarding school. The sisters carried the memory of ancient Catholic cultural heritage in their medieval style black religious habits with the religious symbols of a cross and rosary beads attached to a waistband. The habits functioned to form personal and group identity and authority, but the children may have been seeing for the first time the formidable presence of heavily garbed nuns. Although I was not able to locate personal memoirs of how these first St Ursula’s students perceived the religious dress of the

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12 “St Ursula’s ”.
13 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon." 77.
14 Stewart Bullock, "Memories of School Days at "Star of the Sea" 1898-1907 ".
15 Paul O'Donnell, "Place' as the Locus of 'Memory': Conserving the Cultural Patrimony of the Church," The Australasian Catholic Record 86, no. 4 (2009). 429.
16 These additions to the religious dress were abandoned in the late 1960s.
nuns, the effect on young children of seeing the nuns in religious habit has been recorded from the Presentation Sister’s schools in Ireland. Mary O’Byrne attended Presentation Convent School Cashel, Ireland, in the 1960s and had vivid first impressions of her teachers. The ‘nuns were dressed in black …. and they never seemed human. I refused to attend school, I was simply scared by the way they were dressed’.\footnote{O’Donoghue and Harford, \textit{Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967}. Presentation Convent Cashel, County Tipperary: The memories of Mary O’Byrne. 123.}

Kathleen Curmi recalls from her convent school days in Sydney in the thirties and forties ‘that all nuns in those days must have been saints, at least by default. Their clothes were barbarous. Priests and brothers wore soutanes, and loose, comfortable garments’. She noted that ‘the effects of these practices on me as a girl were insidious and powerful: religious women were less free than their male religious counterparts’.\footnote{Kathleen Curmi, “Not Unreasonably Angry,” in \textit{Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids: Journeys from Catholic Childhoods} ed. Dominica Nelson and Kate Nelson (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1986). 129.} The religious dress was not modified for the sisters in the tropical heat of Yeppoon until 1968, when a new superior, Mother Barbara Houlihan (1968) took the personal initiative to permit the sisters to cut their sleeves back to elbow length and the black habits were changed to white, and beads and crosses were removed from the waistband.\footnote{Fleming, "Interview."}

The students in the convent school were not completely isolated from contact with local people. From its first years, the pioneer sisters visited farms for produce in a horse and cart provided by Sister Evangelist Murtagh’s father. Later, local residents took the sisters and students to their farms, and a fisherman, Mr Barton, took them on boat trips out to the nearby islands.\footnote{Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon."} The sisters raised funds to construct the only Catholic church in Yeppoon in the undercroft of the St Ursula’s building in 1918.\footnote{The Catholic Press, “Sacred Heart Church Yeppoon: Blessed by Bishop Shiel,” \textit{The Catholic Press NSW: 1895-1942}, Thursday 29 August 1929. 42. A new church building was constructed across the road from St Ursula’s in 1929.} The church on the ground floor served as a classroom during the week, but it had another important purpose socially and financially for the boarding school. The students mingled with seasonal holidaymakers who came to Mass at the school.
on Sunday and with residents of Yeppoon who donated food for the sisters and boarders. The importance of this contact was clear to Marie Atherton, a nine-year-old boarder at St Ursula’s in 1918. She comments that, ‘we boarders would have starved only for Mr Carroll arriving in his horse and cart for Mass each Sunday with dressed chickens and vegetables from his farm’.22

**The Catholic school curriculum 1917-1953**

The range of accomplishment subjects in the French Ursuline tradition are documented in the Whitwell reports for St Ursula’s high school, 1922-23. Doris was aged fourteen years in 1923, and this was the equivalent of her scholarship year or the top of the primary school. Besides the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) she had learned French, Latin, music and fancy needlework. Dance was not included as an accomplishment subject at Yeppoon, but from the Murtagh annals we learn that Ursula Kennedy arranged training in callisthenics and drill-like movements for the sisters during their holiday gatherings in Yeppoon.23

In contrast, the basis of the Australian colonial curriculum was the three Rs. In addition, object lessons (show and tell lessons), drill and gymnastics, and vocal music were supposed to be taught, but in practice these relatively new subjects were often ignored or poorly taught. Geography, needlework, grammar, history and mechanics were also included in the curriculum at various levels. While some of these subjects were included for their practical usefulness, the main criterion for inclusion of subjects in the curriculum was not their practical value, but their value in disciplining mental faculties such as memory and reasoning.24

From 1917, the ‘accomplishment’ subjects featured strongly in the ‘select’ high school curriculum of Yeppoon. It was described in the advertisements as a ‘thorough English education’. The subjects offered did not differ from the curriculum for girls’ boarding schools whether in England or Ireland or America. Even the inclusion of

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22 Berenice Wright, interview by Maree Ganley, March 2015, ACU Brisbane.
23 Murtagh, ”Archives.”
vocational subjects was not unusual, as De Bare illustrates in her history of American schools founded by various women’s religious orders.\(^{25}\) The first ‘high schools’ were not secondary schools in the contemporary sense, since students ranged in age from five to late teens. As students progressed through classes known as ‘forms’, they studied a variety of subjects. The advanced subjects in mathematics, languages, history, music, science and office skills gave St Ursula’s students access to the limited number of professional careers open to women, such as teaching, nursing and clerical work. The accomplishment subjects of music and art also provided career opportunities in performance and teaching. The curriculum for girls at St Ursula’s challenges education historian, Anita Selzer’s argument that the main purpose of education for Australian girls until the 1920s was to develop skills for managing homes and rearing families.\(^{26}\)

I could not establish whether there was an on-site sister’s professional library established in St Ursula’s in 1917, but there was a strong tradition of the Presentation Sisters to establish extensive convent libraries in their first foundations in Australia. The Queensland Presentation Sisters came from their convent high school in Wagga Wagga and the archive there contains numerous books, which were part of the sister’s professional library in the 1890s.\(^{27}\) The volumes included academic texts and manuals on a range of subjects such as pedagogy, spirituality and reference books on modern languages such as French and Latin, and textbooks for Mathematics, chemistry, the arts and music.

There is no mention of a student library of books at St Ursula’s beyond the set texts for public examinations, until a dedicated library was constructed in the mid-1970s. No student in the interviews recalled there being a strong recommendation that students bring books to read to boarding school. In the mid-1970s, students and staff had access to a new well-resourced library, and, in those years, boarders recalled bringing novels to boarding school from home.\(^{28}\) Students from the 1950s

\(^{25}\) De Bare, *Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools*.


\(^{27}\) Gregory Allen, 9 August 2001.

\(^{28}\) Catherine (Delaney) Kehoe, interview by Maree Ganley, 30 June 2014, Written response, ACU Brisbane.
and 60s found extra texts on shelves in classrooms belonging to the sisters from their university studies, which suggests there was not a dedicated school library in those years.29

The report cards of boarding student, Doris Whitwell (1918-1923) revealed two subject strands in place (Figure 8). There were the subjects from the accomplishments curriculum, considered culturally enriching for girls, which included singing and playing musical instruments, visual arts, needlework, languages, history, geography and arithmetic.30 There were also the vocation-oriented subjects, including shorthand, bookkeeping and typing which students would take up as they progressed into forms six and seven. Mary Stewart came from Longreach, from a middle-class background, as her father owned some property as a ‘selector’. She began at St Ursula’s in 1926, aged fourteen years, and completed her schooling in 1927. She later moved to Brisbane where she became one of the first two women ever to be employed by the Commonwealth Bank. Mary’s daughter believed her training in the accomplishment skill of calligraphic handwriting, alongside her training in office skills, at St Ursula’s also contributed to graduates’ employability at that time.31

29 Dr. Elizabeth Esmond, ibid., 13 February 2015, Audio.
30 Selzer, Educating Women in Australia. From the Convict Era to the 1920s. 62-66, 70.
31 Geraldine Reardon, interview by Maree Ganley, November 2, 2015, ACU Brisbane.
Chapter 5: St Ursula’s - academic curriculum, culture and faith

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Figure 8 Report cards of student Doris Whitwell from 1922 and 1923: sixth and seventh form end of year results.
By the late 1920s, more advanced levels of literature, languages, Mathematics and history had been introduced to prepare girls and boys for the Queensland junior and senior university exams. Three female senior public examination graduates from St Ursula’s in the pre-World War II years qualified for entry to the University of Queensland and pursued teaching careers.\textsuperscript{32} The two male graduates pursued aviation and dentistry. Physiology was the only science subject listed to junior level at St Ursula’s in the 1930s. The limited number of science subjects in the St Ursula’s academic curriculum was comparable with the Queensland state secondary school curriculum in those years as any science subject in secondary education for girls was only just starting to take hold in private and public schools.

The school register of St Ursula’s in 1917 makes a division in its layout for those twenty-six female students enrolled for the fee-paying ‘select’ high school education for young ladies. There is a separate section listing the day-student girls and boys from a wide range of age and form levels.\textsuperscript{33} As well as the twenty-six boarders, 105 day students enrolled at St Ursula’s throughout 1917, and, of these, twenty-seven were boys. The first boarder’s name in the register is Greta Forrest, aged fifteen years and nine months, from Longreach. Hildred Homewood, the eldest, is sixteen years and eleven months, and the youngest is Mary Hickey, just five years old.\textsuperscript{34}

Amongst this group of girls were seven boarders from Blackall, Winton and Longreach, who until 1916 had been students in the select convent boarding school at the Presentation high school of Our Lady’s College Longreach. It is not known why these students who were already accomplished in advanced subjects in literature and the arts transferred from the Presentation convent boarding school in Longreach, except that the Presentation Sisters intended to establish St Ursula’s

\textsuperscript{33} "St Ursula's College Yeppoon." The headline in the 1920 edition is "\textit{Boarding and High School for Young Ladies}". 2.
\textsuperscript{34} St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's College Yeppoon." 1-3.
for more advanced learning in the accomplishments and to prepare the girls for senior university matriculation not offered at Our Lady's College Longreach.\textsuperscript{35}

Post school-age girls were also accepted as boarders, some of whom remained in boarding school into their early twenties, such as Mary Drummond from Springsure who enrolled at St Ursula's in 1918 at eighteen years of age.\textsuperscript{36} These young women remained at school into their early twenties to continue advanced studies in the accomplishments or as pupil teachers, as there were very few post-school employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{37} Young women from isolated regions were often not able to take up a teacher-training scholarship because it was offered only in the south-east corner of Queensland from 1914.

Doris Whitwell and Asthore Taunton, at ten years of age, began their schooling at St Ursula's with the traditional accomplishments curriculum of music, art, languages, history, geography, arithmetic and needlework.\textsuperscript{38} Doris' report card and exercise books from 1918 to 1923 listed subjects that would have prepared her to sit for the junior university public exams when she reached form seven.\textsuperscript{39} Her workbooks also contained studies in civics that gave her a knowledge of the systems of government, appropriate communication in applying for employment, and instructions on how to vote—a right which had been awarded to Queensland women in 1905.\textsuperscript{40} Doris Whitwell graduated in sixth form in 1923 as a fourteen year old, and in her school reports she attained a level of achievement for fifteen subjects of the accomplishments curriculum, including French, Latin, drawing, piano, needlework, fancy needlework and subjects in introductory literature studies and mathematics.

\textsuperscript{35} The Morning Bulletin, "University of Queensland Music Results," \textit{The Morning Bulletin}, November 19 and 23 1917. 2,7. Our Lady's College Longreach operated as a junior secondary high school and never went on to offer senior university matriculation.

\textsuperscript{36} St Ursula's College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's College Yeppoon." 1.

\textsuperscript{37} Sister Agatha Freeman, interview by Maree Ganley, 15 June 2015, ACU Brisbane.

\textsuperscript{38} Whitwell, "Personal Collection."

\textsuperscript{39} Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon." In 1920 St Ursula's successfully registered as a secondary school.

\textsuperscript{40} Whitwell. "Personal Collection."
The absence of a mark for religious instruction for Doris, who is registered as Church of England, indicates that the non-Catholic students were not required to sit for examination in that subject. Religious difference amongst those of different Christian faiths in the boarding school was acknowledged into the 1930s. Non-Catholic boarder, Marjorie Harper, recalled that the domestic staff at St Ursula’s looked after them while the sisters and Catholic girls went to church in the mornings.41 Moving forward to the mid-1980s, and in an age of ecumenism, it seemed surprising that the boarders recalled that those of other faiths were required to attend all Catholic services and to attend religious education classes.42

![Image of Doris, Vera Vivian and Lynda Whitwell circa late 1920s](image)

**Figure 9** Doris, Vera Vivian and Lynda Whitwell circa late 1920s

The boarders, Doris, Vera and Lynda Whitwell (Figure 9) are listed as Church of England. Their father, John Whitwell, owned a sawmill in the isolated country town of Borilla, south west of Rockhampton. The Presentation Sisters established St Ursula’s to provide schooling for girls from remote regions. In the case of the Whitwell children, the boarding school served an additional purpose as their father

41 Harper, "Interview."
42 Beth (Wheeldon) Oram, ibid., 30 June 2015, Written Response. Non-Catholic students often won the end of year class religious education prize.
required a place for the children to live because of difficulties in their home-life. Their mother had left the family in unhappy circumstances, and, by 1917, John Whitwell could no longer raise the girls and one younger son on his own.\textsuperscript{43} By 1924, the girls had each completed up to four years of schooling at St Ursula’s. Doris’ daughter, Margaret Cooper, seemed sure that their much younger brother, Vivian, also enrolled at the school in the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{44} He joined the four Brown boys from Barcaldine, as fee-paying students, but there is no record of where they stayed while at the school. It may be that they boarded with relatives living in Yeppoon or at privately run hostels for boy students attending St Ursula’s as day students.\textsuperscript{45}

The school was open to boys from 1917 to 1940.\textsuperscript{46} They completed primary school to scholarship and studied for junior and senior university exams, but their place has not been acknowledged in more recent commentaries about St Ursula’s early history.\textsuperscript{47} This diversion from the convent boarding school model was a precedent set by the Presentation Sisters in Longreach in the absence of a state secondary school in the town.\textsuperscript{48} The Presentation Sisters educated boys to senior matriculation level at St Ursula’s until the Christian Brothers opened St Brendan’s boys’ boarding school in Yeppoon in 1940.

On graduation in the early 1920s, the three Whitwell girls, daughters of a saw miller, could communicate in personal and business matters to a sophisticated level and calculate measurement in weights and area to an advanced level. As a fourteen-year-old, Doris had learned civics and the organization of the electoral system, basic physiology, history and geography.\textsuperscript{49} She had displayed the most promise of the sisters and progressed in piano to a higher division. She was also known to be a...

\textsuperscript{43} Cooper, “Interview.”
\textsuperscript{44} Whitwell; Cooper, “Interview.” This assertion cannot be substantiated in the original St Ursula’s enrolment registers.
\textsuperscript{45} Ahern, “Interview.” The Presentation Sisters conducted a co-education high school in Longreach and boys stayed at a privately run hostel nearby for boys for the state primary school and the Catholic school.
\textsuperscript{46} St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.”
\textsuperscript{47} Sister Concilia Ring, “Living the Vision 1918-2008,” in St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, ed. St Ursula’s College (Yeppoon: St. Ursula’s College, 2008).
\textsuperscript{48} Mahoney, \textit{Dieu Et Devoir: The Story of All Hallows’ School Brisbane 1861-1981}. Bishop Quinn of Brisbane diocese in the late 19th century set the precedent when he denied the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows in Brisbane the request to conduct commercial classes for boys even in a separate room.
\textsuperscript{49} Whitwell.
good artist and excelled in pencil drawings, winning a Certificate of Merit from the National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland in 1922.\textsuperscript{50} Doris completed her formal education in sixth form, aged fourteen years, and for a time remained at home in Borilla. Her sisters, Vera and Lynda Whitwell, on graduating from St Ursula’s at fourteen, found employment in Brisbane as a nanny and housekeeper respectively, and later had management positions in service and hospitality before marrying property owners.\textsuperscript{51} Most likely their advanced schooling had provided them with a class status that broadened their opportunities for marriage. A small number of girls from Doris’ class went on to the seventh form in 1924, and they achieved junior university results. The reminder of what Doris Whitwell’s life and experiences at St Ursula’s meant to her personally was a handwritten note on the surviving collection of her school reports. She wrote ‘For the girls [her daughters]. I treasured them—hope you will’.\textsuperscript{52}

Asthore Taunton’s post-school career contrasted with the Whitwell girls at St Ursula’s for several reasons. In 1917, she left Our Lady’s Presentation convent school Longreach as a ten-year-old, for boarding school at St Ursula’s, but returned to Our Lady’s convent school in Longreach after one year. In 1922, Asthore enrolled at Lourdes Hill girl’s boarding school in Brisbane, founded by the Good Samaritan Sisters in 1916. Her education towards senior matriculation was launched by the Presentation Sisters in the relatively unknown country convent boarding schools of Longreach and St Ursula’s Yeppoon. Her exit suggested that her parents could afford to have her finish her education in boarding schools regarded as more prestigious in the south.\textsuperscript{53} A comparison of Asthore’s final school results at Lourdes Hill in Brisbane with the subjects offered at St Ursula’s confirms there was no difference in the curriculum offered at St Ursula’s than at Lourdes’s Hill, which was a combination of the accomplishments and vocation oriented subjects.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. Doris became a housemaid for a young family in New Farm Brisbane from 1927 to 1940. Here she met and married Major Harry Leslie Swain who became a Postmaster. Doris also worked part time in the Post Office.
\textsuperscript{51} Cooper, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} The Courier Mail, "Lourdes Hill School Results " The Courier Mail, 28 December 1922. 11.
\textsuperscript{54} Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives, "Presentation Sisters." In 1951, Superior of St Rita’s Presentation College Brisbane, Aloysius Ryan expresses deep hurt in a letter to the Archbishop of
In 1928, the Taunton family left Longreach for Sydney to be close to their two daughters as they pursued their chosen careers. In the early 1930s, Asthore used the convent boarding school education in the accomplishments to pursue a career on the stage. Unlike many young girls from remote regions, her parents had the financial capacity to chaperone her to more accessible locations to become established. By 1930, Asthore’s name appeared regularly as a dancing teacher and a prominent leading actor in the newly formed Sydney Community Playhouse, and in 1937 she married Louis Vernon, a famous international actor. Asthore Taunton’s opportunities to pursue a career were made possible because her family had the means to assist her to relocate to the city in the 1920s. The employment opportunities and social class advancement were limited in country regions for most girls even for those who had achieved advanced qualifications in the arts and proficiency in literacy, numeracy and commercial skills. A search in electoral rolls and newspapers from the 1920s reveals that despite the restrictions of isolation, some St Ursula’s graduates did travel far from their country towns to pursue careers because of their secondary school education.

There was a small number of day students who enrolled at St Ursula’s from 1917 for the fee-paying high school and accomplishments curriculum. They studied to junior university level and some found employment throughout Queensland as teachers, nurses and clerical workers. Among them were the four Barton girls, daughters of a Yeppoon fisherman, who attended St Ursula’s from 1918 to 1928. The eldest, Eileen, completed her schooling at age sixteen in 1919. She travelled widely on the eastern coast of Australia, found domestic work throughout her lifetime and never married. Her younger sister, Minna won the junior (A) prize in 1924 for Latin and French and gained second place in the Yeppoon district in 1925 for the junior university exams. She achieved a coveted social class standing in the Brisbane that a student who had achieved the highest marks in the Junior Examination in their school and who had secured a substantial bursary awarded by St Rita’s left for a more prestigious girls’ Catholic College for her Senior matriculation.

56 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon." It would be Mr Barton’s boat that would take the sisters and children on boat picnics to North Keppel Island in 1924, led by Father Bray from North Rockhampton parish. 87,110.
Yeppoon district when she was appointed pupil teacher to Yeppoon State School in 1926 and later taught throughout Queensland.\textsuperscript{58}

In June, 1922, boarders, Bessie O’Sullivan, Joan Devenish, Mary Kavanagh and Dorothy Spence prepared for the junior university examinations. In 1924, Bessie O’Sullivan went on to become the first senior university examination graduate of St Ursula’s and gained advanced music qualifications. She joined the Presentation Sisters and became an accomplished secondary music and science teacher.\textsuperscript{59} In 1926, Doris Barton passed her exams in the Shorthand and Writers’ and Bookkeeping Association as well as the Stott’s and Hoare Business College exams in bookkeeping and typewriting, and she found work as a typist in Brisbane.

Nursing was another socially acceptable career for women in the 1920s. Hildred Homewood, from Kunwarara, north of Rockhampton, began boarding at St Ursula’s in August, 1917, at almost seventeen years of age. She went straight into seventh form (sub-junior university), which indicated prior schooling, and graduated in December, 1918. In 1931, she is listed as a nurse in Victoria, but by 1932 she had returned to the family property at Kunwarara. She continued with her nursing career in the district and may not have ever married. Susan Rossberg graduated from St Ursula’s at the end of 1917, aged sixteen years, and took up nursing at the Longreach Base Hospital. Her sister, Sophia, had contracted polio and graduated at aged fourteen years in 1917 to do ‘gentle’ clerical work in the family cordial factory in Longreach.\textsuperscript{60}

Ethel Frances Hanrahan attended St Ursula’s from 1920 to 1926 along with her sister, Marie. Ethel excelled in music and was first violin in the college orchestra in 1926. She completed junior university commercial courses in typing but pursued a career in nursing. Between 1940 and 1945, she rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and, in World War II, she received the highest military decoration for a distinguished career as an army nurse in Middle East theatres of war. She returned

\textsuperscript{58} Australian Electoral Roll, 1903-1980, Minna Barton.
\textsuperscript{59} Therese (McCabe) Clarke, interview by Maree Ganley, 18 February 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{60} Ann Rossberg, interview by Maree Ganley, July 14, 2015, ACU Brisbane.
to complete her nursing career as Matron of Greenslopes Military Hospital from 1947 until her retirement in 1964.\(^\text{61}\)

The progress towards a modern secondary school curriculum in convent high schools like St Ursula’s came at a cost. Throughout the 1920s, there was a noticeable reduction in concert items by students at the annual events. From 1917, Mother Patrick Madden had trained the students to perform with violins, mandolins, a banjo, guitars and piano. There were vocal soloists, action songs by the young students, ribbon drill performed by the junior girls and a eurhythmics display by the senior girls. An annual display of all student work in painting, drawing and crafts was also presented.\(^\text{62}\) The commitment of time required to prepare for public examinations had begun to take a toll by 1927, when the earlier grand performances in the arts involving all students were reduced to one short musical item before the annual distribution of academic prizes.\(^\text{63}\) Rupert Goodman, a historian of Queensland Education, argues that the state and university examinations drove Catholic schools to seek material success at the expense of the arts, pastoral care and spiritual education that characterised the curriculum of convent schools.\(^\text{64}\) He stated:

> when Roman Catholics jumped on the democratic bandwagon in the name of religious freedom and supported schemes for bursaries and scholarships in the early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century … they were forced to accept external examinations … to qualify for the benefits of financial assistance; they were forced to adopt methods of cramming and pressure teaching … to get better results than other schools, particularly state schools.\(^\text{65}\)

From 1914 to 1962, all children attaining a fifty per cent pass in English, history, geography and mathematics in the state scholarship examinations in the last year


\(^{62}\) The Catholic Press, "St Ursula’s College Yeppoon Annual Concert," The Catholic Press Thursday January 1 1925. 42; "St Ursula’s College; Annual Concert," The Catholic Press, Thursday 23 December 1926. 50.

\(^{63}\) "St Ursula’s Prize Day," The Catholic Press, Thursday 2 January 1930. 42.


\(^{65}\) Ibid. 155.
of primary school in Queensland received per capita funding which supported the Catholic secondary school financially. To ensure maximum success, Catholic children preparing for this Queensland Public Scholarship examination had the school day lengthened for an extra hour after three-thirty in the afternoon, and there were Saturday morning classes until midday.66

The pressure to prepare students for public exams had an effect on the curriculum in all Queensland schools. The St Ursula’s superiors increased the length of the school day to concentrate on preparation for junior and senior public university exams to the neglect of art, music and sport (which also throughout the state system came to be regarded as ‘frills’ by some state inspectors and state school teachers).67 In the 1930s, the State Education Department made frequent requests, even warnings to bring state public examinations into proper perspective. The Director of State Education in 1936 stated that ‘any practice which sacrifices physical education or cultural subjects like singing and drawing, with a view to securing high percentages in the examination, is not considered in the best interest of the pupil’.68

The focus on commercial subjects at the expense of the accomplishments subjects also became a priority in the two secondary schools conducted by the Presentation Sisters in Queensland. The Queensland state education curriculum in the pre-World War II years met the changing needs of industrial development in what was a socially and economically depressed period. St Ursula’s maintained the vocation-based subjects during the war years of 1941–1945 as clerical employment became more accessible for girls. Rockhampton historian, Betty Cosgrove recorded that principals in the Rockhampton Girls’ Grammar school often expressed their

66 Fleming, "Interview." Maree Ganley. Fleming explains, ‘My personal recollection of school at St Pius Banyo, Brisbane was Saturday morning classes and school days to 5 pm in my scholarship year’.
68 Ibid. fn 274; Education Office Gazette, 3 May 1936. 35.
disappointment that there was not sufficient support from its school board and parents for the development of the curriculum in the sciences.69

Between 1929 and 1934, boarding school enrolments at St Ursula’s ranged from twenty-five down to eighteen in 1934. However, the day and boarding school enrolments in the primary and secondary school combined through those years had increased to 244. The drop in boarder enrolments reflected the effects of the great depression and drought (1929–1939). Families stopped coming to Yeppoon for extended holiday periods during the school year, and this meant there were fewer children at St Ursula’s for short-term day schooling and boarding. The families that did continue to send their daughters to boarding school through the depression were registered as having middle-class occupations.70 The sisters struggled financially as they kept the fees very low in contrast with St Faith’s Anglican girl’s boarding school, also in Yeppoon. Students, Phyllis and Mona Pill from Wowan were Church of England and were enrolled at St Ursula’s because the family could not afford the fees at St Faith’s.71 Vocational subjects remained the focus in the curriculum, and fees were kept to a minimum throughout the depression years to allow working class families to keep boys and girls in secondary school.

**Extracurricular activities in the curriculum**

From its first year in 1917, St Ursula’s conducted recreational and sporting activities particularly at the seaside. On November 21, 1924, superior Mother Clare McMahon established the first organised sports day as an annual inter-house competition which has remained on the school calendar to the present day.72 Initially, the school was divided into two teams of Reds and Blues, but the number of houses had increased to four by the late 1970s. The school sport’s day came to represent the strongest bonding activity for boarders and day students as there was very little

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69 Cosgrove, *The Wider View: Rockhampton Girls Grammar: A Social History*, 75-76. ‘The school had trouble always when seeking to appoint science mistresses to senior matriculation level. This limitation of a particular source reflected the traditional lack of emphasis on science education for girls.’ (Girls eventually could go to the nearby Boys’ Grammar School for science and mathematics classes).

70 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.”

71 Harper, “Interview.”

72 Presentation Day November 21 is the official celebration date of the naming of the Presentation Sisters taken from the biblical reference to Mary being ‘presented’ in the temple.
Chapter 5: St Ursula’s - academic curriculum, culture and faith

interschool sport in the first forty years.\textsuperscript{73} In those years, the bishop, visiting priests and local Yeppoon residents donated prizes for winning teams and individual events, and they remained for a high tea after the day’s sport was added.\textsuperscript{74} The students served at the tables, and their table etiquette training was on full display.\textsuperscript{75}

In 1928, Superior Mother Aloysius Ryan reported in the Rockhampton \textit{Morning Bulletin} that the annual sport’s day event at St Ursula’s was testimony that the St Ursula’s school curriculum remained ‘broad and encompassing’. In her report, she assured the readers that ‘the splendid display of athletics shows that this branch of education has not been neglected’.\textsuperscript{76} In 1933, the superior Mother Evangelist Murtagh posted a report of the St Ursula’s annual sport’s day in \textit{The Catholic Press}, Sydney newspaper. It was a strategic move as she reported the sports day of a little known Catholic boarding school in central Queensland as a who’s who of the clergy in the Rockhampton diocese, with the newly appointed Bishop Hayes (1933-1945) and eight priests listed in attendance.\textsuperscript{77} The presence of the bishop and priests was an opportunity for them to observe the achievements by the sisters first-hand, which was important as the sisters relied on the recommendations of the bishop and priests to promote the school to parents during their annual visits to isolated Catholic communities throughout the diocese.\textsuperscript{78} In the early 1940s, Bishop Hayes, on his visit to a property at Capella in western Queensland, persuaded Sister Mary Rose MacGinley’s family to select St Ursula’s for their daughters’ secondary education, rather than the family’s preferred boarding school of Lourdes Hill in Brisbane.

From the 1930s, a school swimming carnival became an annual event held in Ross Creek, a popular swimming place for the residents of Yeppoon. All pupils participated, including children from the bush, some of whom had rarely experienced swimming in waterways.\textsuperscript{79} Marjorie Harper, from Wowan, managed to overcome her fear of the water. ‘I could not swim and we were told to run in shallow

\textsuperscript{73} Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula's Yeppoon." 112.
\textsuperscript{74} Harper, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} The Catholic Press, "Yeppoon St Ursula’s College," \textit{The Catholic Press}, Thursday November 9 1933. 36.
\textsuperscript{78} MacGinley, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{79} Charlotte (Tomlin) Leane, ibid., 30 October 2015, Written Response.
water alongside the swimmers, but I won a race in the carnival in 1933 by letting the current drag me along’. Students and teachers played sport on the beach at Yeppoon, which was a large expanse when the tide was out. Miss Marjory Popple (1932-1936) who taught Mathematics at St Ursula’s, along with the other duties of a dormitory supervisor, also coached hockey on the beach. One of Miss Popple’s students, Marjorie Harper, went on to represent Australia in a national university hockey team in the 1930s.

The need to occupy boarding school students after school class hours saw much sporting activity on the beach, including ocean swimming several times a week. Boarder, Marie Messer (1949–1950) from Blackall had a different memory of her visits to the beach. ‘I hated sport and we had to go to the beach. We marched down in twos in brown sports uniforms, changed into togs, had a swim, then we had to walk back in sports uniform and brown stockings for a shower back at school as there was no shower in the bathing shed.’ The absence of competitive sport in St Ursula’s was due to isolation and the difficulties of travel to other secondary schools in Rockhampton. However, the girls competed occasionally with the students from St Faith’s Yeppoon, and, in the late 1950s, travelled by train to Rockhampton for tennis competitions.

**The school experience in living memory 1930-1953**

Three past students and one teacher from 1930 to 1936 provided the earliest reflections of schooling at St Ursula’s. Marjorie Harper turned 100 in 2016, and Sister Teresita Ahern a year later. Bonnie Freeman (1932-1936) was a boarder from Longreach from ten years of age and, in later years, became a Presentation sister at St Ursula’s. Marjorie’s story highlighted the determination of mothers to have their daughters educated to higher levels that could lift them out of the cycle of poverty that the Harper family was experiencing.
Marjorie Harper completed her primary education at Dundee South State School in the Dawson Valley, central Queensland, and she began her secondary schooling at St Ursula’s in February, 1930. She was one of several non-Catholic girls that enrolled as boarders at St Ursula’s who came from the new state primary schools built in country centres from the early 1930s. Her mother had trained as a school teacher in Brisbane in the 1920s, but according to state education department policy, was prevented from working after marriage. She found it frustrating that she had to give up her career when the family struggled financially on a small property. However, Marjorie’s mother turned to journalism to fund her daughter’s school and boarding school fees and the cost of the journey from Wowan to Yeppoon. Marjorie’s mother was good at English and worked as a part-time reporter for the *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin* for the district of Wowan. She was paid nine pence an inch.\(^{85}\)

Marjorie completed secondary education at St Ursula’s to senior matriculation level. Her comparison of her home conditions with what she saw of the Presentation Sister’s lifestyle is revealing. She compared the simple home conditions on the farm with the living conditions of the sisters. The sisters, who were her teachers, slept in a bed on the verandah, separated from the students by only a sheet. She reflected that ‘The women in my life of mother and teachers were surrounding me with the best possible chance for my future, despite their respective poor conditions’.\(^{86}\)

In the 1960s, Jane Jordison’s mother reared chickens on their dairy farm to be dressed and sold for Christmas, specifically to pay for her daughter’s boarding school education, the extra cost of music lessons, and the purchase of a piano.\(^{87}\) She recalls that,

Mum bought day-old chickens, and she raised them through the year. We had to pluck them, and she took them to town as dressed chickens to sell to local people. She saved enough money to buy a piano and pay for lessons.

\(^{85}\) Ibid.; *The Central Queensland Herald,* "The Schools," *Central Queensland Herald,* Thursday December 17 1931. 43.
\(^{86}\) Harper, "Interview."
\(^{87}\) Jordison, "Interview."
I did a couple of music exams, but I did not continue. Mum sent me straight back to school after dad died suddenly because my brother wanted me to stay home and help on the farm. Mum said, "No way, you're going to get at least a year ten education". She had never had an education as she was helping on the farm when she finished school in grade three. She was so determined that we all went to boarding school, and so determined that we all had at least a year ten education.\textsuperscript{88}

In 1933, Sister Teresita Ahern witnessed the meticulous bookkeeping practices of Mother Evangelist Murtagh.\textsuperscript{89} She recalled that, at the year’s end, all suppliers’ and tradesmen’s bills were paid. Even though the Presentation Sisters were bound by the laws of enclosure until the mid-1970s, the interaction with the local community was essential for survival. From Evangelist Murtagh’s memoirs, we learn that when there were insufficient funds, the superiors into the 1950s adopted a bartering system where parents paid for their children’s education in kind with food and transport. In 1936, the Vaggelas children came from a Greek family of pineapple farmers outside Yeppoon. Anne Vaggelas’ parents would invite the sisters and boarders to the farm to eat the pineapples, even though the Vaggelas children came to school in bare feet and were regarded as very poor.\textsuperscript{90} The children learned a musical instrument and were given Art of Speech lessons by Sister Dorothea without cost. Anne learned to recite poetry by heart by sitting outside the classroom where Sister Dorothea was conducting Art of Speech lessons for her brother and sister. ‘I listened so well that when Archbishop Duhig visited the school, I recited a poem for him that I had learned sitting outside the door’.\textsuperscript{91} Although the family paid no school fees, Anne’s brother, Peter, learned the violin and returned after his school days to give donations to the school and gifts to his music teacher, Sister Bernadette Hayman.\textsuperscript{92}

\textit{Music and the arts in the curriculum}

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ahern, "Interview."  
\textsuperscript{90} McGrath, "Interview."  
\textsuperscript{91} Vaggelas, "Interview."  
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
On returning to their hometown, trained student musician graduates from St Ursula's had a positive impact on the cultural life of small country towns. The accomplishment's subjects at St Ursula's did not disappear entirely in the school curriculum after the 1920s, and parents paid an extra fee for their daughters to learn a musical instrument and Art of Speech. Some students who trained in music and art returned to their hometowns and made a significant contribution to the cultural life of those isolated communities.93

Mother Evangelist Murtagh, in her memoir, cites several examples of musical contributions by local residents of Yeppoon. She recorded that, from 1918, Sister Aloysius Ryan taught two talented Yeppoon girls, Cecilia Ganter and Ruby Bailey, who later secured an AMEB Diploma of Singing. They were both generous with their talents and sang at various concerts and at local functions and in Church choirs for many years.94 Sister Aileen Fahey (1968-73), a music teacher at St Ursula's, remembered that she varied the classical music examination syllabus by teaching the piano students dance music so that they could accompany for country socials.95

The few past students like Asthore Taunton, who could move to Brisbane and Sydney with their musical talents, made a good income from a profession in performance in the arts. Others established a career in music from being prepared with internationally recognised qualifications. In 1934, Edna Collins passed the senior university exams and achieved High Distinctions for music in Queensland and went on to be a teacher in the Queensland state system.96 In 1936, Joyce Chown, secured a Diploma of Teaching (A. Mus. A) from the Australian Board of Music and pursued a career as a music teacher throughout regional Queensland. She was listed on the staff of St Anne’s school in Townsville in 1954.97 Dorothy Savage was a boarder from Longreach (1944-1945) and reflected on the benefit of music training at St Ursula’s:

93 Messer, "Interview."
94 Sister Evangelist Murtagh, October 24 1984. 2.
95 Fahey, "Interview."
Chapter 5: St Ursula’s - academic curriculum, culture and faith

Sister Bernadette Hayman was a very good music teacher. I have played the piano for sixty years in Brisbane and Longreach. I got honours at school in practical and theory of music; I can't recall any students going past year ten. Dad would not allow me to take up a scholarship to go to Brisbane for teacher training because I was too young, so I got a job in the Commonwealth Bank in Longreach for thirteen years, and I loved it very much. I moved to Brisbane in 1959 to work in a bank and I kept up music and singing and I sang in choirs, on the radio and for weddings.98

Noelene Esmond was much admired at school by her peers. She achieved High Distinctions in piano, violin and singing from the Trinity College of Music, London. She established schools of music and speech and drama in Blackall, but she did not have the opportunity to further her professional career as she joined the Presentation Sisters for a time and had to find work to support herself after she left the convent.99 Noelene shared her musical and vocal talents with the Blackall community. She played the organ at Mass each weekend and she was the main producer of many concerts for the schools in Blackall.100

From the late 1920s, through to the late 1990s, the tradition was maintained that the Presentation Sisters at St Ursula's supplemented the finances of the convent and school by giving paid individual music and art lessons throughout the school day. Throughout much of the 20th century, both state and Catholic schools struggled to maintain music and the arts in the curriculum and to provide sufficient numbers of teachers and equipment to maintain the arts’ subjects. In the mid-1970s, the Queensland State Secondary Education Department introduced class syllabi in music and art from years eight through to year twelve, and the Presentation Sisters also reintroduced creative arts as core subjects into the curriculum of St Ursula’s. It had taken almost fifty years for the balance to be restored by the reintroduction in the school-day curriculum of accomplishment subjects in the arts.101

98 Dorothy Savage, interview by Maree Ganley, 4 July 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
99 Esmond, "Interview."
100 Messer, "Interview."
101 Sister Kathleen Fanton, ibid., 22 October 2009, Audio.
Lay teachers in the secondary school

The students recognised the positive impact of qualified lay staff on student academic progress. Gender discrimination in the workplace was prevalent in the pre-World War II years, particularly in the world of education. Ursula Kennedy, as mother general of the Presentation Sisters, employed qualified lay women in fields of education such as mathematics and science. Lay teachers staffed her schools in an era when the entry of women into teaching in mathematics and science in the Queensland state secondary school system met with great opposition.

The presence of qualified lay teachers had an immediate impact on the development of the academic curriculum at St Ursula’s. From 1923, a state trained teacher, Miss Lizzie O’Neill, taught at St Ursula’s for three years and lived at the college, assisting the sisters with the supervision of junior boarders whom she escorted to dentists and doctors. In 1931, Mother Ursula Kennedy employed Miss Enid Burbeck, from St Rita’s, and Miss Marjory Constance Poppel, at St Ursula’s. Miss Marjory Poppel was a young female mathematics graduate from the University of Queensland who had completed her secondary schooling at Brisbane State High School. From September 1931, Marjory Poppel, Sister Imelda and a Miss Nancy Stephens taught subjects in the high school. Poppel specialized in mathematics but also had a room in the boarding house and was responsible for boarder supervision duties. By employing these young female university graduates to teach mathematics, Ursula Kennedy provided role models to the St Ursula’s girls. Sister Veronica Casey joined them when she had completed her senior university studies at St Ursula’s as a Presentation sister in training.

There were qualified lay and religious teachers at St Ursula’s in the depression period of the 1930s. Five students, a mix of boarder and day students including two boys, completed senior studies in 1933, a significant number in those years for any secondary school, whether in the country or the city. After graduating from St

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102 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon."
103 Barbaro, “The Origins of the Convent High School in Europe and Its Implementation and Evolution in the Antipodes - St Rita’s College, Brisbane, as a Case Study (1926-2008).” 157.
104 Harper, “Interview.” Marjorie Harper was a pupil of Miss Poppel’s at St Ursula’s and graduated from the University of Queensland where she was a national competitor in Hockey; Freeman, “Interview.”
Ursula’s in 1933, boarder, Marjorie Harper, and day students, Gwilfa and Noelle Meredith, were three of just twenty women attending the University of Queensland in 1934. Marjorie observed that, ‘Not a great number of women were doing degrees, and not everyone came to university to study. I knew one woman who enrolled in “History One” every year just so she could come for the social life’.105

Gwilfa and Noelle Meredith moved to Brisbane from Yeppoon when the two girls began their university studies, and Marjorie Harper was able to board with them. Both Gwilfa and Noelle Meredith graduated from the University of Queensland and went on to be founding members of the departments of Ancient History and English in newly-built high schools in Brisbane such as Balmoral and Kedron state high schools, both established in the late 1950s.106 In 1945, Marjorie Harper joined the staff of Brisbane Boys Anglican Church Grammar School where the boys were instructed to call her ‘Sir’.107 Her position there was terminated when the male teachers came back from the war.

In the post-war years, women continued to experience gender discrimination throughout the levels of involvement in Queensland education. There remained the belief that girls should continue to be educated in the accomplishments and remain in the world of domesticity. In 1945, one Queensland male teacher stated, ‘Girls spend too much time qualifying themselves for careers which are the prerogative of the male sex’.108 As late as 1976, a Queensland Parliamentarian stated, ‘basically I believe a woman’s place is in the home’.109 In 1941, the QTU (Queensland Teacher’s Union) opposed the transfer of female teachers under nineteen years old to schools with less than four staff members. Members of the union maintained that these females needed the guidance and advice of their parents, and that there were risks for them in going to isolated districts.110

105 Harper, “Interview.”
106 Murtagh, “Archives.”
109 Ibid. 41.
110 Ibid. 41.
Young female religious women in convents in remote towns were exempt from these objections, as they lived in the protected environment of the religious community. Ursula Kennedy had also given highly educated young women the protection of residence in the boarding school in a country region and the opportunity to teach to the highest level in a secondary school.\textsuperscript{111} Her vision for girls’ education was revolutionary but declined in later years, impacted by the crushing financial limits placed on education in the war years and the tendency within the Queensland Presentation Institute to favour its Brisbane based secondary school, St Rita’s, in the allocation of finances and teaching personnel.\textsuperscript{112} World War II disrupted the plans to develop state secondary education in Queensland overall.

\textbf{The war years and St Ursula’s schooling 1942-1948}

1942 was a calamitous year for all the citizens of coastal Australia but particularly for residents on the central coast of Queensland, with threats of bombing and imminent invasion. The students and staff of St Ursula’s did not experience direct conflict, but special preparations were made for evacuation given the school was close to the coastline. At the end of January 1942, Premier of Queensland, Forgan Smith, ordered the closure of all schools in the coastal belt from Thursday Island to Coolangatta in Queensland and urged the evacuation of coastal boarding secondary schools to the country. Darwin was bombed on February 19, 1942, and the Catholic Archbishop Duhig organised correspondence lessons on how to build air-raid trenches in school grounds for all Catholic schools in Queensland to be published in \textit{The Catholic Leader}.\textsuperscript{113}

Boarders at St Ursula’s, St Faiths and St Brendan’s were evacuated further inland with St Ursula’s students based in temporary accommodation located in the church and school grounds in Longreach. The St Ursula’s students were schooled at the Presentation secondary school of Our Lady’s College. Mother Ursula Kennedy maintained a strict school-day routine despite the continuous reminders of war from

\textsuperscript{111} Freeman, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{112} Congregation, "Queensland Presentation Congregation Archives, Clayfield." EB, 84-7. Ursula Kennedy organised for the professional development of two teachers at St Rita’s in the fields of science and mathematics.
\textsuperscript{113} Boland, James Duhig. 301-03.
the Longreach airport. The airport, on the edge of the town, was a base for the American air force operations in the Pacific. St Ursula’s girls boarding in Longreach were kept on task, despite the distractions and were presented for exams for junior university matriculation. They also prepared for piano and theory of music and exams for the Queensland Shorthand Writers’ and Bookkeepers Association and Stott and Hoare’s Business College.

Some Presentation sisters remained at St Ursula’s throughout 1942 and kept the day school open for those parents around Yeppoon who opted to keep their children with them as they worked. Schools built their own slit trenches in school grounds, and there were frequent air raid drills. Journalist and author, Lawrie Kavanagh’s parents owned the Railway hotel in Yeppoon. He experienced daily life at St Ursula’s as a day student through the war years:

They had dug big zig-zag trenches in the playground and every now and then the head nun (Angela Murtagh) would blow a tin whistle and we’d all dash from the classrooms and jump into the trenches, practising what we would do when we heard the Jap bombers coming to get us. We would squat down on the trench’s clay floor, but not letting our bodies touch the side wall because they told us we could get injured by concussion if a bomb blasted nearby.

The sisters and students at Yeppoon were reminded of the reality of war time as the beach was wired and gun fortifications lined the foreshore, so that students never saw the beach in the war years. Australian and American troops camped to the north or south of the township at different times. Over a million United States servicemen passed through Brisbane between 1942 and 1945. Of these, a high proportion were Catholic soldiers with army chaplains. Archbishop Duhig of

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114 Pauline (Foster) Smith, interview by Maree Ganley, 16 November 2011, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
115 Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”
117 Freeman, “Interview.”
118 Boland, James Duhig. 301.
Brisbane opened his residence at Wynberg to chaplains and laity of all ranks. The sisters at St Ursula’s opened their doors as well, and the sisters and students were not insulated from the military presence in Yeppoon.

Sick and injured American soldiers occupied ‘Camp Yeppoon’ at Lammermoor beach from December 1942, and the sisters welcomed very young American soldiers of eighteen and nineteen years of age on leave to visit the school. Past student, Pauline Smith, from Isisford, boarded at St Ursula’s from 1942. She recalls:

We played tennis with the American soldiers, and the sisters stood on the verandah and supervised us. The soldiers brought records of Bing Crosby singing “A White Christmas” and they were entertained to afternoon tea in the sister’s parlour. We students had debating competitions with them and one topic was “Should Australia be Americanised”.

The American Forces chaplain, Father Haley, donated the academic prizes for all grades from 1943-1946, which further confirmed the connection of St Ursula’s with the military presence in Yeppoon. The sisters had included the students in the opportunity for cultural exchanges throughout World War II. At the end of 1943, there was just one senior university graduate and just six junior graduates.

State and religious leaders did not invest in curriculum development and school building projects for some years after the war ended. The Queensland government spent less than any other state in the late 1940s, and the high hopes that educational reform would be the key to social progress was not realised. The school rooms and the sisters’ living space needed renovations in the aftermath of the war years. The school had received no extra financial support to maintain school supplies and to find ways to keep up a supply of food for the boarder’s meals because of food rationing. However, the Presentation Institute remained faithful

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119 Ibid.
120 Smith, "Interview."
123 Williams, "Interview."
to its commitment to provide schooling for those from the bush and from the local Yeppoon area who struggled financially. School fees remained below those of other boarding schools in the region.\textsuperscript{124}

The superior/principal of St Ursula’s received Government cheques for each successful scholarship holder, but in the immediate post-war years, the superior Angela Murtagh helped mothers struggling on meagre war pensions by giving the cheques back to some students, such as the McGrath children in Yeppoon whose father had died from war wounds after returning to Australia.\textsuperscript{125} Patricia McGrath and her sisters lived with their widowed mother in Yeppoon as the war ended. ‘At end of the year, Mother Angela gave back the government scholarship cheque to us children to take home. I was so excited to have this cheque in my hands. I do not know how the nuns ran the school in the 1940s, given so many people were on the breadline.’\textsuperscript{126} Karen Daniels’ family lived in the Solomon Islands and needed to place Karen in boarding school because of inadequate schooling provision in the Solomons. She recalls that, ‘My family had a choice of any school in central and northern Queensland but chose St. Ursula’s eventually because the fees were the cheapest on the coast of Queensland’.\textsuperscript{127}

In the immediate post-war years, the Presentation Sisters modified the restrictions of enclosure and responded to the wider social needs of the surrounding community. For a time, they engaged with the charity work of the local community. Sister Dorothea Hegarty invited a family living at a local hotel to allow their two children to live in the boarding school until severe tinea extending past their ankles was healed. A four-year-old, whose mother was deceased, lived for a time at the school and was looked after in the boarding school by her older sister. Two children, one just three years of age, who were the younger siblings of a girl already boarding

\textsuperscript{124} Murtagh, "Mother House Annals 1874-1923 Vol 1."
\textsuperscript{125} The War Widows pension in 1946 was fifty shillings a week when the basic wage was ninety-six shillings per week.
\textsuperscript{126} McGrath, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{127} Karen Daniels, ibid., 4 July 2015. “My family chose St. Ursula’s eventually because the fees were the cheapest on the coast of Queensland.”
at St Ursula’s, were taken in and cared for until their sick mother came out of hospital.\textsuperscript{128}

In 1946, Bishop Tynan of Rockhampton diocese made a request for the sisters to take British migrant children into the boarding school. Mother Patrick, the Mother General of the Presentation Sisters, refused, replying that there were ‘unsolvable problems of lack of space and a shortage of sisters to care especially for eight to ten children’.\textsuperscript{129} Karen Allen was a British migrant child and, with her mother, came to Yeppoon under a Rockhampton Catholic diocesan scheme. She attended St Ursula’s as a day student. She recalled a fete the sisters held in the town to fundraise for the school, but had not realised as a small child how little financial resources the sisters had at the time.\textsuperscript{130}

A small number of sisters taught all subjects in classrooms that were crowded, with no provision being made for a dedicated secondary school space for senior students. In 1952, Shirley Wilson, who later became a teacher at St Ursula’s, completed senior matriculation as a day student. She recalls that, ‘The students preparing for senior university exams, like myself, sat on the verandah of the classrooms for our lessons’.\textsuperscript{131} Both staff and boarders experienced the difficulties of attempting to recover from the war-time effort, and, as late as 1956, boarding student, Patricia Cuthbert experienced the hardship. She notes that, ‘Times remained hard for boarders and there was no privacy for us, no curtains between our beds - it was all open dormitory, and we went to bed cold’.\textsuperscript{132}

\textit{Post-World War II limited opportunities}

From 1946-1951, church schools continued to take a large proportion of the state’s secondary population.\textsuperscript{133} Goodman argues that, ‘The vast distances in Queensland

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\textsuperscript{128} Page, "Interview."; Clarke, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{129} Mother Patrick Madden, October 27 1946. Rockhampton.
\textsuperscript{130} Karen Allen, interview by Maree Ganley, 2015, ACU Brisbane. Karen had always wondered why the sisters kept a cake destined for the fete cake stall, until at the time of this interview I explained the sisters’ poor conditions.
\textsuperscript{131} Shirley (Green) Wilson, interview by Maree Ganley, 16 February 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
\textsuperscript{132} Sister Patrice Cuthbert, interview by Maree Ganley, 3 May, 2016, Telephone, ACU Brisbane.
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and the scattered nature of the population, even after a hundred years of settlement, were factors in the lack of availability of schooling, particularly for secondary education. St Ursula's had progressed in the development towards modern secondary education for girls in Australia with the introduction of vocational subjects, but parents continued to regard schooling to year ten the limit for both boys' and girls' education.

The decision by parents not to extend education beyond the junior public examination for boys and girls was not isolated to those in country regions. Author Sister Jean-Marie Mahoney, reported that, in 1946, at All Hallows Girls' Boarding College in the heart of Brisbane, 'while parents wished their daughter to have secondary education within a Catholic school, many of them for economic reasons or because of their own attitude to education, saw the junior examination as her immediate educational limit'. In 1954, All Hallows and St Rita's both reported that fewer than half of the juniors continued to senior.

Even after the social and economic disruption of World War II, women continued to experience opposition to their advancement in fields other than teaching, nursing and full-time motherhood. Gender prejudices remained entrenched in the most unlikely quarters. In 1949, the principal of St Faith's girls' boarding school in Yeppoon, delivered her annual report, in which she stated that, 'Words, not figures, are the tools of the teacher, and girls of considerable ability who would make good teachers are still compelled to spend time on mathematics to a standard of difficulty that is absurd and indefensible'. She concluded that 'the real career for women will be that of wife and mother and, to that end, in the school there are home science and hygiene classes at St Faiths.' In post-war Australia, leaders in the Catholic hierarchy echoed these sentiments. In November, 1955, Bishop Farrelly of Lismore Diocese addressed 200 women in Brisbane and declared that 'Women's' vocation

134 Ibid. 329.
135 Selzer, Educating Women in Australia. From the Convict Era to the 1920s. 88-90.
137 Ibid.; Barbaro, "The Origins of the Convent High School in Europe and Its Implementation and Evolution in the Antipodes - St Rita's College, Brisbane, as a Case Study (1926-2008)." 219.
was motherhood, and the home was her place in life'.

The bishops of the Rockhampton Diocese also projected, in their official addresses at school events, the conservative official church ideology of the place of women in society.

In 1954, Bishop Andrew Tynan addressed the girls at St Ursula’s. He stated, ‘firstly, some girls would remain single and should remain staunch and true to their Christian ideal. Secondly, others would marry and it was earnestly hoped that they would marry into happiness and motherhood that would make them a pride to both their Church and Australia. Thirdly, there would be some who would have the cherished desire to work for God and enter a religious order’. In 1959, Ann Cullen went up to receive an academic prize from the bishop, but her only recollection about speech night at St Ursula’s and the address of the bishop was that she felt very embarrassed when she forgot to genuflect and kiss the bishop’s ring.

Lily Staniforth argues that the official Church belief of the place of women in society did not always match the practices in girls’ education by women religious:

I think our convent school education had prepared us for the fight for our rights in the church. The nuns had educated us, but they had also disciplined us. They had instilled qualities of tenacity in study and had coached us to victories on the sporting fields. They had given us pride in ourselves, a sense of integrity. When we were ready to put these lessons into practice, we turned to our parishes in the sixties and seventies, as educated and committed Catholic women, only to be told that our role was to polish the candlesticks.

**The Catholic school curriculum 1954-1998**

Change came to the curriculum in St Ursula’s with the appointment of Sister Rosa MacGinley as principal in 1954. As a graduate in science and the arts, she oversaw

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139 The Courier Mail, "Brisbane Archdiocese Jubilee Celebration " The Courier Mail, 19 November 1955. 3.
141 Ann (Cullen) Rhodes, interview by Maree Ganley, 6 February 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
the introduction of physics, chemistry and mathematics to senior level.\(^{143}\) The secondary school staff of three sisters covered all the subjects from sub-junior to senior. Sister Mary Foster prepared students in several subjects for junior university examinations and Sister Benedict O’Rourke taught mathematics, commercial subjects and music. Rosa MacGinley taught English, French, Latin, mathematics, geometry, algebra, logic and chemistry, and, in 1958, tutored Kay Condon at night as the only student to choose ancient history. In 1956, there is the first recorded instance of a parent participating in a conversation about the school curriculum: Marion Cuthbert’s father asked why only chemistry, rather than chemistry and physics, was being introduced.\(^{144}\) Rosa MacGinley’s attempts to establish science in the school were limited by a lack of science resources. Her mother added £10 to the limited convent financial resources to purchase science equipment.\(^{145}\)

In 1960, there were just six students at senior level in St Ursula’s, but this was in keeping with the state statistics for girls. Even at their sister school, St Rita’s, in Brisbane, in the same year, there were just twenty-six students presented for senior from 104 junior candidates.\(^{146}\) However, MacGinley’s qualifications made it possible for girls to study to senior university level. Despite low numbers, St Ursula’s was able to offer English, speech and drama, ancient and modern history, Latin, French, mathematics, chemistry and physics, shorthand, bookkeeping and typing.\(^{147}\)

Marion Peters (Cuthbert) was a senior student in 1966, and described how ‘Rosa MacGinley made numbers in mathematics magic and that she made so much sense with its order and precision: I was fortunate to experience her breadth and depth of knowledge of literature and the stories embellished in teaching history’. Marion secured a Commonwealth Scholarship to the University of Queensland and majored in English and history and graduated to become a school teacher and librarian.\(^{148}\) Liz Esmond boarded at St Ursula’s (1963-1967). She graduated in Medicine from

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\(^{143}\) Marion (Peters) Cuthbert, interview by Maree Ganley, 23 March 2015, Written Response, ACU Brisbane.

\(^{144}\) MacGinley, "Interview."

\(^{145}\) Ibid.

\(^{146}\) Barbaro, “The Origins of the Convent High School in Europe and Its Implementation and Evolution in the Antipodes - St Rita’s College, Brisbane, as a Case Study (1926-2008).” 219.

\(^{147}\) Sister Concilia Ring, interview by Maree Ganley, 21 September 2009, Audio, ACU Brisbane.

\(^{148}\) Cuthbert, "Interview."
the University of Queensland in the early 1970s, and was the first woman from her hometown of Emerald in central Queensland to graduate in medicine. She was a gifted student and was much younger than her class age. She recalls that,

Sister Rosa seemed to teach everything, sciences and languages and she taught Logic and I loved it. Rosa managed to give me things to do without making a big fuss in front of other people, which I was grateful for. She would quietly put another book on my desk saying, "You might like this" and just walked on. She was a teacher who inspired us to move forward; I graduated at sixteen years of age. Sister Rosa had Shakespearean plays in the cupboard so I always borrowed them. In any spare moments, I would rifle through science books left around by the nuns.149

Ursula Kennedy appointed Sisters Veronica Casey and Canice (Moira Creede) at St Rita’s, and Sister Rosa MacGinley at St Ursula’s, to guide the two Presentation Institute’s secondary colleges through the developments of secondary education in Queensland. They were supported by a small number of sisters who taught full day timetables in multiple subject areas and studied by night. Catholic education throughout Australia moved forward and flourished because of this commitment by willing women religious. In 1964, Mother Gabriel Hogan, the Queensland Presentation Sisters’ mother general, launched significant building programs funded by Federal grants to non-government schools for science classrooms and dormitories.

The optimism to expand the classroom facilities and to develop the curriculum capacity of St Ursula’s was sustained by the increasing number of girls who joined the Presentation Sisters from student ranks at their two secondary schools. The last contingent of Irish ‘aspirants’, the name given to new applicants to the order, had arrived in 1946, but from 1956-1966 there were seventy-three past students who joined the Presentation Sisters, all of whom were Australians and nine were past pupils of St Ursula’s Yeppoon. The majority of girls who joined the order were past

149 Esmond, "Interview."
pupils of St Rita’s. Most of the seventy-three new sisters were appointed to the over thirty primary schools established by the Presentation Sisters throughout Queensland from 1900 to 1959.

At St Ursula’s, women religious continued to carry the added burden of full-time care for boarders, and the principals continued to teach full-time without the support of a deputy principal. Neither the living conditions for the sisters nor the demands on their time had changed from the 1930s, nor did they have much personal privacy until a senior dormitory was built in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s, however, all teaching staff of sisters in the secondary school appointed to specialised subject areas were gradually training to postgraduate level. However, there was no provision made to train those teachers who were appointed as boarding supervisors to care for the needs of adolescent girls. Throughout the 60s and 70s, adolescents experienced more freedom and were given a specific identity of ‘adolescence’ with psychological needs distinct from those of early childhood. This reality called for new responses from parents and teachers to address the students’ daily social and emotional needs, especially of many adolescents living together in a boarding house. However, this did not occur until a sister was appointed in 1984 as director of the boarding school.

Post-secondary education developments for country students 1968-1982

This section examines St Ursula’s staff response to the changes in the state secondary curriculum and the impact of these changes on the day and boarding students. By 1967, a whole new world of career options had become possible for country women through easier access to tertiary institutions established in central Queensland regional areas. Commonwealth funding supported new classrooms and a science block which opened in 1967. The following year, boarding

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151 MacGinley, A Place of Springs. 287.
152 Fleming, "Interview." The sisters shared the bathroom facilities with the boarders.
153 The works of major child development theorists Freud, Erikson and Piaget were being inserted into graduate studies in education at this time.
accommodation was opened above the classrooms to house years ten to twelve, with shared rooms rather than dormitories of past years.\textsuperscript{154}

From 1968, St Ursula’s experienced the nation-wide dramatic rise of students seeking senior secondary education. The new boarding residence for students and staff housed senior students in more spacious and comfortable accommodation. In 1973, the newly-elected Labour government under Gough Whitlam, established the Commonwealth Schools Commission. The Capital Grants Program assisted schools to upgrade facilities at a time when it was very difficult to provide the extra capacity required by the increasing numbers of students. St Ursula’s benefited from extra funding in library grants, and for teacher professional development across all sectors. By 1980, the per capita grants in the secondary sector were $1073 ($633 Commonwealth and $440 State).\textsuperscript{155}

The Queensland Institute of Technology, Capricornia, opened in Rockhampton, and this campus extended to Gladstone in 1978, Mackay 1987 and Emerald in 1989 (Table 3). Higher enrolments and curriculum change placed a strain on Catholic secondary schools and an even greater strain on boarding schools. Public external examinations were abolished by 1970, and the University of Queensland no longer set the syllabi, texts and examination papers for junior and senior university subjects (Table 3). The Radford system of assessment replaced external examinations by the University, and assessment procedures were conducted internally. Internal assessment enabled schools to cater for a wider range of student learning needs and opened more options for career paths for girls.

From the late 1960s, the township of Yeppoon experienced growth in population through an upgrade of roads to Rockhampton and the growth in tourism created by the Japanese Iwasaki Resort development outside the town. Sister Marie-Therese Dwyer was appointed to St Ursula’s in 1974. She had taught English at St Rita’s and included Japanese in her postgraduate studies at the University of Queensland.

\textsuperscript{154} Ring, “St. Ursula's College Yeppoon.”
Sister Dwyer introduced the Japanese language into the school curriculum. Sister Therese Collins also included Japanese in her post-graduate studies. The teachers of Japanese at St Ursula’s welcomed cultural exchange opportunities that made the study of the subject more relevant and of benefit to St Ursula’s economically and culturally. The owner of the Japanese-funded resort, Mr Iwasaki, made frequent visits to the school. On one visit to the school, on a rainy day, he donated a covered walkway between buildings.\(^{156}\)

Through the 1970s, the secondary school sisters pursued postgraduate studies in administration and developments in educational pedagogy, the sciences, mathematics, history and languages while they taught at St Ursula’s.\(^{157}\) The Queensland state secondary school curriculum continued to favour subjects that would lead to university entry. The graduating seniors of 1973 chose teaching and nursing, and one graduate chose the Police Academy. The year eight students who commenced secondary education in 1974, and graduated in 1978, went on to choose medicine, physiotherapy, arts/law, agriculture, teaching, nursing, the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) and business.\(^{158}\) In the mid-1970s, increased student numbers necessitated coordination of multiple classes of core subjects like mathematics and English and of lower secondary classes for languages and science. For the first time in fifty years, art and music education was re-introduced across all year levels. The larger numbers of boarders also required attention for supervision for study and for extra-curricular activities.

Vocation-based subjects were not recognised in the state curriculum as contributing to an overall senior pass result. The devaluation of vocation oriented subjects in the senior curriculum caused difficult situations in the compulsory evening study in a boarding school. In the mid-1970s, student, Maria Oram, noted that, ‘There was no problem with structure around study times but there were still difficulties for boarders who were not academically inclined and who would have learned in a more

\(^{156}\) Collins, "Interview."; Daniels, "Interview."
\(^{157}\) Fleming, "Interview."
\(^{158}\) The Morning Bulletins 1973/74.
practically oriented curriculum, especially during the long hours of night study in the boarding school’. Sandra Stapleton noted:

I learned best through doing things in art and music. Theoretical subjects overwhelmed me and class sizes did not allow for any individual consideration. Therefore, no one tapped into how I learned; I switched off. I was reminded how good my two sisters were before me which made me angry and rebellious, but Sister Marie Therese’s gentleness and wisdom spoon-fed me in preparation for the modern history exam and she showed me how to study’. 

The increase in the Yeppoon population brought a greater proportion of day students to boarders. The social class composition of students from working and middle-class backgrounds did not change greatly. There was a greater awareness amongst the younger boarders that day students went home daily, which at times created divisions amongst students mostly in the first year of secondary school’. Day student, Kris Holm described her association with the boarders as she began the first year of secondary school with them.

In grade eight, I was picked on terribly by boarders. They would gang up on me at the trampoline and they pulled my pigtails. It was very sad, until I dived into the pool one day and I was a fast swimmer and I gained credibility. New boarders were unhappy and seemed to resent us as day pupils being able to go home every day. It changed over the years to acceptance. They really hated being away from home and the rigidity of their life at St Ursula’s. I remember learning about Western Queensland and all the small towns where boarders came from and even today I still look at Winton. I eventually had a lot of exchange with boarders. Year eight was a time of settling and

159 Maria Oram, interview by Maree Ganley, 28 November 2014, Telephone ACU Brisbane.
160 Sandra (Stapleton) Clements, ibid., 21 November 2011, Audio.
161 Chris (Murphy) Holm, ibid., 8 November, 2014.
we all got to know each other. Most students stayed into year twelve and we became close but obviously we had a circle of friends.\textsuperscript{162}

The infusion of new thought and encouragement for women religious to take initiatives in their religious lifestyle from the recommendations of Vatican II coincided with a surge in State Education curriculum development in the arts, literature and sciences along with government funding to support the initiatives. In the mid-1970s, the sisters kept pace with the progressive development in the state secondary school curriculum in science and the arts. New science facilities were built and equipped, and a neighbouring house was purchased and became ‘the art house’, equipped for art education as a class subject to year twelve. For the first time, an in-house school magazine was produced by the year twelve students, featuring student poetry, narrative and art.\textsuperscript{163} Native speakers of French, Japanese and German were employed to tutor in their own languages to senior matriculation level.\textsuperscript{164} This exchange brought the sisters and students more in touch with the local community. Science teachers approached local fishermen for transport and information, which gave marine biology a specific local focus.\textsuperscript{165}

A new hall was constructed for social and formal events, and music and drama teachers worked with St Brendan’s staff to produce musical and dramatic events. In the mid-1970s, the sisters moved more freely between the two colleges of St Brendan’s and St Ursula’s and co-produced musicals.\textsuperscript{166} Sister Kathleen Fanton formed a college orchestra for the first time since the 1920s. She remained at St Ursula’s from 1979-1997, building a culture of music in the school and the district. She introduced the Suzuki method of music education and raised funds locally to take students to Japan for specialised tutoring.\textsuperscript{167} Sister Kathleen organised

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} St Ursula’s Senior Class, “Ursula’s Own”, ed. Year 12 students (Yeppoon 1976).
\textsuperscript{164} Yeppoon had a multi-cultural population of European and Asian background. It became easy to employ residents in the town with international backgrounds, e.g. French national Madame Francoise Rivory and her family lived on a farm outside Yeppoon and her husband was a mining engineer in the Bowen Basin.
\textsuperscript{165} Cruice, "Interview."; Collins, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{166} Sister Zoe Fitzpatrick, ibid., 14 November 2011.
\textsuperscript{167} Fanton, "Interview."
concerts in the town and the performers were children from the district and the school.

Dormitory sisters went beyond the call of duty with their pastoral approach, especially when they conducted after hours tutoring for senior students. Sister Marie Griffin (1977-1982) taught economics at St Ursula’s and related to the boarders positively in her supervision duties:

I sat on the bed with the kids after lights out, preparing lessons. I was sitting on the bed, as there was no room large enough or a desk. We had folders open trying to get lessons ready for the next day. This was 10.30/11pm at night. It was difficult, but we got by, and I had been teaching the subject for a few years which made it easier. I was very happy in Yeppoon, but very busy. I have never worked so hard in all my life. Sister Kath Tynan would take over the boarders a few nights, while I did university assignments or prepared for science excursions.\(^{168}\)

By the end of the 1970s, girls could complete secondary education close to home towns as regional state high schools had opened which extended to year twelve. However, parents continued to bypass the local high schools and chose boarding schools with the belief that there were academic and perhaps social advantages to attending a larger regional boarding school. Catholic families in remote regions continued to seek out the faith dimensions that could be developed in a Catholic secondary school. The boarding school was still an essential schooling destination for children on remote properties as the journey into the nearest town with a new state high school was, for some, several hours one way on a dirt road.

Where secondary tops to year ten were added to state high schools in regional towns, some families sent their daughters to boarding school just for years eleven and twelve. For other students, boarding school education for the final two years was more of a ‘finishing school’ experience rather than a necessity. Roycelyn

\(^{168}\) Griffin, "Interview."
Pearson completed year ten in Rockhampton in 1973 and was sent to St Ursula’s for years eleven and twelve. She notes that, 'The boarding school gave me a sense of independence and extra polish. I did not have to go to boarding school, as I lived in Rockhampton. The cultural experience taught me to mix with people and in a lovely community experience'.

Past students into the 1990s, reported that, despite the presence of state secondary schools and hostel accommodation to year twelve in their regional towns, parents sought a more secure environment, especially for those young people whose only education had been through Distance Education on remote properties in their primary school years. In the late 1990s, Loretta McKeering came from a remote property near Aramac in central Queensland. She notes that,

A Mercy sister in Barcaldine recommended St Ursula’s because she believed it catered more for bush kids and advised mum not to send me to the Longreach Hostel, but recommended boarding school. I looked forward to playing sports and doing things with other kids as well as music, art, science that distance education kids missed. My family chose St Ursula’s for boarding school because it was the cheapest girls' boarding school in Queensland. The nearest possibility for secondary education near Aramac was Longreach State High School, but it had a reputation for drug use and poor educational outcomes. St Ursula’s combined with St Brendan’s boy’s college in Yeppoon to organise bus transport home for the holidays and for free weekends. My mother also knew families of students at St Ursula’s to share transport.

Through the late 1970s, St Brendan’s boys’ secondary school and St Ursula’s synchronised timetables and shared facilities and staff for a range of subjects, including senior physics and Mathematics, and vocational education subjects such as hospitality. However, this arrangement was not without its problems. St Ursula’s student, Donna Graham (1978-82) had to travel out to St Brendan’s for Physics and Maths II because the principal of St Ursula’s initially limited girls’ access to a range

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169 Pearson, "Interview."
170 McKeering, "Interview."
of science and Mathematics options. At St Brendan’s, Donna experienced gender discrimination by the Christian Brothers. She recalls that,

Newly appointed principal in 1979, Sister Bernadette Fleming, determined that Physics and Mathematics II were not required by girls. A student, Judith Pini, relocated to Brisbane in protest, but returned when physics was reinstated by an arrangement that the students could travel out to St Brendan’s for classes. I topped the physics class for both girls and the boys of the St Brendan's senior year, but I was not awarded the class prize for physics at St Brendan's Prize giving event. I also had to do the physics exam on my own in the St Ursula’s library and not with the boy’s class out at St Brendan’s.171

In 1987, the Federal Government abolished unemployment benefits for sixteen and seventeen-year olds, thereby establishing links with secondary school and tertiary institutions to provide training specifically for the workplace. St Ursula’s embarked on a building restructure to accommodate that facility, and developed vocation based training in hospitality, in which St Brendan’s boys also participated. This initiative prepared students for workplace opportunities in hospitality that were opening with the growing popularity of Yeppoon as a seaside resort.

Students had their horizons widened even more when the sisters, lay staff and girls travelled state-wide for public speaking, and interstate for international art and science excursions and exhibitions.172 At the same time, girls from country regions thought that, despite the developments in the curriculum that gave girls more choices in career options, there was a lack of information and access to advice about employment and tertiary studies. The perennial problem of where country

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171 Donna Graham, ibid., 7 December 2014, Skype.
172 Fitzpatrick, "Interview."); Koveos, "Interview."
girls could live, having gained access to tertiary institutions or employment in the cities, also remained. Loretta McKeering (1996-2000) remembered that,

Career guidance was ‘bleedingly’ limited; a lady came from a state government office for career guidance chat for a one-half hour session each about what you would like to do. Subject specialist teachers spruiked about the advantages of the content of their subjects. In the long run, the mathematics teacher at St Ursula’s, who was a mum of my friend, was the best guide.

Kathleen Noonan (1981-82) also described the absence of career guidance for girls about to graduate:

I remember being told, I remember saying, ‘Well, I feel like that niche, I really like ... I’m quite curious and I’d really like to be a journo and saying no, there are no jobs ... The career path, I’ve got no idea ... no idea’.

The academic curriculum 1983-1998

The growth of mining towns from the 1980s in the central regions of Queensland accounted for an increase in boarder student numbers, but enrolment numbers fluctuated as the fly-in fly-out arrangements from the mining locations increasingly became the norm and families based themselves in capital cities. Along with the growing presence in Yeppoon of families with professional backgrounds in business, health and law, there were those families in Yeppoon who struggled economically. St Ursula’s student enrolments represented these various groups.

173 Jena Woodhouse, ibid., 27 May Word Attachment. Jena from Yeppoon qualified for tertiary entrance to the University of Queensland in Brisbane in the late 1970s and found board with family acquaintances and had to work to pay for board.
174 McKeering, “Interview.”
176 Conway, “Interview.” In the 1960s, Sister Margaret Conway recounted examples in the primary school at Yeppoon of children with no shoes and in need of food on arrival at school.
Women religious began to be released from their teaching duties to pursue theological and catechetical developments as part of their spiritual renewal. Some student responses from Sister Marion Kingston’s years of administration reflected the benefits of that professional development. Sister Therese Collins (1979-1986) began to apply the results of her spiritual renewal and she shared her spiritual dimensions and enlightenment in the classroom through science, music and the arts.\textsuperscript{177}

That was the whole thing; that's what changed, the spirituality thing too, mainly in this second time I went back to teach at St Ursula’s (1979-1986) when we were doing more of this biology stuff and astronomy. The kids were starting to think differently about God from what they maybe had learned before. They'd be looking in microscopes at this little drop of water, and they'd see the microscopic little creatures getting along. I used to love, just love, teaching grade eights, especially biology, the science bit, because they used to be so fascinated. We'd do this big thing about the size of the universe and it kind of led into the religious sort of side as well. Yeppoon was just such a bonus as kids from grade eight, they knew so much in Yeppoon.\textsuperscript{178}

From 1983 to 1995, Marion Kingston and the reduced number of teaching sisters maintained a Catholic and religious presence in the day-to-day routine of the school and boarding house. Student Joanne Adams said,

There were lots of prayer based activities and celebrations, for example, St Patrick’s Day. I was college captain and students like myself were given the task of organising the liturgy. Prayer was an integral part of every day before meals. We were strongly urged to visit the chapel often. There was a strong presence of the sisters quite a lot and at times I met them around every corner. All girls, Catholic or non-Catholic, had to attend all the religious

\textsuperscript{177} Collins, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
services and there was no provision made for non-Catholics to attend their own services.  

Donna O’Grady was a day student from Yeppoon in the mid-1980s who challenged all the boundaries established by both parents and teachers during Marion Kingston’s administration. She represented the increasing numbers of day students from the Yeppoon youth culture in which the freedom of the seaside life held more appeal than the restrictions of a convent secondary schooling. The day student presence in the modern boarding school also reduced the sense of isolation from the world outside experienced by students in a boarding-only setting. However, the presence of the increasing numbers of day students called for new approaches to provide pastoral support for troubled adolescents, as well as the boarders’ needs in the latter part of the 20th century. The boarding school rules of the past that restricted boarders’ access to the outside world no longer applied.

As a day student, Donna experienced conflict between the freedom of life in a seaside town and the strict rules in place at St Ursula’s:

I was pretty full-on, and Sister Marion was good to me in hindsight. I did not do homework, but my parents still would not allow us downtown in Yeppoon. I did not have good study habits at home. In year ten, my family worked in Rockhampton, and I was moved to Marian Catholic High School in Rockhampton. I was thrown out of Marian High School for swearing at a nun. I was a big problem up there, as I really did not want to go there. Sister Marion had good reason not to take me back at Ursula’s, but she did. The nun in charge of year ten pastoral care at St Ursula’s - can’t remember her name - I’d be climbing the fence to a mate’s place and having a cigarette before school, and I’d walk in as school started and she’d go “So, did we have a nice cigarette this morning?” like she was really cool. I turned up one day with a Mohawk. I got my hair cut, and it wasn’t shaved but quite short. There was a

179 Joanne Adams, ibid., 28 October 2014.
180 Lambert and Millham, The Hothouse Society: An Exploration of Boarding-School Life through the Boys’ and Girls’ Own Writings. 414.
commitment to see me through year ten by both family and St Ursula’s, and they did. 182

Donna’s experience challenged the Presentation Sisters to adapt the cultural habitus of a traditional convent boarding school curriculum and lifestyle to accommodate the educational and social needs of a new age. Donna experienced a firm but supportive group of teachers through her schooldays, and actually sent her daughter, Summer, to St. Ursula’s in 2010 for high school where she was dux of year twelve at graduation. 183

Individual Presentation sisters left no record of the level of personal satisfaction derived from seeing their students attain high standards in study and work in the secular world. However, knowing that students had succeeded was how each religious sister found meaning as a member of a religious community whose core mission was teaching. In 1984, Evangelist Murtagh, who had completed her teaching and leadership roles in St Ursula’s in 1948, was able to supply, in much detail, the post-school musical history of many students after their training at St Ursula’s up until World War II. 184 She was one of the many sisters who maintained contact with past pupils, inviting them to reunions and annual past pupil events. Through the 1980s, for some sisters, the search for meaning as a religious sister in an institute committed solely to life in a classroom with no other missionary outlet proved altogether too demanding emotionally and physically, and they left the classroom or left the institute in significant numbers.

Reframing the school curriculum for a new age

In 1995, there were thirty-eight year twelve students who could choose from twenty-one subjects in the curriculum, including religious education. There was a balance of subjects for university entry or vocationally-oriented work-place training. 185 Marion Kingston, with deputy principal Mrs Veronica Pedwell, administered a staff

182 Donna O’Grady, interview by Maree Ganley, 17 February 2015, Audio, ACU Brisbane. The ‘dux’ in a school year achieves the highest aggregate score in selected subject areas.
183 Ibid.
184 Murtagh.
185 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Annual Magazine,” ed. St. Ursula’s School Magazine Editorial Team (Yeppoon: St. Ursula’s College, 1994).
of twenty-six women and men, of which just two were Presentation Sisters. There were separate boarding school staff of fourteen women, mostly part-time, with an additional ten catering and maintenance staff. These staff members conducted the residential affairs of the boarding school under the administration of the director of boarding.186

First lay principal and new governance model

Mrs Margaret Ramsay was the first lay principal of St Ursula’s, in 1996, and she remained in that position until 2004. She was on the inaugural St Ursula’s School Board of Directors (1992-1995) before applying for the position of principal. St Ursula’s is a public company limited by guarantee, governed under the Ministry of Mercy Partners – the Member Company. St Ursula’s College was entrusted to Mercy Partners by the Queensland Congregation of the Presentation Sisters in 2014. The ten-member Board of Directors of St Ursula’s College Limited is appointed by the Member Company (Mercy Partners) to govern the College under delegated authority in the areas of education, industrial, financial, property and employment responsibilities, and to plan for the ongoing development of the College. The Member Company and Directors appoint the Principal, and they delegate the day to day running of the College to that position.

The Board of Directors assumed responsibility for the management of the school in the following areas: formation of policy, financial management and strategic planning of the college, and the appointment of the Principal. Ramsay had a prior connection with the Presentation Sisters as she was educated by them and had also worked closely with a small team of Presentation Sisters in Brisbane in the 1980s. She gradually replaced the tradition of conducting school administration through informal communication, that had operated for the past eighty years, and began to implement key policies and procedures formulated by the College Board for systemic operations.

The lay principal and College Board established a school administrative system as a corporate organisation, whereas the Presentation Sisters had administered St

186 Ibid.
Ursula’s from 1917 as a family business from around the community table. An administration model for the boarding school was formulated independently of the day school administration, particularly because Margaret Ramsay left the college at the end of her working day. The leadership team of the college, led by the principal, faced a new era of expectation and belief about the value of single-sex secondary schools when co-education was gaining favouritism in the latter part of the 20th century. Ramsay worked with the College Board to determine the future direction of a convent boarding school and to search for ways to preserve the traditional Christian values and mission of the Presentation Sisters. She deemed that this message was, in particular, that girls can do anything.

Loretta McKeering (1996-2000) arrived as a grade eight student in Margaret Ramsay’s first year of appointment. She noted that,

The teachers and society generally established an environment of an empowering community with a real emphasis that girls can do anything. As well, the school had a real have-a-go attitude. It did not matter that I was not good, only important that I was active and had fun. Year ten was the happiest year. I was not too stressed with studies and all the 'bitchiness' of year nine was gone.

The happiest boarding moments were the first half of year eight and being able to run around and play with other kids. In year twelve, I experienced moments of contentedness and I was perfectly happy with where I was and who I was and just enjoying the year knowing that it was all about to change. I wanted to go to uni, so no doubt having something definite to look ahead to also helped. As an engineering student, it was a huge shock that I was one

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187 Madonna and Monica Lasker, interview by Maree Ganley, July 4, 2015, audio, ACU Brisbane. Madonna Lasker sent her daughters to the boarding school of Cathedral College in Rockhampton because it was co-educational (1991) rather than to her old single-sex school of St Ursula’s.

188 Ramsay, "Interview."
of eight girls out of 250 studying Agricultural Engineering at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ).\textsuperscript{189}

Loretta graduated with an agricultural engineering degree, but returned to Aramac in central Queensland to help manage the family properties.

In 1991, Cathedral College (TCC), a Rockhampton diocesan Catholic co-educational secondary school, opened in Rockhampton for day students. It incorporated boarding facilities for girls from years eight to twelve, and in January 2001, accommodated boys in the boarding school. The rationale was that the city of Rockhampton should have a Catholic boarding school option. The Rockhampton Grammar School was a co-educational boarding school and attracted amongst its enrolment, Catholic girls and boys, and it offered a wide range of scholarships as an incentive. Also, the Rockhampton Catholic Education Directorate assessed that the Catholic population of the Central West of Queensland could sustain an option for country parents to choose either Catholic co-educational secondary schooling in Rockhampton or the single-sex schooling in Yeppoon at St Ursula’s and St Brendan’s. The gradual reduction in boarder enrolments from the late 1990s, at both St Ursula’s and St Brendan’s Yeppoon has proved this was not the case. St Ursula’s had entered a new era of being a predominantly day secondary college for the Capricorn Coast with greatly reduced boarder numbers.\textsuperscript{190}

\section*{Conclusion}

Students and staff at St Ursula’s participated in what was a nationwide journey of change and adaptation in the secondary school curriculum for girls from the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Around 1910, State Governments in Australia entered the field of secondary education as relative latecomers compared with privately run institutions, which already had, by then, established a history of preparing graduates for further study or the workplace. The Presentation Sisters of Queensland came with personal accomplishments and experience in conducting girls’ education in the French

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{189} McKeering, "Interview."
\item \textsuperscript{190} Brother Ted. Magee, interview by Maree Ganley, 12 May, 2016, Telephone conversation.
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Ursuline system, and they revised this model as they became established in Queensland in 1900. I was not able to discover personal diaries of students from the early 20th century that may have revealed their post-school personal ambitions. The records I gathered of reports of some post-school careers allow for a reasonable assessment of the consequences and advantages of a convent boarding school education. In the case of the Whitwell girls, Asthore Taunton and Mary Stewart, there were the positive consequences for the workplace and social advantages from an education tradition that placed an emphasis on academic attainment as well as retaining a combination of moral, religious, and accomplishment endeavours.

By the time St Ursula’s was established in 1917, Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden, the first superior/principal of St Ursula’s had already aligned their high school curriculum with the state public examination system. By 1920, St Ursula’s had been registered as a secondary school and the accomplishment subjects were being gradually phased out of the curriculum. A narrow range of vocation-oriented subjects such as typing and shorthand replaced the cultural studies of music, dance, art and languages in the classroom. St Ursula’s retained music and art of speech as extra-curricular subjects, which proved to be pathways for some to careers in performance and teaching. Marjorie Theobald’s observed that ‘the accomplishment curriculum has been trivialised and misunderstood by historians as an education without substance’. Indeed, at St Ursula’s, the retention of music and art of speech even as extra-curricular subjects proved to be pathways for some to careers in performance and teaching. The contribution to the cultural enrichment of isolated regions by musicians trained at St Ursula’s has been an enlightening aspect of this research.

The sisters laid the groundwork for the establishment of a modern secondary education in the 1930s when they introduced mathematics and science into the curriculum, alongside the vocational subjects. Even through the years of the Great Depression, St Ursula’s university graduates, such as Marjorie Harper and the

Meredith sisters, experienced the consequences and advantages of the school having embraced a curriculum that prepared girls for university entry and work opportunities. Girls who returned to their hometowns to live and work, such as Judy Lasker and Sandra Clements, were sought after for employment because of their boarding school education. From the early 1930s until the mid-1970s, St Ursula’s struggled for survival financially, without suitably qualified administrators to develop the enterprising curriculum that had been put in place by 1920.

Over the eighty years, the students consistently came from middle-class and working-class backgrounds and achieved academically in some cases well beyond the schooling level of parents. In the mid-1960s, Elizabeth Esmond, a boarder on a visit from school to her hometown, was shunned by a boy when he heard she planned to study medicine. Some students, like Sandra Clements in the mid-1970s, who returned to their hometown to live, fitted back into the social class strata held by their parents in the town. They were aware of how proud their parents were that they had completed a boarding school education. The convent boarding school education provided the Barton sisters, who were the daughters of fisherman, and the Whitwell sisters, the daughters of the saw-miller, with the means to pursue professional careers from the first years of the 20th century when there were no state high schools available in their country areas.

There were growing numbers of recruits to the Queensland Presentation Institute, having completed senior matriculation by the late 1960s. The sisters abolished the tradition of teacher-training internally and sent newly professed sisters to universities and teacher training colleges to be qualified for their respective places in primary or secondary education. The Queensland Presentation Institute leader, Sister Gabriel Hogan and her council, were then able to co-ordinate the placement of qualified sisters and lay-teacher subject specialists in St Ursula’s to prepare for the nationwide developments in secondary education.

192 Williams, "Interview."; Clements, "Interview."
193 Esmond, "Interview."
194 Clements, "Interview."
A lack of bi-partisan political support hampered progress in both the state and independent secondary schools for children in remote regions for the first fifty years of the 20th century. This situation meant that educational institutions like St Ursula’s struggled for survival until Federal Government funding provided science and library facilities in the early 1970s. Until then, there was also a lack of bi-partisan vision within the Catholic education system itself. There was a competitive mentality amongst religious institutes to attract students to their schools, which resulted in a wastage of common facilities and personnel in the Catholic system. St Ursula’s and St Brendan’s boys’ college Yeppoon addressed the overlap of facilities and personnel, and coordinated timetables for some co-educational classes from the early 1980s.

Students from both colleges pursuing pathways in vocational education training and in mathematics and sciences benefitted from the pooling of resources and personnel to broaden the academic curriculum. In the latter part of the 20th century, St Ursula’s progressed to organise financial support from external organisations such as the Parents and Friends Association and a School Board.195 The respective college boards of St Ursula’s and St Brendan’s have developed a common purpose to include boarding and educational opportunities for Indigenous students from local central west regions. In doing so, both boarding colleges have developed a specific identity of seaside boarding schools that have continued the traditions of making the academic curriculum relevant for students from all walks of life from coastal and inland central Queensland.

Chapter six

Culture and faith formation in a Catholic school

Introduction

This chapter examines the history of Catholic faith formation and practice in the daily lives of students and staff of St Ursula’s. Church historian, O’Farrell, argues that real history is often ‘hidden away in the minds and hearts of ordinary men and women’.¹ Australian historian, Roy Williams, adds that this is true of much religious history where little survives of the thoughts and beliefs of the people to whom all clerical activity is directed.² A convent school education aimed to prepare young women for a ‘dual citizenship role’ of a life-time commitment to the Catholic faith in the world and a preparation for life in the ‘kingdom of heaven’.³ The convent secondary school religious instruction lessons prepared girls for membership in the Church.

The hidden curriculum both inside and outside the classroom prepared girls to adopt the passive role in the Church and the world, mapped out for them by 19th-century middle-class culture. Throughout this chapter, I explore how the training by the sisters at St Ursula’s in faith dimensions influenced the girls’ perception of their place in the Church and the world as adult women. A small number of boys shared the classroom catechetical religious instruction with the girls to senior matriculation until 1940. From the content of Mother Aloysius’ weekly talks in 1932, it can be deduced that it was a girls’ only gathering, and possibly only boarders, when she delivered her instruction on the moral and social expectations for a Catholic lady.⁴

³ Cummings, New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era.
⁴ Harper, "Interview." I was unable to locate for interview any of the small number of male students from the pre-1940 era.
From 1988, lay staff faced the challenge to meet the spiritual needs of 21st-century girls and to develop a religious education curriculum for a lifetime commitment to the Catholic Church. The intensive cultural experience of life in a Catholic girl’s boarding school influenced the girls’ association with the Church positively or negatively, when in post-school life they attempted to establish the relationship between their religion and Australian culture beyond the convent walls.

From the student interviews, I examine the meaning the students took from the daily religious practices and behavioural expectations of them as young Catholic ladies. From the staff interviews, I explore the crosscurrents of acceptance or rejection of their role in the faith formation of the students. Teachers established a Catholic school environment to engage the hearts and minds of St Ursula’s students; to know and accept the Catholic faith. That environment consisted of classroom religious instruction, liturgical practices, membership of religious societies, and the presence of religious symbols. Also, the presence of women religious provided students with a visual reminder of Catholic role models of womanhood.

McNamara argues that women religious were committed to obedience and silence; thus, they were both denied a voice in the Church throughout much of the 20th century and compelled to provide an obedient and silent model of womanhood for girls in convent schools. I liken the informal experiences of formation in Catholic faith and culture as the ‘hidden curriculum’ that is the subtle presentation of political or cultural ideas outside the formal curriculum. The intended outcomes of the hidden curriculum are compliance, punctuality and discipline. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that the hidden curriculum teaches young people ‘to know their place and sit still in it’.

Likewise, in the hidden curriculum in Catholic faith formation, there were the frequent informal reminders of the place of the laity and particularly of women in Church life to know their place in the church and sit still in it. The Presentation

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5 McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*. 630, 644.
Sisters at St Ursula’s persisted with reminders to the students to comply with an upper social class level of lady-like demeanour expected of young Catholic women. These informal lessons occurred during daily practices such as meal time and movement throughout the school and dormitory. As a ten-year-old boarder, Agatha Freeman can remember being made to ‘stand back at the bottom of stairs if a sister was coming down the stairs’.8 Much of what students interpreted as school discipline centred on those cultural expectations.

In the convent boarding school, the presence of women religious constituted a powerful symbol and, at times, created confusion that women had sacrificed all freedom for the sake of the work of the Church and personal spiritual life. Students also reported an awareness that the women who were faithful members of the patriarchal Church were capable of genuine work on behalf of women.9 The Rule and Constitutions of the Presentation Sisters Institute of 1947 directed a religious sister as teacher to establish the culture of the classroom as the place of keen learning where she could achieve her spiritual fulfilment.10

The sisters’ daily presence in the classroom in ancient religious dress and detached demeanour reminded the students of the Catholic Church’s cultural and religious heritage. The Presentation Sisters’ Rule did not specify that religious belief and moral values were to colonise the content of secular school disciplines in a fundamentalist environment. Rather, the sisters were to be a witness to faith commitment by their adopting a personal spiritual dimension towards their teaching duties. Although a boarding school was an optimum environment for proselytising activity on behalf of the Catholic Church, no student recalled being harassed to become a Catholic in the dormitory or classroom.11 At the same time, the strict routine of prayers, religious observances and moral formation left very little option for the students to be anything else but Catholic.

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8 Freeman, “Interview.”
9 Oram, “Interview.”
11 Leanne (Barnett) Howard, interview by Maree Ganley, 5 February 2015, Written Response, ACU Brisbane.
In 1905, the Australasian Council of Bishops in Decree 323 called on the full authority of the Church to ensure that Catholic children attended Catholic schools. This decree went so far as to deny the sacraments to those parents who refused without “sufficient reasons” to send their children to an available Catholic school. The bishops also adopted a standardised approach to the delivery of religious instruction in Catholic schools. The armies of religious sisters and brothers assumed the responsibility in their classrooms for faith formation in the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. The bishops appointed a priest inspector to conduct yearly examinations of religious instruction in each school. In 1943, in the Rockhampton Diocese, the secondary school religious instruction syllabus consisted of set prayers of the Church, bible stories, and the catechism with special focus on the Church, sin, the commandments, and the sacraments.

In the 1950s, religious instruction for senior students of years eleven and twelve extended to Apologetics and Church history. The bishops assumed that the school was the optimum setting for the key pedagogical principles in Catholic religious instruction. The Catholic school classroom became the ideal setting for instruction in Catholic history, morality, beliefs, and practices. There, the students also experienced a simplified understanding of key theological beliefs through the practice of repetitious religious rituals in the daily activities of a Catholic school. The following reflections represent the variation in the responses of what religious instruction meant to students, ranging from indifference to real connection to a total faith experience in home and school. Liz Esmond (1963-1967) summarised her experience of the religious curriculum throughout her years at St Ursula’s:

I can't remember religion being taught as a subject - it was kind of wound into things. Sister Rosa taught about St Thomas Aquinas, so we must have had religion at some time. There was no formal credit for religion lessons; it was just integrated in day-to-day life, so we lived that way. There were prayers all over the place; there was a lot of that then. We did a lot of traipsing back and

12 Boland, James Duhig. 95-96.
forth from the church; there was mass every morning and twice on Sundays.\textsuperscript{14}

Maria Oram (1975-1977) welcomed the faith journey that she experienced at St Ursula’s and suggests that the daily religious rituals reinforced a sense of belonging to the Church and the spiritual values of family and school:

I remember religious education certainly because I had a strong faith. My parents brought me up with a very strong faith. It wasn't a rogue faith; I was involved in Christian activities in high school, and Interschool Christian Fellowship was strong in my home-town high school. I loved regular masses and particularly music at masses, being involved and participating.\textsuperscript{15}

The hidden curriculum and Catholic faith formation

Symbols of belonging in the Church

Author and politician, Katherine Zappone, casts religious symbols as ‘the expressions of people’s deepest feelings, yearnings, attitudes and values. They take on a meaning from our experiences of living in the world and in turn offer meaning back to us’.\textsuperscript{16} The sentiments contained in the language of the prayers and hymns common to Catholic children in Australian convent schools were in the prayer traditions brought mostly by the Irish clergy and female religious institutes from the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century. Roy Williams argues that Catholicism was present from the beginning of Australian settlement in the hearts of many Irish convicts.\textsuperscript{17} Catholic historian, Edmund Campion, argues that what Irish convicts believed was hard to define. ‘It was a bewildering mixture of formal Catholicism, debased Catholic practices, family piety, superstition, magic and Celtic mythology’.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Esmond, “Interview.”
\textsuperscript{15} Oram, “Interview.”
\textsuperscript{17} Williams, \textit{Post God Nation? How Religion Fell Off the Radar in Australia}. 27.
\textsuperscript{18} Edmund Campion, \textit{Australian Catholics} (Sydney: Penguin, 1987). 4-6.
The pioneer Irish women religious and priests introduced into their schools and parish communities the set prayer formulas, such as the rosary and litanies, which involved repetitious prayer invocation and response. The repetitious exercises required the students to know their place (in the Church); to sit still in it and to not challenge and question. Historian of the work of Irish women religious, Mary Peckham Magray, argues that repetition of set formulas of basic Catholic truths were the teaching tools of Catholic reformation in Ireland in the 19th century. The sisters adopted this teaching style to educate Catholics in Ireland who had grown up through several generations with no knowledge of the faith after British Penal prohibitions. The metaphorical expression of ‘giving heart and soul’ was repeated throughout the prayers and hymns of the pre-Vatican II era. Author and teacher, Pamela Winter, recalls from her childhood days, ‘Our hearts were like blotting paper, absorbing whatever was put into them and then finding religious connections and relationships. There was a great comfort in phrases like “Our Holy Mother Church”.'

The sisters sought to imbue all aspects of daily life with the sense of a spiritual dimension, just as they were trained to do in their religious life. They utilised even the mundane exercises of the students’ daily life such as mealtime and bedtime for formation into the faith and culture of being Catholic. The students recited a prayer at the beginning and end of the school day, and at the change of each class. St Ursula’s students commented on the rigidity of the lifestyle and their awareness that this was the disciplined regime expected of them at a school conducted by the nuns.

In the first fifty years, St Ursula’s students experienced the intensely repetitive and ritualistic style of Church practice. This changed considerably after Vatican II (1962-}

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19 Magray, The Transforming Power of the Nuns; Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900. 88-89.
22 Williams, "Interview."
1965) and students responded positively to changing Catholic liturgical practices that were more inclusive, in a language that could be understood, and were more community oriented and reflective. Informed by the documents of Vatican II, the sisters’ own renewed theological and spiritual training led them to explore more reflective and spiritual dimensions from ecological and feminist perspectives.\(^{23}\) The religious education curriculum changed and became less prescriptive and dogmatic. This occurred only up to a point, as teaching in matters of sexuality, marriage and the place of women in the Church remained conservative.\(^{24}\)

For Catholics in isolated regions, the boarding school played an important role in faith formation for their children. The conferring of the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation was a major community event at St Ursula’s, involving parents, the bishop and clergy. The sisters took the opportunity to bring together country families to bond with the wider Church and experience a sense of solidarity. On these occasions, the Catholic boarding school became the ‘spiritual centre’ of the Catholic Church in the vast Rockhampton diocese. The seven sacraments of the Catholic Church were given at significant milestones in the faith journey of a baptised Catholic. Charlotte Leane boarded at St Ursula’s, starting in 1946 at age ten. She recalls, ‘I came from a family of Catholic parents and was very aware of my faith. I had made my First Communion, but I am sure the time at St Ursula’s with the Presentation Sisters cemented my faith, for which I am thankful.’\(^{25}\) Leanne Howard was a non-Catholic student at St Ursula’s (1971–1972) and was very disappointed that she did not get to wear a white dress and veil and go to a party after the First Communion ceremony, but her recollections were that she was not ever persuaded to become a Catholic.\(^{26}\)

In addition to daily and Sunday Masses, the boarders also attended all religious observances in the Yeppoon parish church. Catholic day students were expected to attend also. In the 1940s, St Ursula’s primary school student, James Pyle, was

\(^{23}\) Collins, "Interview."; O’Connor, "Feminism and Women Religious." 5.

\(^{24}\) Pope Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae (of Human Life)," Vatican, w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/.../hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

\(^{25}\) Leane, "Interview."

\(^{26}\) Howard, "Interview."
given a detention after school for failing to attend Sunday evening benediction in the parish church. He cried through the detention time on Monday afternoon after school because he could not spell the word, ‘benediction’, which he was required to write 100 times. It seemed no one was spared through the 1940s and 50s, as James was the son of the headmaster of the local state school. Pauline Rafter’s journey in religious faith as a day student at Yeppoon encapsulates the experiences of intense formation in the Catholic faith at St Ursula’s through to the late 1950s. I interviewed Pauline when she was in her early seventies. She had maintained an active membership of the Catholic Church in her local parish in Brisbane throughout her lifetime as did her children as adults.

I was prepared for First Communion by the nuns. Even as a day student I went to Mass every morning, and four or five day students went to the convent chapel every Saturday morning for Mass also. Every Lent season before Easter, we raised money for little black babies. Religion was not thrust down our throats. There was no more input than other subjects. There was a religious instruction period, prayers before school and Bible stories we talked about in class. We stopped to pray the Angelus at midday and classroom statues were decorated in May and June. There was a Corpus Christi procession each year at St Brendan’s and all students were expected to attend. We also did a lot of work around the Church and cleaned the parish church after school until five pm.

The Catholic way of life in the school day routine

In comparison with day students such as Pauline Rafter, boarders experienced with greater intensity the regular religious activity throughout their school day. They started their day with rising to a bell and being dressed and ready to attend Mass with the sisters. Kay Condon, a boarder for eleven years (1950-1960) remembers that ‘the bell rang at five forty-five a.m. and boarders had to be dressed first for study and then to form a line in twos to walk to Mass at six forty-five a.m.. Breakfast

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27 Pyle, "Interview."
28 Pauline (Boland) Rafter, ibid., 22 September 2009, Audio.
29 Ibid.
followed, and school began at eight-thirty a.m.’. There was a large bell on a stand, the height of the original three storey building in the early school years. This meant that the local community throughout Yeppoon also heard the call to religious exercises in the school-day, as well as the angelus prayers at midday, and the bell ringing for church on Sunday. By six forty-five a.m., the sisters had already recited community morning prayer with meditation and then accompanied the students to Mass. Some sisters had the added duty of supervising breakfast, taking music lessons and then being ready to begin classes at eight-thirty a.m.. The same sisters took sport or music lessons after school, and supervised boarders for the evening meal, study and bedtime.

By the 1970s, it was no longer compulsory for the boarders to attend Mass every day. Roycelyn Pearson (1974–1975) reflected on the change to the rule of attending daily Mass. ‘There was not a compulsion any more to go to daily Mass, except on Sunday, and not a lot of us did. My friend, Shelley, and I did, and Shelley went more than me. I started to go to mass with her nearly every morning’. Despite Shelley’s intense commitment to religious practice reinforced by daily religious teaching in her life as a student, her marriage to a non-Catholic was followed by her total rejection of Catholic belief and practice. Roycelyn noted that, ‘It was as if there was no common meeting ground for Shelley between the beliefs and practices of Catholicism and the more fundamentalist beliefs of her partner’s church’.

The rule of silence during some daily activities of the boarders was a carry-over from monastic religious observances. In that monastic setting, silence was adopted in the medieval monastic age to establish calm and minimise distraction. McNamara argues that ‘silence’ once practised in religious institutes was the ‘discipline of deference and obedience’. Silence had a cultural overtone also of the circumspection and decorum expected of high-born women of the Middle Ages, but

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30 Condon, "Interview."
31 Presentation Sisters Queensland Archives, "Register of Entry of New Presentation Sisters."
32 MacGinley, "Interview."
33 Pearson, "Interview."
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 McNamara, Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia. 644.
this meaning was lost in 20\textsuperscript{th}-century boarding-school life. Students drew little meaning from this practice, especially at meal times when so much of their day was already defined by silence in the classroom and dormitory.

Until the 1950s, the boarders ate meals in silence until permission was given to speak. Students stood for grace before meals and, on being seated, were silent until they were given the instruction, ‘You may have recreation’. This command came from a practice in religious life when community members were given permission to speak at meal time. Silence at meal times for religious was abandoned by religious communities after the 1973 revision of the Rule and Constitutions. Venetia Nelson recalls, ‘there was the endless lining up – and silence: everything was done in lines and in silence. Talking without permission was the cardinal sin, and talking in dormitories was the worst of all’. Australian Catholic historian, Sophie McGrath tracked common traditional practices imbedded in the routine of Catholic girl’s secondary schools in Australia in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. She argues that they were a carry-over from the practices in the older established convent boarding schools of the European teaching orders, such as the Ursulines, where the students lived more closely within the daily routine of the nuns.

\textit{Catholic cultural expectations for a young lady}

In this section, I rely on the recollections of students from the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century onwards. Several past students reported that the expectation placed on them throughout their convent school life was to be always restrained in language and movement. Irish author, Catriona Clear, argues that, in the first half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, a vocal and active Irish Catholic middle-class emerged that supported the work of women religious such as the Irish Presentation Sisters. They introduced the rising generation of poor children to a more formal canonical practice of the faith. The sisters indoctrinated them also with a whole range of middle-class and ‘modern’

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[37] MacGinley, \textit{A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia}. 9.
\item[38] Sister Pius. Stubberfield, interview by Maree Ganley, 22 September 2009, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
\item[39] Freeman, "Interview."
\end{itemize}
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values such as cultured modes of behaviour.\textsuperscript{42} The daily life experiences of the boarders were based on the highly symbolised and ritualised culture of middle-class religious life. The St Ursula’s convent boarding school dining room for students also became a place where attitudes were formed to polarities such as food and body, movement and stillness, silence and speech, nature and grace, the expression and repression of character, and the life-affirming and life-denying.\textsuperscript{43} However, these deeper spiritual meanings that attached to the expectations of silence and formality were not explained to students in an Australian convent boarding school.

The expectation to adopt middle-class modes of behaviour extended to appropriate table etiquette. Until the 1970s, each student was to include a serviette ring amongst the list of meal requirements. This formality indicated that meals, however unpalatable, would be conducted along prescribed lines of etiquette as boarders sat down to a hot dinner in the middle of the day. Jane Jordison, who came from a small dairy farm and attended St Ursula’s through the late 1960s, had laid out a formal morning tea with serviettes for my interview in her home. She demonstrated that this was the formality of the dining room at St Ursula’s, with serviettes and the expectation of good manners.\textsuperscript{44} In the latter years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Roycelyn’s mother summarised a key middle-class motivation for sending daughters to St Ursula’s: she believed that ‘the Presentation Sisters were ladies, so they would produce a lady’.\textsuperscript{45}

In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Presentation Sisters introduced the middle-class values of propriety and prudence to St Ursula’s. Judy Lasker (1946) pointed out that she was never out of work when she returned to her hometown of Longreach. She attributed this to her formal training in social etiquette at St Ursula’s. She emphasized that her upper middle-class training in manners and ladylike behaviour was valued in the Longreach township. Her training at St Ursula’s enabled her to consistently find work in managerial positions in local stores.\textsuperscript{46} Judy recalled her strongest recollection of her one year of boarding at St Ursula’s:

\begin{itemize}
\item Clear, \textit{Nuns in Nineteenth Century Ireland}, 4.
\item Curran, \textit{Grace before Meals:Food, Ritual and Body Discipline in Convent Culture}.
\item Jordison, "Interview."
\item Pearson, "Interview."
\item Williams, "Interview."
\end{itemize}
There was strict discipline - the nuns were very strict, but fair. They put us on the right track; they taught us to be ladies with good manners and the way you conducted yourself. We were taught autonomy.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{Figure 10} School uniform circa 1920s

From 1917 to 1951, the style of student school uniform and recreational clothing represented the outward sign of modesty and decorum (Figure 10). Students wore long-sleeved, dark coloured uniforms, and the smallest child wore stockings and gloves, even on visits to the beach and during the tropical heat of Central Queensland.\textsuperscript{48} Day student, Pauline Rafter's two older sisters in St Ursula's were singled out on a Monday morning and called “brazen hussies” for being seen at the beach in shorts on the weekend.\textsuperscript{49} In the 1960s, Mother Patricia McCarthy chastised

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Murtagh, "Archives."
\textsuperscript{49} Rafter, "Interview."
a day student from St Ursula’s for appearing in a swimsuit in a beauty contest during holiday time at the Yeppoon beach.50

During the many activities in the school day, there was the regular reminder of restraint in movement and the imposition of strict codes of behaviour appropriate for young Catholic ladies.51 The expectation was that Catholic girls could take their place in all levels of society as model Christian women.52 Past students reflected that acting as a moral being in the Catholic tradition was intertwined with the obligation to be a cultured and well-mannered middle-class lady. Australian author, Anna Rutherford argues that,

the sisters seemed fanatically determined to create in us the image that the Church had demanded – humble servants of God and men ... so many paintings on the walls of the convent that weren’t religious were of Dutch masterpieces depicting those silent submissive women whether in their middle-class role of ornament and decoration or their working-class domestic role.53

The students’ awareness of this class differentiation became more obvious to the students in the late 1970s, when there was more involvement in competitive sport and cultural activities outside the school. Day student, Vicki Koveos, momentarily saw herself as a class above others, as she noted how reserved her behaviour was compared to the perceived brash behaviour of girls from other secondary schools in the Rockhampton region.54 Joanne Adams (1987–1991) a student at St Ursula’s at a time when there was more flexibility regarding school rules, noted that, ‘Rules were difficult, but I realised they were there for a reason. Some of my friends from other boarding schools also reported really bad memories of the rigidity of boarding school life’.55

50 Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon."
51 Williams, "Interview."
52 Clark, Loreto in Australia.
54 Koveos, "Interview."
55 Adams, "Interview."
**Issues of sex and gender**

Any records of sex education in St Ursula’s over eighty years, came down to two basic Catholic ideals: chastity outside marriage, and monogamy within marriage. This section examines how those ideals were presented, both in the content of the formal classroom religion lessons, and in the ‘hidden curriculum’ of formation in moral behaviour in and out of school time. Sexuality, dating and marriage were all approached within the context of Church teachings, which, until Vatican II, treated divorce, birth control, and premarital sex as mortal sins. As a result, some of the class instructions about dating and sexuality went beyond conservatism into the absurd.

Each Wednesday, the third superior/principal of St Ursula’s, Mother Aloysius Ryan (1928-1932) delivered to the girls what could be considered sex education in the context of moral instruction. She emphasized in her weekly talks that each St Ursula’s girl should always uphold moral and ladylike behaviour in all social circles. In 1932, the content of the talks contained the sternest warnings that ‘some men are like beasts in the field’. Somehow an expression of masculinity was something to be feared, and the expression of the feminine was something to be guarded. Aloysius Ryan’s favourite saying was, ‘a lady can live in a tent’.

From the mid-1930s, secondary school teacher, Sister Dolores Dwyer gave sex education classes once a week. These classes came from an American-based secular ‘blue book’ series, published in 1924, entitled the *Physiology of Sex Life*. Its content was predominantly moralistic in tone, reinforcing gender differences and offering a strong commentary on the place of women in society of the early 20th century as submissive in marriage relationships. Literature dealing with anatomy and sex would have been prohibited from classrooms. Thus, in the ‘blue book’,

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56 Harper, "Interview."
57 Ibid.
58 MacGinley, "Interview."
59 E. Haldeman-Julius, ed. *Physiology of Sex Life*, 1st ed., 666 vols., vol. 74, Little Blue Book (Girard, Kansas USA: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1924); Freeman, "Interview."
60 Presentation, "Constitutions of the Sisters of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady (Australia)." 20.
sex was referred to, philosophically and morally, in headings such as ‘The Mystery of Life and the Consequences of Abortion’.

In the 1960s, a short course, called ‘Mothercraft’, was introduced in Queensland schools. It was delivered by qualified nurses to year nine girls. The course involved the care of a newborn baby. It did not feature sex education. In several of my interviews, past students produced the memorabilia of decorated scrapbooks from those lessons. They regarded Mothercraft as a favourite subject because it had a practical orientation compared with the moral focus and prescriptive nature of the personal development classes conducted by the sisters.  

The sisters invited Father Barry O’ Donoghue, the parish priest who conducted YCS (Young Christian Students Movement) to bring in a married couple who talked about Marriage Encounter. This approach to sex education was an option approved by the sisters because Marriage Encounter was a Christian lay movement that provided skills to develop written and oral communication between couples and not education in the physiology of sex. A student from the late 1960s noted that, ‘We never ever got any sex education; we found out some way or another’. In the early 1960s, boarding student, Liz Esmond (1963–1967) described the lessons on morality delivered at St Ursula’s. Liz Esmond’s description of the content of her religious instruction classes had a similarity to the lessons delivered in American girls’ convent schools at the time:

We were told not to wear sunglasses, so that we were not looking sideways behind our sunglasses and observing healthy young men, as we would be filing past them on the way to the beach. We were in yellow dresses with rickrack, so I don’t think any one of them was losing control of themselves over us. We learned a lot more about life during the weekend from the activities of the kitchen staff who lived across the road from the boarding

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61 Angela (Anderson) Schick, interview by Maree Ganley, 14 November 2011, Audio, ACU Brisbane.
62 Melrose, “Interview.” Marriage Encounter organisation introduced approaches to oral and written communication between married couples.
63 Ibid.
64 De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools. 229-230. De Bare describes instruction on dating and sexuality in American Catholic girls’ schools where girls were told to avoid wearing patent leather shoes because they would “reflect up” and allow boys to see their underwear, and to hold a phone book between them and the boys to maintain a safe distance.
school. Lessons on sexual morality were implied in the actions of the sister projectionist in the Saturday night movies for the boarders. Once there was a war movie set in Egypt and the nun blocked the lens with a book in front until the scene was over every time a belly dancer appeared on screen.\(^{65}\)

These actions by the sisters were an attempt to prevent girls from being tempted to impure thoughts on seeing the human body, including their own, exposed. It revealed the negative aspects of the theology of the Church regarding sexuality. The nature of personal development classes also reflected the belief that students needed to be saved from occasions of temptation. Donna Graham (1978-1982) remembered her personal development classes, which included the stories of placing a tissue between the boy’s hand and yours, and to throw a pebble in a puddle to disturb water so that boys could not see up your dress.\(^{66}\)

The contraceptive pill was made legally available in Australia in January 1961. From 1968, the students heard the Church’s view on contraception from the local parish priests, in Sunday sermons and on annual retreats for senior students. They conveyed the hard-line approach of the Catholic Church from Pope Paul VI’s encyclical ‘Humanae Vitae’ of 1968. In the 1970s, women religious were not trained to fully understand the implications of the encyclical for Catholic girls together with the sexual revolution that was occurring in the modern world. Girls in class began to challenge openly the right of women religious and priests to comment on matters of sexuality, on relationships and physical contact. Students in Donna Graham’s religious instruction classes (1978-1982) aimed to shock and embarrass the sister in personal development classes with challenging questions on such topics as oral sex.\(^{67}\) Despite the sisters’ unpreparedness, sex education, termed personal development, continued to be taught by the sisters right through to the 1990s, even though no prescribed formal syllabus of sex education was known to have existed.

**Membership of religious societies**

\(^{65}\) Esmond, “Interview.”
\(^{66}\) Graham, “Interview.”
\(^{67}\) Ibid.
The Virgin Mary was presented as the role model for young girls through religious lessons and in symbols such as statues and pictures placed throughout the school. The statues, prayer cards and special colourful religious feast days of Marian events in the school calendar reinforced Mary’s identity as the model of purity and submissiveness. The presence of the statues of Mary in the chapel and classrooms, cloaked and with eyes cast down, was a reminder to the girls to model that demure and ladylike behaviour. Mary Peckham-Magray argues that it was in the late 18th century, when Irish Catholics looked to new ways to express religious belief after centuries of suppression of Irish culture, that Irish women religious instigated rituals and elaborate ceremonies for Irish adults and children, believing that colourful ceremony made the religious message more attractive.68 Irish Catholic identity was formed around the rituals that enshrined Mary as the model of womanly virtue. These religious rituals brought by Irish pioneer priests and religious teachers with its puritanical approach to sexual morality had a powerful and unique influence on Australian Catholicism.

Irish women religious reinvigorated Catholic religious practice in Ireland through their introduction of Catholic societies for men, women and children. One was known as the Sodality of the Children of Mary, founded in 1847 by the Irish religious Order known as the Daughters of Charity.69 The Sodality of the Children of Mary was formed in elite boarding schools and promoted as the highest privilege to which a Catholic school girl could aspire. Girls were nominated for their piety, regularity in attendance at religious services and good conduct. They submitted their names for election to the sodality and were on probation until the superior/principal admitted them three months later.70 The practices of the sodality in a Catholic girls’ boarding school drew the girls into a sisterly organisation that could be a way of controlling young women and their sexuality. The exercises reinforced the spiritual gains of withdrawing from occasions that might threaten their Catholic virtue. The students committed to regular attendance at religious exercises and to be a model of feminine

70 Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns; Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900*. 100-01.
virtue as a preparation for life as an adult woman in the Church as mother or religious. Magray argues that the Children of Mary was in essence the training ground for future women religious.\textsuperscript{71} The students at Mary’s Mount Loreto boarding school Ballarat in 1885 wore the sashes of membership of the sodality each day over their school dresses as a symbol of great honour.\textsuperscript{72}

In 1924, superior/principal at St Ursula’s, Mother Clare admitted twelve ‘senior’ girls for the first time as aspirants to the Children of Mary Sodality. The aspirants took on certain obligations of appropriate behaviour before admittance to the sodality.\textsuperscript{73} In the early 1960s, the sodality still held status in St Ursula’s when day student, Winifred Knaggs was a Child of Mary aspirant. The superior stripped her of membership for supposedly writing slanderous statements about the principal in an essay. To this day, Winifred is unable to determine which statement was considered so slanderous that she suffered the humiliation of being stripped of membership of the Children of Mary and of the opportunity to wear the blue cloak and veil.\textsuperscript{74} In later life, she sought to balance this unpleasant experience with her recollection of what really mattered in school life, despite the importance at the time placed on membership of the sodality.

The ‘pleasantness’ of Winifred’s sporting achievements and the happy relationship with a teacher was the focus in her recollection of school life at St Ursula’s as a day student.\textsuperscript{75} Both Winifred and another day student, Vicki Koveos, commented that they felt included in other aspects of boarding school life than membership of the sodality.\textsuperscript{76}

The happiest times were friendships shared and sporting activities. I played baseball, vigoro and tennis. I was best at sport and loved it. I was part of the inter-school tennis team and played singles and doubles, sometimes travelling to Rockhampton for competition. I regarded my music teacher

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. 104-105.
\textsuperscript{72} Clark, Loreto in Australia. 62.
\textsuperscript{73} Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.” 112.
\textsuperscript{74} Knaggs, “Interview.”
\textsuperscript{75} Crawford et al., Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory. 9.
\textsuperscript{76} Koveos, “Interview.”
Sister Magdalen as a friend. She accepted me as I was and understood my struggle in performing on piano. I studied at night with the boarders and she entertained us by playing piano in the evenings after study time was finished. She died in September of my senior year in 1959 and she was missed.\textsuperscript{77}

The importance of the Children of Mary Sodality in the spiritual life of St Ursula’s diminished from the early 1960s, with the religious loyalties and commitment of the students directed to more outward looking engagement in church activity through social action such as the YCS movement. In the late 1940s, some diocesan priests and women religious teachers introduced the Young Christian Students Movement (YCS) into Catholic secondary schools in Australia (Figure 11). The YCS movement is based upon the teachings of Joseph Cardijn, a Belgian priest, who had devoted his life to bringing Christianity to the working class. It was based on the ‘See, Judge, Act’ method where young people would take leadership roles to look after the spiritual and material needs of others.

The sisters introduced the YCS movement into St Ursula’s in the post-war decades, and students admitted experiencing a sense of relevance and meaning different from the highly ritualised Church practices of more introverted Catholic organisations like the Sodality of the Children of Mary. Noelle Melrose, a St Ursula’s school captain in 1972, joined the YCS movement. She recalls, ‘Father Barry O’Donoghue the assistant parish priest of Yeppoon came to the school for religious instruction and YCS meetings. All the girls were in love with him and it was a great highlight to have someone young and motivated’.\textsuperscript{78} YCS gave students then the opportunity to take up youth leadership roles through activities within the school and to seek involvement in social justice movements after St Ursula’s. Post-school students could join an organisation called the Young Christian Worker (YCW).

Theresa Clarke participated in YCS in the late 1960s. ‘YCS coloured our lives in terms of involvement with community and social justice. I have since belonged to

\textsuperscript{77} Knaggs, “Interview.”
\textsuperscript{78} Melrose, “Interview.”
an international women’s league for peace and freedom’. The YCS movement had a short lifespan in St Ursula’s and existed only until the early 1970s, when the time commitment of staff in teaching and dormitory and the sharp increase in enrolments did not allow it to continue. In 1976, YCS with its strong Catholic faith orientation that included social action, changed to SAM (Student Action Movement) at St Ursula’s without the spiritual dimension of gospel reading and reflection that was part of the YCS movement. The senior students initiated SAM and they engaged in social and pastoral action in the Yeppoon community.

Figure 11  St Ursula’s Catholic Action Group

_Recruitment activities to join the Presentation Sisters_

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79 Clarke, "Interview."
80 St Ursula’s senior class, "Ursula’s Own", ed. Year 12 (Yeppoon 1976).
The number of girls from St Ursula’s who joined the Presentation Sisters had steadily increased in the late 1940s, and five girls from St Ursula’s trained to be Presentation sisters in 1949. However, those numbers were not enough to meet staffing needs for the Presentation Sisters who had committed to a growing number of primary schools throughout Queensland. The idea of religious life being the ultimate expression of belonging to the highest order for women in the Church was promoted strongly in school spiritual retreats. These retreats were part of the Catholic curriculum, and were conducted by visiting priests. Membership of the Sodality of the Children of Mary also had an influence and ‘was regarded as a training ground for future religious women’. The ideals of the YCS movement of Catholic action may also have had an influence on some girls committing to religious life.

Religious institutes conducting Catholic schools used the opportunity of the captive student audience to promote religious vocations through recruitment campaigns in the school year. The evidence of recruiting at St Ursula’s varied from direct approaches to individual girls, to sporadic campaigns with relevant literature and class talks. Some students reported instances of a superior and principal campaigning for recruitment in the late 1970s. Others were approached individually at times to consider religious life, including Patricia Nielsen (1938–1944) who was approached but declined the invitation. Trish (Clements) Stapleton (1969–1971) was surprised at a cursory response she received when she indicated her intention to apply for membership of the Presentation Sisters. She had noted that, while there seemed indifference to her willingness, another student was being encouraged to apply, with the inducement of the gift of a bible. As only certain girls were targeted personally, there were obviously undocumented selection criteria.

82 Magray, The Transforming Power of the Nuns; Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900. 101-102.
83 MacGinley, "Interview."
84 Freeman, "Interview." A student from 1936-42 stated in seven years she did not receive encouragement to join the sisters.
85 Graham, "Interview."
86 Latimer, "Interview."
87 Trish (Stapleton) Clements, ibid., 10 February 2015. That student did not join the Presentation Sisters after much objection from her parents.
One was that the sisters regarded girls from middle-class backgrounds as the ideal student considered to be an appropriate candidate to the sisterhood. The criteria were not known, except that a class teacher at St Ursula’s had questioned Trish’s suitability to apply ‘because she came from Longreach’, thus presuming she came from a working-class background.88

In addition to the idea that women religious automatically occupied an exalted place in the Church, ultimately the attraction of becoming a member of a religious institute was found in the dedicated example provided by young women religious. In 1996, Karen Daniels had never been to a Catholic school before boarding at St Ursula’s. ‘A young nun came to teach science and year ten mathematics. She was young, just out and was a strong influence on me to join. I had dreams of the love of silence and contemplation. I did not join the institute and did not experience any recruiting’.89

The formal curriculum in Catholic faith formation

Religious education was a compulsory subject in the curriculum at St Ursula’s, based on the French Ursuline tradition in which the catechism dominated.90 The catechism format also reached back to its introduction into the petite écoles of the post Catholic Reformation era. It consisted of four main sections: the creed, commandments, sacraments, and prayers. Authoritative teaching of doctrines in propositional form and the memorising of responses were central to the approach in religious instruction in Catholic schools into the mid-20th century.

In 1948, the curriculum for Catholic faith in the classroom consisted of three categories: Catholic belief, bible stories and liturgical practices centred on the seven sacraments of the church.91 In senior classes, from the mid-1950s, more attention was given to making religious education intellectually challenging for the older

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88 Ibid.
89 Daniels, “Interview.”
students, and a textbook on apologetics was set for Australian Catholic schools which highlighted the theme of the defence of the faith. The secondary school religious instruction syllabus included the study of the Gospels and Church History from set texts.  

During the 1960s and 1970s, religious education in Catholic schools consisted of a life-centred and experiential approach, which was more in keeping with the worldwide social movements that rejected the social norms of the 1950s. There was a gradual increase in the number and variety of texts used in secondary religion classes, which introduced topics such as faith, morals, sex, marriage, and social issues. The teaching approach remained formal and authoritative, and the content of the formal classroom religious instruction was reinforced by annual three-day retreats. The retreats were usually conducted on the school premises and featured periods of silence and prayer as well as talks for secondary students given by a priest.

Student, Liz Esmond attended retreats in the late 1960s, conducted by the parish priest, Father Danny Moore and other visiting priests. 'We had to be silent all day, and even during mealtime, when someone would read during dinner on improving things - religious things. The priest gave talks and some of them were sort of fire and damnation. You would be tired and asleep, and the priest would shout out, "And then they were dead, dead!!"' This recollection by Liz Esmond implied that there was no student interest in the content of the talks, even though, as an adult, she has remained an active member of her local Catholic church.

Although the students often expressed difficulty with accepting the repeated practice of religious rituals like the early morning Mass, none reported there ever being a climate of harassment by the sisters about religious belief and practice.
through the religious instruction classes. Some students admitted that they somehow had absorbed a distorted view, both inside and outside the classroom, of the teachings of salvation and redemption and of the superior place of the Catholic Church in salvation history. Some views grew out of the name-calling and jingles that the students could recall from the 1940s and were well-known until the 1960s. Eighty-year-old past student, Judy Williams could recite the jingles from her schooldays. One was, ‘Catholics, Catholics ring the bell, while the protestants march to hell’. She could not recall the source of the prejudices that she absorbed as a child. Author, Josie Arnold reflected that the hymns taught in school and sung in church on Sunday contained triumphalist sentiments and sermons of the one true Church and went a long way to influence young Catholic minds about the superiority of their place in the universe.

Outside of school hours, the young students also had absorbed the religious prejudice instilled in their young minds. Pauline Rafter (1943-1950) grew up in Yeppoon. ‘We dared not talk to Protestant children, or ever go inside a Protestant church. In those years, we did not participate in Anzac ceremonies because of Protestant prayers’. By the mid-1960s, the prejudices were removed at St Ursula’s when the students began to attend the Anzac ceremonies in Yeppoon. Following a recommendation from the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic parish priest, Doctor Grove Johnson, began ecumenical meetings between the sisters and the clergy of all religious faiths in the town. However, even before ecumenism was introduced, non-Catholic boarders at St Ursula’s could not recall any discrimination levelled against them. Marjorie Harper (1931-1933) was not a Catholic, and she and other non-Catholic boarders were able to attend services in their churches on a Sunday.

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96 Rafter, "Interview."
97 Williams, "Interview."
99 Rafter, "Interview."
100 Dr. Grove Johnson, ibid., 29 June 2011, 2011.
101 Howard, "Interview."
102 Harper, "Interview."
In the 1970s, teachers of religious education in the classroom experienced a reaction to the way in which they presented religious instruction lessons. Students began to question openly the prescriptive nature of the content of class religious instruction and to challenge church teachings. Catherine Kehoe was a boarder (1976–1977) and her religion lessons with the sister religion teacher became a philosophical battleground and eventually the class had a spare period instead, and the lesson would be abandoned.\textsuperscript{103} Beth Wheeldon was a boarder (1983–1984) and stated ‘I cannot remember too many religious events. I talked through religious lessons and checked out the boys during most masses’.\textsuperscript{104} Donna O’Grady was a day student (1982–1984) and her experience of religious education lessons questions the effectiveness of the shift in emphasis in the religious education curriculum in that decade from a catechetical to an experiential approach in the secondary school.

I remember year eight religious education was annoying. There was all that personal development stuff. I clearly had bad self-esteem. In the year eight religious retreat, I was told to go out into the garden to find a tree and talk to a tree and give it a hug. I was just so embarrassed my mind would explode. I was in a position where you can't get out of it in a (freakin’) Catholic school. I could not say to anyone that was the most ridiculous thing I have ever done.\textsuperscript{105}

Other students interviewed from the 1980s strongly affirmed their affiliation to the Church throughout their adult lives and attributed much of that faith dimension to the influence of the values and the lives of the sisters at St Ursula’s rather than from the content of religious instruction. It also indicated that religious education classes were no longer potential ‘battlegrounds’ on issues regarding relationships and sexuality. Women religious in the secondary school were no longer prepared to promote the hard-line official Church teaching. Donna Graham (1978-1982) noted

\textsuperscript{103} Kehoe, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{104} Oram, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{105} O'Grady, "Interview."
My memories of the sisters were of strong women who lived their faith and who were good, kind, thoughtful and considerate. I loved regular masses at school and particularly music at masses and being involved and participating. The overall experience was positive. There was room to explore your faith in a not as formal traditional way. I had lots of role models like the nuns.\textsuperscript{106}

Beth Wheeldon (1983-1984) had a similar experience of religious education through the 1980s:

There were no great discussions about religious life. I can't remember much advice being given, but I recall the sisters who were very humble and loving teachers and encouraged us to pursue our dreams. The Study of Religion was not my favourite subject but was made enjoyable by Sister Mary, who was an exceptional person and a leader who was very genuine with the girls.\textsuperscript{107}

Sister Therese Collins reflected on the change of approach to religious education from her perspective:

As a child in the 1950s, we had religious instruction. I learned about actual grace, sanctifying grace, and that unbaptised babies could not go to heaven because they would not understand heaven, and it was better they were not there. As a teacher, the study of science led me to consider religion from an ecological spirituality perspective. During my second time with teaching and boarder supervision at St Ursula’s (1979–1986) things were changing then regarding spirituality. We still laid down the law about abortion and all that sort of stuff, and still had the thing about toeing the line about divorce, but it was starting to change and a different type of spirituality was coming. It was something like an Australian spirituality. We’d do things even in the

\textsuperscript{106} Graham, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{107} Oram, "Interview."
community of sisters, like we had loaves and fishes kind of thing on the beach one time.\textsuperscript{108}

Another member of the staff chose indirectly not to support the Church’s conservative view regarding divorce. Sister Suzanne Gentle (1989-1991) noted that, when she was boarding director, the mother of a student in year twelve remarried. ‘The student had to pick a religious education topic and she chose to do marriage annulment and we talked about it. When her mum remarried, I sent a gift to her mum and the girl was surprised that I was accepting. The girl also did not know that her mum and I had exchanged conversations about her marriage’.\textsuperscript{109}

There were very few recorded conversions to Catholicism by students throughout the eighty years, except for a year twelve student in the mid-1970s and several year eight students in the late 1990s. In those years, a lay teacher at the school for a short time conducted an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) program in the school.\textsuperscript{110} As the teaching institutes of women religious began to withdraw from staffing schools through the late 1980s, Catholic dioceses throughout Australia established Religious Education support teams. Each school established the administrative role of Assistant to the Principal Religious Education. The person in that role gives faith leadership, supports a faith community and, on behalf of the bishop of the respective dioceses, ensures there is an official Catholic Church perspective across the curriculum.\textsuperscript{111}

\section*{Conclusion}

The Presentation Sisters of Queensland faithfully implemented the Catholic curriculum envisioned by the second Provincial Council of Australian Bishops from 1869 ‘that education must take place in and be infused by a religious atmosphere

\textsuperscript{108} Collins, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{109} Sister Suzanne Gentle, ibid., 29 January 2015.
\textsuperscript{110} Pearson, "Interview." In the 1990s, the College Annual reported the RCIA was introduced by a lay teacher but did not continue after his departure.
which would act upon a child’s whole character of mind and heart’.\textsuperscript{112} The prescriptive nature of the Catholic curriculum for girls at St Ursula’s directed the girls to practice their Catholic faith as adults, and adopt, in adult life, the Catholic cultural expectations of moral behaviour and social graces that befitted a convent educated young lady. Some women reflected that their formation in the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church had enabled them to participate in the Church as adults. For others, their post-school experiences of relationships, work and further study presented unforeseen and different realities that challenged the prescriptive nature of their religious formation. Some reflected that the sisters had prepared them for more active participation in the Church through social action societies only to discover that their worth was devalued to a level of subservience in the Church.\textsuperscript{113}

Over the first sixty years, while the Presentation Sisters at St Ursula’s taught religious education classes, they aimed to prepare young women to be committed to the practice of their Catholic faith, and to be accomplished in the social graces in keeping with the Ursuline traditions of a convent school education. Catholic faith formation was, for some girls, in keeping with the values and principles already established in their family life. Some of the superiors’ yearly reports, dating back to the 1930s, publicly confirmed a commitment by staff to the faith dimensions encapsulated in the Catholic curriculum.

Until the mid-1980s, women religious in their religious education classes continued to reinforce a Catholic gender ideology. They prepared students to be the ideal woman to participate in a patriarchal church through her piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. From Mother Aloysius’ speech day address of 1932, the superior/principals at times made public statements that encouraged the students to consider broader perspectives. The few records of public statements by superiors and principals at times referred to the pursuit of intellectual accomplishment as equally important as the accomplishments of moral and ladylike behaviour.\textsuperscript{114} From


\textsuperscript{113} Staniforth, "Slipping the Knot." 163.

\textsuperscript{114} The Morning Bulletin, "Successful Year." \textit{The Morning Bulletin}. 
the late 1970s, there was an undercurrent of decisive action by the Presentation Sisters who adopted a more liberal intellectual attitude towards religious belief. This perspective was welcomed by the senior students, and it had a positive impact on their adult lives.

From the interviews of students who completed year twelve at St Ursula’s, I deduced that the religious education curriculum, even in the post-Vatican II era did not necessarily engage the girls to establish their place as active Catholics in modern society. A formal classroom religious education syllabus appears to have been the least effective means of developing a Catholic faith commitment in individual students. An examination of the student and staff recollections reveals the two most significant influences faith as an adult: 1) prior commitment and the example of Catholic family members; and 2) the daily example of commitment, provided by women religious, especially those who established an open attitude towards official Church teachings and students’ experiences in the modern world.
Chapter seven

Boarding school life - Sea Pictures from the dormitory window

Love! Love! When we wandered here together, Hand in hand: Hand in Hand through the sparkling weather, From the heights and hollows of fern and heather, God surely loved us a little then.

The Swimmer, Edward Elgar (words by Adam Lindsay Gordon; 1833–1870) (Appendix 1).

Introduction

This chapter examines how the St Ursula’s students experienced a boarding school lifestyle, which had its origins in traditions built up over centuries beginning in early modern Europe. It covers daily life and sociability, specifically amongst the boarders. It provides an account of the complex historical practices of boarding school life, which were shaped by the circumstances of co-living as well as the changing structures and personalities of school management.

Variations of the convent boarding school curriculum became more widespread in Britain and Ireland by the mid-19th century. In Australia in the early 20th century, the earliest models of education for girls as a holistic learning experience in moral and accomplishments education had a different orientation. Specifically, for many families of working-class and middle-class backgrounds in remote regions of Australia, a boarding school education was regarded as a necessity because of distance, rather than as a privilege as in the English boarding school system.

St Ursula’s was purpose built in 1917 as a convent boarding school to house the convent community, with a capacity of thirty girl boarders in dormitory style accommodation, a school room, domestic facilities and a music room. A chapel was not included, and a classroom served as a church in 1917 for the few times a priest
visited Yeppoon from Rockhampton. The earth basement of the building was enclosed to become the local church in 1918. The school opened with twenty-six boarders and a community of five sisters.¹ Boarding school living conditions were similar to descriptions and images of girls and boys in boarding-school dormitories for much of 20th-century Australia, with living quarters for a supervisor attached. The bathroom facilities and refectory were communal, but in 1968 years ten, eleven and twelve moved into two-person cubicle accommodation with individual wash basins and cupboard space.

From 1920 to 1923, boarding numbers increased to fifty and the community of sisters increased to seven. As the debt on the original building was paid off by the end of 1922, the Queensland Presentation Sisters began plans for a new three storey building which was completed by 1923. Evangelist Murtagh recorded that, while fifty boarders enrolled for the summer months, that number varied across the school year as itinerant workers sometimes brought their families to Yeppoon for three summer months and then took their families inland for work in the winter.² In 1941, there were thirty-two new boarders, but boarding numbers fluctuated and dropped to just nine in 1954.³

The steady increase in numbers after 1955 coincided with industrial developments in central Queensland and the increased numbers nationally of students seeking post-primary education. Some superiors embarked on a significant marketing campaign in central Queensland regions to attract boarders. A newly appointed superior, Dorothea Hegarty (1952-57) introduced the Presentation School Bursaries, and, by 1967, numbers had climbed to 100. From the mid-1970s, boarding numbers reached a peak of 125, which was maintained until the early 1990s when principal and superior, Marion Kingston adopted a policy to cap boarding numbers at 150. A new boarding complex opened in 1998 with the appointment of a director of boarders, assisted by several supervisors. It consisted of individual student bedrooms, including private study facilities, and open spaces.

¹ Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon." 87.
² Ibid. 87.
³ St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon." 22-23.
for after-school activities in common rooms. In 2018, St Ursula’s maintains a boarding school of just fifty-two girls.

The registrar of St Ursula’s who was the superior of the convent, meticulously recorded the dates of arrival and departure of boarding students. The register provides a cameo of the social history of the families from the vast region of Central Queensland in the first thirty years. The length of time that some students came to St Ursula’s, either as boarders or day students, was often determined by the father’s itinerant work throughout the west. Boarders had remained at the school for as little as the minimum requirement of three weeks or for up to ten years.

The story of the two Stormouth girls, Sidonie and Elise, illustrates the background circumstances of short-term boarding at St Ursula’s in the early 1930s. The girls attended the St Joseph’s primary school in Longreach, conducted by the Presentation Sisters. Their father was a World War I veteran and was employed as a boundary rider by the Longreach Council, which also provided a small house. He brought milk daily, without charge, to the convent and often a share of meat from a stray sheep. The parents’ only break from their life in Longreach was a trip to Sydney in 1933. During that short term, Sidonie and Elise boarded and continued schooling with the sisters in Yeppoon. Also, the mother of Australian author and poet, Jena Woodhouse, came to St Ursula’s for short-term schooling. Although she was ten years of age, she had never been inside a classroom. Jena recalled that her mother often spoke of how a sister took her for individual tutoring until she was able to take her place in a classroom. This experience gives a glimpse of how the curriculum was adapted to accommodate children with no prior experience of schooling.

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4 Margaret (Clifford) Ramsay, “The Changing Face of St Ursula's," in St Ursula's College, ed. St Ursula's College Yeppoon (Yeppoon2008).
5 The reasons for this enrolment history is developed further in the chapter.
7 Stormouth, “Interview.” The names ‘Sidonie' and ‘Elise' belonged to the children of a French family who hid the Stormouth father in their house in France during World War I.
8 Woodhouse, “Interview.”
In the group residential environment, girls shared living spaces, social life, and trials and tribulations during important years of development. They often had extended periods of time and space with same-age peers, or older and younger students. They were involved in a range of academic, social, and extracurricular activities and often had their own unique customs and practices. This chapter examines the complex interaction between the boarders’ home culture and that of the school culture as a source of academic, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual development. As such, the boarding school became an agency of socialisation, as it provided a unique experience of activities, interactions, diverse values, and culture.

From 1917, the ‘high school’ population of St Ursula’s comprised boarders ranging in age from five into the early twenties, and they were joined for classes by some fee-paying day students. In 1918, the Presentation Sisters followed an Irish tradition of schooling and established on the premises a separate ‘elementary school’, called St Joseph’s, for low fee-paying day students. The state Department of Public Instruction of Queensland established divisions of primary and secondary schools in the early 1920s, and the ‘high school’ then became St Ursula’s secondary school. Young boarders, from the age of five up, attended the primary school, and some remained through to senior matriculation at age seventeen.

On January 28, 1920, the superior/principal, Mother Patrick Madden advertised St Ursula’s Yeppoon as a ‘boarding and high school for young ladies’. She outlined the school curriculum as a ‘thorough English Education’ and that ‘terms were very moderate’. This advertisement clearly defined St Ursula’s as a ‘select’ convent boarding school. By 1923, the advertisements stated that ‘the curriculum offered all the requirements necessary to pass the junior and senior examinations in the Queensland University’. After its initial 1920 claim to exclusivity, the school widened its enrolment to included both genders and a wider range of social class.

9 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.” 1.
10 A separate primary school was built across the road from St Ursula’s in 1957 and young boarders walked to school from the boarding house each day.
12 “St Ursula’s Convent Yeppoon.” Wednesday 3 January, 1923. 5.
The occupations of parents taken as a sample from the register in 1924 and 1955-56 indicate that the range of social class of the boarding school population was consistently white working-class and middle-class background. That profile changed when the school began to include girls from Papua New Guinea from the late 1960s until the late 1970s and Indigenous Australian girls from the latter part of the 20th century. In 1924, parent occupations ranged from shearers to property owners. By 1955, parents came from a wider professional and labour base, including land-owners, doctors, a surveyor, a labourer in mining, and a railway employee.\(^\text{13}\)

The student recollections of convent boarding school life from my interviews are much more positive than prevailing views from other sources. A possible explanation for this difference was a willingness on the part of children from the bush to treat each other equally in classroom and dormitory regardless of family background. De Bare argues that the Catholic boarding school provided a unique set of experiences for girls: 'For all their rules and restrictions, Catholic girls' boarding school exerted a powerful sway over their students. United by their shared adversity, girls often forged intense friendships. The religious rituals, music, and medals blended with the nuns' visible faith to inspire students'.\(^\text{14}\)

One student from De Bare’s study noted, “It was like going through the Crusades together, but after it was over you knew you had something of worth under your belt”.\(^\text{15}\) In Lambert and Millham’s study of boarders in English public schools for boarders only, the boarding school society of itself tended to establish a climate of tolerance. In this study, a student described how he learned the meaning of tolerance and charity and felt as if he had completely lost the mean streak that he had in him before he came to boarding school. ‘This school accepts every type of boy madman or genius as long as he doesn’t either annoy or disturb others. Like

\(^{13}\) St Ursula's College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's College Yeppoon." 3; 24-26.

\(^{14}\) De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls' Schools. 223.

\(^{15}\) Ibid. 223.
the boarding removes the social distinctions which matter so much in the outer
world’.\textsuperscript{16}

Nevertheless, in St Ursula’s, as in the English public schools, there is evidence that
all was not as positive in other aspects of boarding school life. There were instances
of resistance, secret societies, disputes around surveillance and discipline, sexual
tensions, instances of what would be perceived in today’s terms as a manifestation
of mental illness, and expulsions. This eighty-year narrative of boarding school life
at St Ursula’s is a construction of these subjectivities, based on memories of past
staff and students.\textsuperscript{17}

The reflections of boarding life by past students were at times more extensive than
recollections of the school-day routine because of the more heightened emotions
involved in the interaction of students living so closely together and sharing a strict
communal life. In this chapter, the well-established limitations in documenting
historical data from oral evidence necessitated serious consideration around the
literature on oral memory recall, interpretation and meaning in the data analysis.
The work of memory theorists, David Rubin and Dorthe Berntsen, is relevant to this
research because it became evident that interviewees could recall negative
experiences of boarding school in more detail than they could positive
experiences.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{A boarding school routine for bush children}

The record of the first years of the daily school routine comes from Sister Evangelist
Murtagh’s memoir of St Ursula’s.\textsuperscript{19} Her main thrust was to emphasize the
advantages of boarding school life for the girls from bush locations and the benefits
of coming to school near the sea. The daily life of a student in a country boarding
school in Queensland was considerably less ambiguous in 1917 than after World

\textsuperscript{16} Lambert and Millham, \textit{The Hothouse Society: An Exploration of Boarding-School Life through the
Boys’ and Girls’ Own Writings}. 340.
\textsuperscript{17} Finkelstein, "Education Historians as Mythmakers." 255-297.
\textsuperscript{18} Rubin and Berntsen, "Emotionally Charged Autobiographical Memories across the Life Span: The
Recall of Happy, Sad, Traumatic and Involuntary Memories."
\textsuperscript{19} Murtagh, "Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon."
War II (1939–1945). Sister Evangelist described boarding school life then as more relaxed and leisurely. At the same time, the annals refer to the precarious nature of life at a boarding school in such an isolated location as Yeppoon when there were medical emergencies for staff and students before a hospital was built in Yeppoon by 1926. There were rescues from near drownings and the need to comfort a grieving child with family-member tragedies hundreds of kilometres from the school. Unfortunately, Sister Evangelist refers vaguely to the 'great difficulties' the sisters encountered in the first years of becoming established. Because her words were meant to be part of a memoir for circulation amongst the sisters, she may have presumed everyone knew of those difficulties. Another explanation may be that she wished to prevent any negative records of the work of the sisters.

Students at the school in its first twenty years may not have coped with the distance and time away from home, as, then, most could only return home just once at the end of the year because of distance and limited road access. One other difficulty became obvious after a review of the school register of those first years. There were twenty-six boarders at the beginning of 1917, who could be accommodated comfortably in the new building. However, by the end of 1917, student numbers had expanded to an additional eighty-nine day students. This increase brought no extra buildings or space, and it had to be deal with by the existing five sisters, as there was no accompanying increase in staff.

The lack of space was somewhat rectified by the beginning of 1918, with a strategic expansion plan by the sisters. They gained financial support from the wider Catholic community by building a much-needed Yeppoon church facility under the convent, which the sisters used as another classroom during the week. The need for a church in Yeppoon drew more financial support than did the need to provide another classroom to accommodate the boarder-students in the ‘select high school’ separate from the low fee-paying day students in the primary class.

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20 Ibid. 121.
21 In one instance, girls were swept out to sea and rescued by passers-by on the beach.
22 St Ursula's College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula's College Yeppoon."
23 Murtagh, "Annals of St. Ursula's Yeppoon."
Murtagh emphasized how important the ocean and beach activities were in the daily lives of both the boarders and the sisters (Error! Reference source not found.). Both groups had bathing boxes on the beachfront by 1928, and newspaper advertisements at the time described 'the healthy seaside locality, and splendid sea bathing facilities'.

The Murtagh annals reported a larger number of school holidays in the 1920s in Queensland, such as St David’s Day (March 1) and St Patrick’s Day (March 17) which have since been withdrawn from the school calendar. On these days, students and teachers could picnic and go boating with local fisherman, Mr Barton. Moreover, in these early years, the pressures of preparation for public external university examinations did not dominate school life. In November, 1922, Mamie Halberstater, a boarder at St Ursula’s from Mt Morgan, wrote possibly an idealised reflection of her boarding school life in an article to a children’s section in the Rockhampton newspaper, *The Capricornian*:

> I am twelve years of age. I am in the fifth class at school. We are having delightful weather. We had some rain last week. We go sea-bathing. We have great sport in the water. I like bathing in the warm weather, but I am very much against it in winter. On last Sunday, we went exploring the rocks and found many shells of fantastic shapes. We also found a sea-cow and many hermit crabs.

By 1923, the superior Mother Patrick Madden began advertising for short-term boarding school applications of not less than three weeks, and opened the convent boarding school experience to a wider section of the bush population. This move would define its character and history for the next eighty years. Some students started to attend St Ursula’s as day students for up to three months, as families stayed at Yeppoon, while a father did itinerant work of shearing and other seasonal labouring work.

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In 1924, of the eighty-two new enrolments, twenty-two students had spent just one to ten months at the school, and they did not return for 1925. The students ranged in age from five years to fourteen, and, of these, twenty-six were boys. Leonard Hill was enrolled at eleven years of age and started in first form with the same class set of readers as his six-year-old sister. The fathers of eighteen of the twenty-two children in short term boarding school were shearers, and their work took them vast distances for seasonal work between sheep stations and interstate. In early 1918, thirteen-year-old, Vincent Desailly, enrolled in year three. He came into Yeppoon from droving with his father and joined three other siblings already at St Ursula’s.

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27 St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, "Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon." 8-10.
In August of the same year, Vincent went back out droving with his father and did not return for any further schooling.\textsuperscript{28} By the late-1920s, secondary school-aged students, girls and boys, were schooled together, whether boarders or day students. The students who remained at the school for longer periods were more likely to complete schooling to junior university. Murtagh’s description in the annals of the conditions of boarding school life for the students in the years before the impact of the Great Depression and World War II presents a contrast with the student experiences of the post-war years. In the aftermath of World War II, the sisters carried heavy financial burdens but remained open for primary and secondary education.

\textbf{Boarding life in times of national crises (The Great Depression and World War II)}

The change in boarder enrolment numbers varied from thirty-three in 1933 to just eighteen in 1934. In 1931 to 1934, the occupational background of families varied greatly from shearsers and labourers to a doctor, hotel owners and a dentist. By 1941, the student enrolments had increased to fifty-four.\textsuperscript{29} On the school roll from 1942 to 1945, there were ten fathers of students in either the Australian Imperial Forces or the Home Forces.\textsuperscript{30} Pauline Smith remembered an uncle was killed in action while she was at boarding school, and Trish Nielsen remembered the many hours the boarders and nuns spent in the chapel as the Battle of the Coral Sea was fought off shore and just north of Yeppoon.\textsuperscript{31}

Even though the school was so close to the central Queensland coastline and there was the threat of invasion, the students in the boarding school environment were insulated from military activities until the American forces camped south of Yeppoon from 1942. Boarders were moved inland for most of 1942 and were kept on task with schoolwork to prepare for public examinations. Much of the way in which the superior/principals managed and maintained a regular school curriculum and

\textsuperscript{28} Sister Sally Desailly, interview by Maree Ganley, 7 October, 2013.
\textsuperscript{29} St Ursula’s College Yeppoon, “Register of St Ursula’s College Yeppoon.” 12-14.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 26-30.
\textsuperscript{31} Smith, "Interview."; Latimer, "Interview."
routine throughout the Great Depression (1929–1939) and World War II (1939-1945) was covered in previous chapters.\footnote{Sister Marie Ryan, ibid., 26 October 2009. Marie was sent from Brisbane to board in Yeppoon because of the fear of invasion of Brisbane during WW11.}

The recollections of the students in the depression and war years centred on the conditions of boarding school life. They could still itemise the unchanging boarding school menu and meal-time routine, but no students in the war years remembered ever being hungry. Food parcels from home and from relatives in Yeppoon supplemented the daily meals, including the tubes of condensed milk and tins of milo, which were secreted into the dorms for after-hours snacks. The frequent boarders’ visits to the pineapple farms suggest that, in the harshest economic times, people were generous to the sisters with food supplies, when there was not a guaranteed income from school fees. The boarding school diet was supplemented by parents giving ‘pocket money’ to spend on treats. From 1930 to 1933, Marjorie Harper’s mother gave her sixpence each week, which she spent on six pieces of fruit. Also, there were a few concessions from the basic diet:

The midday dinner at St Ursula’s was later on Sundays and there were special treats from the sisters on Sundays of bread and butter for morning tea and cakes for afternoon tea with cocoa served with water. Each Sunday also in the 1930s a glass of Epsom salts was placed for each girl on the tables. We were often invited to the pineapple farms of the Ryan and Vaggelas families and with an instruction just to bring a spoon.\footnote{Harper, "Interview."} A sister grew garlic for the boarders specifically during these years to ward off colds.\footnote{Murtagh, “Annals of St Ursula’s Yeppoon.”}

The boarders’ vivid recollection of life in the war years featured their being transferred inland to Longreach to live and study at the start of 1942. The greatest hardship in the war years was that there were even more restrictions of movement, as they could not go near the fortified beach after they returned to Yeppoon from
Longreach.\textsuperscript{35} Judy Williams attended St Ursula’s when food supply was rationed during World War II. ‘In the early 1940s food was enough always; lots of bread and jam but no butter; butter was rationed per family during the war years and cost one shilling eleven and a half pence at a time when the basic wage was ninety-six shillings per week’.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1943, the principal/superior, Angela Murtagh, outlined in her annual report the impact that World War II had on educational institutions such as St Ursula’s. She noted that because of the disturbed year in 1942, there was a reduced number of students for junior public examinations. In contrast, the number of boarders had increased as ‘the war effort had broken up many homes and parents must place their children in a boarding school and hence these schools were taxed to the utmost’. She concluded by stating, ‘the sisters had endeavoured to make the children as contented and happy as possible’.\textsuperscript{37}

In the decades following World War II, the sisters struggled financially to assist families to keep their children in boarding school, and girls did report that conditions were difficult and there was insufficient food.\textsuperscript{38} Even into the early 1970s, Leanne Howard’s most vivid memory of boarding school as a boarder from Jericho in Central Queensland (1970-1972) was her first evening meal there on a Sunday:

As a non-Catholic my introduction to the dining room was that new grade eight kids like me were seated at a table with three of the seniors. Each of us stood behind a chair with hands folded and recited grace. We sat down and buttered our half piece of bread, popped the half piece of pineapple on top of the bread. I washed mine down with a half a cup of cold tea and since the seniors then stood up behind their chairs again so did I. We blessed ourselves and thanked the Lord for the meagre blessings. At this stage I thought it unusual that we would say grace in between each course. Surely

\textsuperscript{35} Latimer, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{36} Williams, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{36} Stubberfield, "Interview." Judy Williams recalled ‘The breakfast diet was porridge, bread and jam with no butter and always fruit.’
\textsuperscript{37} The Morning Bulletin, "Principal’s Speech Night Address." 6
\textsuperscript{38} Fleming, "Interview."
there was more food to come … steak with onion and mash… How wrong I was. The seniors left the refectory and I followed wondering how I would get through the night.…

Leanne and the new students joked about the small amount of dinner the next morning within Sister Fidelis' hearing, who laughed along with them. What Leanne did not know at the time was that the sisters could not afford cooks for Sunday evening meals. This was addressed by 1973, when the sisters agreed to roster themselves on to cook a Sunday evening meal on top of their dormitory duties rather than pay the cost of employing staff.

**Boarding school in difficult family circumstances**

There were students who viewed the whole boarding school experience more negatively from the outset. Those students engaged in rebellious behaviour as they could see no reason for their being in boarding school, except as a convenience to resolve difficult family situations. Alternatively, perhaps their rebellious behaviour occurred because the contrast in the daily routine of home and school was so great. Some students displayed resentment to the reality that, for them, boarding school represented more of a punishment in circumstances such as a family separation. Sandra Stapleton (1975-76) described the unsettled behaviour of girls in her dormitory:

Sally from Brisbane was an intelligent but an angry girl with her father for sending her with her two sisters to boarding school from Brisbane after a divorce. Sally and her friend Jenny would go to the shops and pub for supplies and I kept watch at the dorm window for any nuns approaching. Sally was bored out of her head and she tried such acts as dissolving aspro and Panadol into cigarettes to smoke; but she managed to complete her schooling and graduate.

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39 Howard, "Interview."
40 Fleming, "Interview."
41 Clements, "Interview."
Sandra herself was rebelling against the boarding school experience. She missed the freedom of her country life and found the academic aspect of senior schooling challenging. In response, she joined in the actions of the unsettled students, even though she came from a secure country family background. Sister Marie Griffin (1977-1982) oversaw a year eleven dormitory with a student who did many destructive acts to be sent home, such as destroying furniture, and kicking out the screens on the dormitory windows and throwing empty cans on the school library roof when it was occupied. Marie Griffin concluded, ‘It was best that a student as unsettled as that went home. The girl’s mother had been sick and died and she was sent to boarding school for someone to look after her. She needed to be with her brothers and sisters. She was sent to boarding school for all the wrong reasons’.  

This complex issue of the need for boarding schools to provide adequate care of students with special learning needs or with disturbed family backgrounds was not addressed until 1985, when the Rockhampton Catholic Diocese and the Sisters of Mercy commissioned a report from Patricia Mitchell, then President of the Isolated Parents Association of Queensland. The data for the final report was drawn from all boarding schools, both church and independent, such as the two Grammar schools in Rockhampton. One conclusion from this research was that the boarding school generally had continued to operate for too long on the original model of boarding schools, in terms of physical structures that were not conducive to accommodating children with special needs.  

The recommendation was that there was a need for wider community involvement to provide support services to assist the boarding schools that accepted children with special circumstances from remote regions, especially when these students could not remain in the family home. By the late 1980s, the Presentation Sisters had begun the first stages of a separate lay administration of the boarding house of

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42 Griffin, "Interview."
43 Mitchell, "Educational Needs of Isolated Secondary School Students with the Rockhampton Diocese."
44 Ibid. Appendix B, 3.
St Ursula’s, but it would not be until the 1990s that staff members were employed on the basis of experience and training in conducting boarding schools.\(^\text{45}\)

**Dealing with homesickness**

Shirley Fisher and Leona Elder describe homesickness as a term for the distress reaction that afflicts many of those who leave home to reside in educational and vocational institutions.\(^\text{46}\) Jacqueline Downs examined boarding school students’ perceptions of themselves and their social contexts of home and school. She looked at personal adjustments, in particular, as a result of the boarding school experience.\(^\text{47}\) Downs concluded that homesickness is a normal adaptive developmental process of adapting to new surroundings, which, if protracted, can impede positive identification with the school setting and adjustment.\(^\text{48}\) In Downs’ study, 90% of new boarders had the highest incidence of homesickness, but it remained problematic for just 20%.\(^\text{49}\) The following narratives of St Ursula’s boarders include their experiences of homesickness as one aspect of boarding school life. It adds a dimension, not previously examined, of the personal stories of school and boarding life of how the students gained control over novel aspects of the environment and established personal meaning that helped reduce the incidences of homesickness.

I have not been able to locate any documentary evidence of orientation procedures to welcome and to help new students settle into boarding school, although, in the first years of opening, the small number of boarders would not have required as much formal welcoming. Nor, it seems, were there any farewell rituals for girls who had lived together, some for up to ten years. However, when in the early 1980s, boarding students came in much larger numbers, the consequences for the absence of orientation procedures caused misunderstandings and unpleasant

\(^{45}\) Ramsay, "Interview."
\(^{46}\) Fisher and Elder, "Homesickness in a School in the Australian Bush." 15.
\(^{47}\) Downs, "Coping with Change: Adolescents’ Experience of the Transition to Secondary and Boarding School."
\(^{48}\) Ibid. v.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
beginnings to boarding school life. As Kathleen Noonan, who began boarding school in year eleven, in 1981, recollects:

The first night the boarding sister told Tania Corsaro and me, “You are two of the boldest girls I have ever met in this school.” We are thinking “well what have we done?” We did not realise the lights were going to go out and then you had to shut up and go to bed. It was the first night and Tania Corsaro said “but sister you have only just met us”. Then I am thinking we need to have to work out a strategy on how not to antagonise. On the first night there seemed to be too much panicking.50

St Ursula’s past students referred to the experience of separation from family and familiar surroundings as ‘horrible homesickness’. Patricia Nielsen (1938-1944) from Carmilla in north Queensland was ten years of age and recollects how she felt every time she left home: ‘I felt dreadful going to boarding school. Every time I waved out the train window I was thinking will I ever see them again?’51 Theresa Clarke (1966-1970) lived nearby in Rockhampton, but due to family illness went to boarding school in Yeppoon.

I remember always waiting on the stairs for mum and dad to arrive. They were always late. I was eleven years old and so homesick that I developed stomach problems and lost my voice and would not talk. I just needed counselling. I started to speak again after a stern chat from a teacher.52

The pain of leaving family and surroundings for boarding school life described as ‘homesickness’ was, for some girls, more akin to ‘culture shock’.53 For some children, the experience was too overwhelming and they returned home - some by running away. Madonna and Monica Lasker (1975) were daughters of business people from Longreach.54 Madonna completed her schooling at St Ursula’s until

50 Noonan, ”Interview.”
51 Latimer, ”Interview.”
52 Clarke, ”Interview.”
54 Lasker, ”Interview.”
junior level, but Monica was overwhelmed by homesickness and reported being disoriented by the size of the school and experiencing the complexity of the secondary school-day routine for the first time. She and Ruth, a daughter of a doctor from Rockhampton, ran away from St Ursula’s:

We got it in our heads to run away. Ruth said, "You can come up to Rockhampton (Ruth’s home) and stay with us". After lights out we went out with fruit and Christmas cake and walked along the beach. We slept in the sand dunes. In the morning we went to the railway tracks and walked to Cawarral and someone saw us. They offered food and contacted the school. We had blisters. Sister Marie Therese was kind and talked to us and we phoned mum and I went back to Longreach.

Monica subsequently returned to school in her hometown and completed secondary school to year ten as a day student at Our Lady’s College Longreach, and Ruth was sent to boarding school in Brisbane. Veronica Pedwell, a long-term lay staff member and deputy principal (1978–2002), did not detect that homesickness affected a boarder’s application to learning or any ongoing negative effects in the schoolroom, even though Monica Lasker’s experience would suggest otherwise. Pedwell reported that boarders achieved a range of results comparable to the day students. Her observation is in line with Papworth’s later study on boarder versus day student academic performance.55

The day students were aware of the boarders’ feelings about boarding life. They formed friendships, and both boarders and day students were invited to each other’s homes on holidays. Kris Holm was a day student and noted,

In year eight the boarders resented us day pupils being able to go home every day. That changed over the years and they got to like us. The boarders hated being away from home and the rigidity of their boarding life. After

55 Pedwell, "Interview."; Papworth, "Attending Boarding School: A Longitudinal Study of Its Role in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes."
school they had to wear sports uniforms; I liked the uniform and I swapped on free dress day.56

One factor that lessened the impact of separation after 1940 was that some girls had family or knew boys from their hometown, boarding at nearby St Brendan’s Yeppoon. Also, Yeppoon was a holiday destination or retirement option for country people and many students reported a relative resident in the town. Barbara Searle completed her lower secondary schooling at Longreach and enrolled at St Ursula’s for years eleven and twelve in the mid-1970s. At St Ursula’s, she did not experience the more relaxed environment and the day-to-day exchanges with the Yeppoon sisters which was part of the culture she was used to in the small secondary school conducted by the Presentation Sisters in Longreach:

I did not feel at home in the St Ursula’s environment and I did not know how to deal with homesickness. I felt I did not fit as I tried to break into friendships already established by students since year eight and these girls looked so accomplished. The nuns tried to help me settle in but I hated the place. I had lost my small-town security and could not deal with separation from family. I look back and feel the two years of school were wasted if only someone had provided some counselling I think I would have survived.57

Barbara’s experience was not an isolated example of difficulties in boarding school life. The pastoral guidance and one-on-one support time that both Monica and Barbara required to adjust to life away from home were not built into the staff timetable. Each teaching sister’s day was taken up as both teacher and supervisor of large groups in after-school hours and in the dormitory. This is most likely how the culture of boarders caring for each other regardless of background became so important in boarding-school life. Besides the sisters not having enough time for individual attention for boarders, there was built into the religious training of the sisters a culture of maintaining impersonal contact with others and distancing themselves to prevent personal relationships forming.

56 Holm, “Interview.”
57 Barbara (Lunney) Searle, ibid., 16 February 2015, Audio.
Sister Kath Tynan (1974-1979) recalls that, as a member of staff at St Rita’s College Clayfield, she was directly warned not to ‘get too close’ to the students. She noted, however, that the same direction was not given on her arrival at St Ursula’s, and she tried to help the students feel comfortable in boarding school. Another contributing factor to the prolonged feelings of homesickness was that boarders lost personal independence of movement and opportunities to make new friendships or to just be alone. Lambert and Millham reported that many problems in boarding school life came from continuously having to live in public life. St Ursula’s boarders also resented the lack of privacy and the experience of never being alone. Loretta McKeering would hide between the school library shelves and read alone until it was closing time. The class lessons, sleeping, eating and leisure were mostly spent in the company of other people.

**Home versus boarding life (loss of independence)**

The contrast of home surroundings with the more confined space of the convent boarding school precinct and the daily school and boarding routine was a significant emotional challenge for some children. There was a loss of independence and the freedom to move around the streets of a small town and to ride a horse into the bush. Until the 1960s, St Ursula’s had retained a semblance of a bush setting and the first buildings were surrounded by trees, water tanks, vegetable gardens and poultry runs.

Many girls came from a rural property where they were an essential contributor to the daily operations. Often, they were an important support to a mother and family members coping on a remote property with a father away with labouring work or shearing. Other students regarded boarding school as a welcome relief from the farm duties. Jane Jordison (1960-1967) came to boarding school from a dairy farm. She recalls, ‘At home in Goovigen at primary school I had to go to the cow yard

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58 Tynan, "Interview."
59 McKeering, "Interview."
60 Lambert and Millham, *The Hothouse Society: An Exploration of Boarding-School Life through the Boys’ and Girls’ Own Writings*. 308.
61 McKeering, "Interview."
62 Conway, "Interview."
every afternoon after school. I did not have to do that when I was away at boarding school’.63 There were circumstances where boarding school gave a country child the opportunity of more interaction with peers than they would have experienced in their home life. Carmel Denis (1955-1965) was an only child from a small country town and thought it was a great place to have the company of other children with sport and activities.64

The personal challenges to adjust from bush life to boarding school for pupils of St Ursula’s were similar, whether in 1944 or 1996. In February, 1944, a child reports in the children’s section of *The Longreach Leader* that she was about to go to St Ursula’s from a property called Tyrone, near Aramac, in central western Queensland, nearly 700 kilometres west of Yeppoon. She describes the experience of her bush home that had no resemblance to the order and regimentation of dormitory life. Using the pen name Golden Lily, she wrote,

This will be my last letter to you for a while as I am going to school to St Ursula’s. Dad is coming home on Saturday. We killed a pig on Thursday afternoon….We went to town last Tuesday and took the baby to the clinic. ‘Tyrone lad’ (her brother) took some fox scalps and pig snouts and tails in for the bounty. We have four pigs in the sty.65

Just over fifty years later, Loretta McKeering (1996-2000) came to St Ursula’s from a property in the same region of Aramac. She noted:

I considered myself emotionally and socially stunted when I arrived at St Ursula’s for grade eight. All my primary schooling had been by distance education and I much preferred to be lonely in wide open spaces with animals, and that homesickness was dealt with by writing in a journal and seeking security under the big eucalyptus tree in the school grounds. The greatest culture shock for me was meal time at St Ursula’s when a hot meal

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63 Jordison, "Interview."
64 Carmel (Aitken) Dennis, ibid., 30 June Written response.
was served in the middle of the day and dinner at night began at five-thirty pm. At home on the property in Aramac the family routine for me was that mum would come in from work out on the property and begin cooking tea at eight pm.66

Past students looking back could recall that, as children, they were aware that parents valued education and were making great sacrifices emotionally with separation from each other, and financially to pay school fees. Jane Jordison described how ‘Even when my father died suddenly while I was at boarding school and the farm needed more hands to manage, my mother would not allow me to come home until schooling was completed despite strong objection from my older brother’.67 Ann Rhodes (1957-1960) remembered her family’s support for secondary education. ‘Our family home was very poor. I think my family went without food sometimes to have us educated. My father did not care what subjects I studied as long as I was schooled to the highest level’.68 Sandra Clements (1975-76) never felt comfortable being away at boarding school from her small country town. It was only afterwards that she accepted being sent to boarding school, when she was assured of work when she had completed year twelve at St Ursula’s:

In the final days in boarding school my mother was approached by an accountant in the town and I was assured of a position in his firm before I stepped off the train. He knew my family in the town and that I had been educated to senior level at boarding school.69

Kay Condon boarded for eleven years (1950-1960). In the interview she reflected on the experiences of her post-school life to reinterpret the meaning of the boarding school experience. Her recollection gives a longitudinal perspective of what it was like to have spent much of childhood in boarding school away from parents and siblings. Kay and many other students in boarding school for up to eleven years were called upon to redefine their roles as children away from the intimacy of family

66 McKeering, "Interview."
67 Jordison, "Interview."
68 Rhodes, "Interview."
69 Clements, "Interview."
life and without any known formal preparation. Kay was supported by a grandmother, who lived in Yeppoon near the school. She had two brothers at St Brendan’s and two sisters who followed her to St Ursula’s after she had left. Kay compared her boarding school life of long years of separation as a child with her adult life overseas, once again removed from parents and familiar surroundings. Throughout the interview, she argued that she had established independence in both settings, noting the similarity in that she strove to take the positives out of the experiences of what were unusually long periods of separation from family:

My boarding school life seems now like a big adventure. They were wonderful days, wonderful times, I always had fun. I was not ever thinking that there was any other way to live. I never felt I wanted to get out of boarding at St Ursula’s. There were times when I wished I could be at home but I never felt I hated being away at boarding school. It was just the way of life. I had done it for so long and I was young and did not know any better. I credit those years with helping me to adjust to life after school away from Australia from 1967 in Texas, USA. I did not go home to Australia from America for sixteen years. There was no skype and it was very difficult to talk to my parents without crying. Boarding school did prepare me for isolation but nothing does. The reality is we got on with life and made the most of where we were and what we were doing and did not dwell on it, or it would have collapsed. You grow where you are planted.70

Kay Condon’s parents owned the Boulia hotel in the late 1950s and 1960s.71 The children travelled the 1227 kilometres from Rockhampton alone, a trip that took three days to travel one way. The last leg of their journey was sometimes through the night on the back of a mail truck from Winton. No one checked to see if they were still in the back of the truck during the journey. Toni was the youngest Condon girl to board at St Ursula’s (1965-1970). Her older sisters and brothers had boarded before her, but this did not make the experience any easier for her. Rather, it seemed especially trying as she was expected to be able to follow positively into

70 Condon, "Interview."
71 Ibid.
boarding school just as her older siblings seemed to have done. By the time of Toni’s interview, almost forty years after school, she had resolved the impact of unpleasant experiences by balancing them with a recollection of the pleasant aspects:

The happiest memories of school were with friends and the other girls. The good times were supporting each other and just being in each other's company. As a ten-year-old the separation from home was a shock. I tried to remain stoic so as not to disappoint my family. I was a small child and Sister Benedict always looked out for me while I was there. I had many conversations on the nun's stairs with her. Sister Bernadette was a warm friendly caring woman who laughed with us, humoured us and demonstrated humanity of a Presentation Sister which had a positive effect personally.72

Toni had experienced unhappy circumstances when there was a change of superior in 1968, and she revealed how she had dealt with this negative experience. Her poem describes her journey to live with the memory of the difficult times in boarding school, and how she had dealt later with the memory of her negative experiences of physical and emotional abuse as a boarder by the superior. Toni spent ten years in boarding school, and her recollection of the experiences of cruel treatment may have been felt even more because her older sister Kay had achieved highly in sport and music and was well-liked by the very superior who treated Toni harshly. Toni’s poem composed thirty years after boarding school, reveals that she had taken many years to overcome the effects of the negative experiences. She wrote:

And as I tread the hallowed halls of your sisterly keepers
I marvel that I am walking there as
These quarters were sacrosanct.
We would stand trembling beside the chapel if we were called – waiting-
For the sound of feet
But now I walk freely through your rooms fearing nothing –
Just marvelling!

72 Condon.
Your sisters congregate elderly and mellowed now,  
In the room that recalls past examiners of Speech,  
And we talk as friends,  
I feel old Recrimination, worn thin over the years,  
Wash away and I am glad.  

The underground student culture (secret societies and codes) - achieving autonomy

The association of secret societies with boarding school culture features in children’s literature and prominently in a feature movie based on Tom Schulman’s ‘Dead Poet’s Society’, set in Welton Academy in Vermont, America, an exclusive boy’s boarding school. Enid Blyton’s ‘Malory Towers’ is a series of six books published in 1946, featuring student, Darrell Rivers, who attends Malory Towers, a school based on the Beneden boarding school for girls on the Cornish coast of southern England. Some boarders at St Ursula’s, like Darrell Rivers, challenged the strict daily routine by creating an imaginative existence through secret societies and secret codes of communication. The Enid Blyton books were published around the same years that St Ursula’s past students such as Pauline Smith (1942-45) reported her involvement in secret societies in the boarding school. Secret societies founded in later years by boarder, Loretta McKeering (1998-2002) were termed ‘clubs’ and in both instances the secret societies had an informal function in the school in that they did not disrupt the organisation of school and boarding life.

William Graebner argues that secret societies by their very nature are exclusionary; membership is by invitation only, and not everyone is invited. Graebner examined the American high schools’ rich history of “secret societies” as distinct from the larger history of adult secret societies. In the Progressive Era of early 20th-century America, high school secret societies were prohibited by law in many states as disruptive influences. They were regarded as commonplace and yet irritatingly

73 Ibid. Personal reflection included with kind permission of the author.  
unreachable, sheltered by location and secrecy from the influence of teachers and adults and thus from the hegemony of the dominant culture.75 Graebner identifies the phenomenon of secret societies within Erik Erickson’s theory of childhood and adolescent development as a period of testing in which youth engage, before giving themselves to the social order. He argues that Erikson attempts to explain the strong tendency of adolescents to form cliques; to stereotype themselves and others along lines of ethnicity, race and appearance, and to test the capacity of peers for “fidelity”, and Graebner points out that these behaviours are common in secret societies.76

The student recollections revealed that, beneath the formal structure and pattern of St Ursula’s boarding school existence, there was an inner world constructed and ruled by the children themselves. Lambert and Millham argue that groups living in institutions create little societies of their own within the wider society of which they are all members. Every child is involved in some way in this inner world and all schools have one. It can be neither lurid nor damaging to the official world.77 In St Ursula’s, students formed small friendship groups where they found support and acceptance. They established group bonding that included activities outside of the rigid daily routine. Despite the strictness, students sometimes established autonomy through various unscheduled activities. Crawford et al. argue that the inside/outside dichotomy is a recurring pattern in a tapestry of memories. This is where ‘inside’ represents a place of warmth and security of keeping the rules and conforming, and ‘outside’ is a place to feel free and to experience the exhilaration of a challenge.78

A common element in the two St Ursula’s boarder’s recollections of their boarding school life and their membership of a secret society was that members were drawn together for bonding and support because, at the time, they were not part of an inner circle of ‘teacher’s pets’ or they were victims of bullying.79 Pauline Smith recalled the secret societies helped the members to deal with the favoured treatment of other

75 Ibid. 412, 415.
77 Lambert and Millham, The Hothouse Society: An Exploration of Boarding-School Life through the Boys’ and Girls’ Own Writings. 242.
78 Crawford et al., Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory. 186-188.
79 Smith, "Interview."; McKeering, "Interview."
students that she termed ‘teacher’s pets’. The practice of forming special friendships at St Ursula’s are reported in the interviews from past students of the 1940s through to the late 1990s.

In 1945, Pauline Smith and Norma Wills from Alpha had a secret society at St Ursula’s. ‘We held secret society meetings and spent most of the time laughing so much at our plans. The cook Mrs Kavanagh took us out some Sundays. Some of the students were teacher’s pets but we did not mind and I enjoyed all five years there’.\(^80\) In 1996, Loretta McKeering, in her first years at St Ursula’s, experienced bullying from some boarders and found group support when she and her friends formed a society called The Tree Leaves Club. The members of the club nominated a secretary to handle mail and they organised activities that helped support one another.\(^81\)

Theresa Aiello Gerber argues that children and adolescents often make up languages of their own and some belong to secret societies.\(^82\) Her study traced how the childhood experiences of famous literary artists, involving secret language within exclusive childhood friends, prefigured the imaginary settings and characters of their adult works. She argues that, in the case of the Bronte sisters and J.R.R Tolkien, the secret society and secret language were a force allying the children together against the incomprehensible folly and cruelty of the adult world. St Ursula’s boarder, Sandra Clements recalled that there was a secret code of communication amongst some senior boarders in the mid-1970s as a form of group identity. The small group had bonded through their shared activities to escape the restrictions of boarding school life. The terms of identification were known to the sister in charge of the senior dormitory, but her response was a suggestion that the terms of address between members of the society did not seem very ladylike and there was no further censure or investigation.\(^83\)

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\(^{80}\) Smith, "Interview."

\(^{81}\) McKeering, "Interview."


\(^{83}\) Clements, "Interview."
The secret societies and secret codes of communication did not appear to involve vindictive activities against those in authority, and the focus seemed more to be on reinforcing a sense of independence and of bonding and friendship amongst the students. The reports of strong lifelong friendships that were forged at school through the group bonding activities like secret societies were cherished by some boarders because they could never have experienced this group identity with several girls of similar age in small home town communities. Jane Jordison boarded from year two until junior. She recalled that,

There was no formal farewell on leaving year ten. We just said goodbye and hurried to catch trains but I made good friendships and that's what I keep in my memories. I still see two school friends every year and I ran the past pupils’ association for a few years. It’s a spin off from boarding school because they became your family in a way.

**Group bonding through shared experiences**

St Ursula’s offered affordable secondary school education and boarding and attracted a representation from various social and ethnic backgrounds. Past students commented on this climate of acceptance and egalitarianism, but they could not determine how it was generated. The absence of discrimination amongst the boarders was not necessarily generated from their family and country town environment. What was the common ground that allowed the children of the shearer and drover to live and work so well with the children of the doctor and hotel owner? The following collection of memoirs indicates that it was the shared living experience, and group bonding activities that provided emotional support and produced positive outcomes.

Sue Thomson (1968-1973) began boarding school in 1968, after her mother died. ‘I did not worry about being a boarder because Dad was worried for me. I had a safe place and had a daily routine I could rely on. I was happy to leave boarding and live

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84 Oram, "Interview."
85 Jordison, "Interview."
with my own family as a day student. My father remarried in 1969 but my boarding school classmates have been like cousins in an extended family and we have been ready to support each other ever since’. 86

Roycelyn Pearson (1974-1975) started boarding at St Ursula’s from year eleven, and wondered if she would be isolated by students who had boarded from year eight:

My first morning I woke up it was beautiful Shelley. She said “Hello Roycelyn, my father knew your father and he told me I have to keep an eye out for you”. Shelley’s dad and her brother had been tragically killed in the Whiskey-go-go bombing just before I got there; Shelley has been an important person in my life since. It was great to be able to take boarders home for long weekends especially ones too far away. I also made friends with girls who had difficulty fitting into boarding school life.87

Sandra Stapleton came from Longreach (1974-1976) and regarded the train trip home as the journey to and from freedom but also commented on the acceptance of the cultural diversity amongst the boarders.88 ‘The best parts of boarding school were the friends and the opportunity to mix with people from different cultures. The PNG girls were treated like everyone else. Skin colour mattered in my hometown of Longreach but not in Yeppoon’.89 Kathleen Noonan (1981-1982) lived on a sugar farm in North Queensland and commented on students in the boarding school who may not have been able to form friendships easily:

I brought an Indigenous student home for the holidays from Neerkol orphanage. She was boarding at St Ursula’s but would have had to return to the orphanage for the holidays. I did not see evidence of racial discrimination at school. Eyebrows were raised by my dad though when I brought her home for holidays. We were just girls all away from home. We stuck together. At

86 Sue (Shaw) Thomson, ibid., 4 February 2015, Word Attachment.
87 Pearson, "Interview."
88 Clements, "Interview."
89 Ibid.
the same it was hard to help some kids to find a space to survive who were pretty wild.\textsuperscript{90}

Joanne Chandler (1975-1976) submitted a written response for this project and itemised a series of significant memories of her experience of boarding school: ‘I made lifelong friendships; I was devastated at boarding students’ loss of a father or brothers in mining blasts; boarding school gave me confidence and independence; I felt badly away from home; It was strict but there was no corporal punishment; I felt safe in a family atmosphere’.\textsuperscript{91}

In Joanne Adam’s (1987-1991) interview, it became clear to me that there had been a cultural shift in the approach to conducting girls’ boarding schools by the Presentation Sisters. Joanne included terms such as ‘nurturing’ and ‘trust’ that had not been included in the recollections of boarding school life by past students before the 1980s. She stated, ‘I found St Ursula’s a very nurturing place. I met great girls; a trust was established as we got older. As seniors the very studious girls would stay up much of the night then get up at five am and run up the hill or to the beach for a swim. The non-sporty girls did sewing in the Home Economics room over the weekend’.\textsuperscript{92} Joanne Adam’s recollection of boarding school life in the late 1980s demonstrates the change in regulations from the rigidity of boarding school rule just ten years earlier. The Presentation Sisters had made one of the most significant adaptations since the beginnings of St Ursula’s in 1917 by incorporating independence and personal responsibility training into the boarding school experience.

\textbf{Friendships and sexuality}`

Boarders’ isolation was not limited to the experience of being separated from close family members at home. Most boarding schools are single-sex communities, and isolation from the opposite sex can provide many children with profound problems more keenly felt by older students. Girls and boys often lose their friends, and are

\textsuperscript{90} Noonan, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{91} Joanne (Walker) Chandler, ibid., 30 June Written response.
\textsuperscript{92} Adams, "Interview."
isolated from the recipient of their confidence and the sympathiser with their problems. At the same time, in single-sex boarding schools, girls could establish life-long and close friendships that became deep and enduring throughout their adolescent and adult lives.

For the boarders, there were restrictive measures imposed by the sisters to prevent close friendships forming with boys or girls. There was the non-negotiable rule, until the 1970s, at St Ursula’s of not leaving the premises unless accompanied by a sister. Besides the acknowledged commitment to protect the safety of the girls, individual superior/principals put in place restrictive measures to prevent any occasion for sexual experimentation both inside and outside the boarding school. The restrictive nature of the actions of boarding staff towards the girls in matters of sexuality reflected much of the strict recommendations in the Presentation Sisters’ Rule that guided them as women religious to avoid occasions of temptation.

The boarders were closely supervised on the few organised invitations to events such as dances and athletic carnivals at St Brendan’s boys’ college nearby. At times, the supervision bordered on comedy with the extreme behaviour of the superior once standing on a chair in the middle of the dance floor to locate inappropriate physical contact. In the 1960s, the same superior and boarding staff of sisters and brothers from St Brendan’s agreed to preselect the partner for each girl. Despite the restrictive supervision in school time, there were reports from both staff and students of two student pregnancies from relationships in the boarders’ hometowns. Sister Loyola (1968-1973) provided for a pregnant student to complete her studies and arranged for her to sit for her exams off the boarding school campus. Donna Graham (1978-1982) has remained friends with one girl who was pregnant in her final year at St Ursula’s. ‘I don’t know if the nuns knew but she completed year twelve and did exams. She went on to become a social worker and

95 Condon, "Interview."
96 McGrath, "Interview."; Noonan, "Interview."
kept her son. She had a friendship with a much older boy and stayed with him for many years'.

The censorship of mail was another means to ensure the moral reputation of the students and college was protected. This was one aspect of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in a boarding school where the superior exercised total power over the lives of both student and the members of her religious community. The practice was that all incoming and outgoing mail, including to and from parents, was read and censored by the superior. Censorship of boarders’ mail was a practice that continued in principle until the 1980s, but had not been enforced from the mid-1970s. With the sharp increase in boarding school numbers, year-level boarding supervisors were given the task of censoring mail, but they simply let the practice die out and eventually refused to open student mail.

This censorship practice could be viewed as an attempt to limit the prospect of public criticism of the boarding school affairs in the student mail. The students reported that its purpose was to prevent interaction between the girls and boys. Past pupil, Bonnie Freeman (1936-1942) who was ten years old in her first year of boarding school, realised the superior read letters to and from her parents when Sister Angela Murtagh (1940-1945) declared that she loved reading her father’s letters. In one of her letters, Bonnie wrote that, on a winter walk, they ‘went to West’s slaughter yard’. Her letter was corrected so that it read ‘we had a lovely time in West’s paddock’.

The opening of boarder’s incoming and outgoing mail was a violation of privacy, but there was a precedent set in pre-existing practices in the religious life of a Presentation sister. The practice of opening student mail may have emerged from the fact that sisters in the early years of their religious training had their mail censored also. One superior would read a letter to a religious sister in her presence and hand it on page by page. The 1947, Constitutions state that ‘Letters to the sisters, as well those sent by them, shall pass through the hands of the Superior,

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97 Graham, "Interview."
98 Freeman, "Interview."
99 Sister Zita Power, interview by Maree Ganley, April, 2015, ACU Brisbane.
who may read them, distribute or retain them according to her conscientious judgment in God...'. This recommendation was left out of the revised Constitutions of 1973. Until then, boarder’s mail was not only read, but censored and corrected by the superior.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the practice of reading boarders’ mail had more serious consequences when superiors acted on the contents of the letters. Letters from boys were intercepted and construed as something more sinister than just communication between boys from the same country town or relatives of brothers. Students were admonished or at times punished because they had received a letter from a boy. On the information from the contents of one of these letters, Jane Jordison (1960-1968) was not allowed to attend her annual St Ursula’s school dance for her year ten class social because a boy from St Brendan’s had written to her.

As day student numbers increased, the boarding school girls and boys from St Brendan’s maintained some control over the practice of censorship and engaged in acts of independence and defiance of this controlling practice. Before one phone was installed in the school in the late 1970s, and the later advent of mobile phones, letter writing was the only means of communication. The boarders found ways to divert their letters to the intended recipient without detection mainly through the willing day student network. At the same time, a St Brendan’s boarder would address his letter to a St Ursula’s boarder, ‘Dear Cathy and Sister’. That treatment of a serious breach of privacy was taken to an extreme when a superior took fifteen minutes in the boarder’s dining room meal to berate the boarding students about to begin their meal about the content of a student’s letter. In the mid-1970s, Sister Veronica Cruice initially never opened mail from parents to students, and eventually she did not open any mail at all recalling that she just did not tell anyone of her

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101 Jordison, "Interview."
102 Kehoe, "Interview."
103 Fleming, "Interview."
decision.¹⁰⁴ In the same years, Sister Bernadette Fleming also just let the practice die out.¹⁰⁵

This section addresses an aspect of boarding school life and sexual experimentation within the boarding school that was raised by past boarders. Lambert and Millhams’ study in *The Hothouse Society* addressed the short-term effects of issues of homosexual practices in single-sex institutions. They argue that two powerful forces shape the incidence and kind of homosexuality in schools: the official policy towards it, and that of the children’s own sexuality – this latter being immeasurably the more important.¹⁰⁶ Past student, Patricia Cuthbert, who became a Presentation Sister, remembered that an Irish sister of the 1950s, carried over into her dormitory supervision the strict observances of the Rule for women religious to prevent them from forming particular friendships and by being on their guard against contracting familiarity with any person.¹⁰⁷

As a boarder, Patricia was required to move bed places each term to prevent special friendships forming with the student in the neighbouring bed.¹⁰⁸ Doctor Elizabeth Esmond (1963-1967) attended St Ursula’s as a boarder from Emerald, and graduated in medicine at the University of Queensland. She subsequently specialised in psychiatry. Liz noted that her reflections on life as a student at St Ursula’s in the 1960s would be influenced by her professional background in psychiatry.

In my experience as a boarder, girls did not form close one to one relationships with each other. In my own personal search for emotional support I was most likely fairly (sexually) naïve like the other girls of my era. The strong guidelines that were put in place created a blinkered effect for the boarders and prevented experimentation because we were not game. As an

¹⁰⁴ Cruice, "Interview."
¹⁰⁵ Fleming, "Interview."
¹⁰⁷ Presentation, "Constitutions of the Sisters of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady (Australia)." 20.
¹⁰⁸ Cuthbert, "Interview."
adult I have learned how to live in all circumstances in public and shared places where I was able to create my own personal space. This was a skill I learned in boarding school with little or no personal space. The best example was the swimming box at Yeppoon beach where we had to change into swimmers underneath our dress. People think of boarding school as a place where all kinds of shenanigans are going on, but we were well behaved.\textsuperscript{109}

She attributes this general good behaviour to the fact that, as boarders, ‘every activity of our daily lives was highly structured and supervised so girls remained well behaved. Girl to girl relationships were quite exceptional. Girls were not forming little relationship bonds with each other. There was not lesbian acting out of any kind’.\textsuperscript{110}

The censorship of mail and restricted movement out of the boarding school were aimed at preventing a threat to the boarder’s morality through establishing relationships with boys. However, for the girls, there was also the presence of young priests who were assistant pastors to the Yeppoon parish and chaplains to St Ursula’s. As well as administering the sacraments, the priests shared recreation time with the girls. The girls regarded the young priests as a source of sexual awakening for them. Elizabeth Esmond (1964-1967) reflected on her awareness of the young priests: ‘Father Dan burned his feet when he went out fishing. He could barely walk. He was young. He did cause a bit of a flutter. We all knew he was unavailable but still he was a cute young man’.\textsuperscript{111}

I interviewed the same Father Dan Moore who emphasized that ‘the girls were allowed to visit for confession in groups only, and they were closely supervised at all times’.\textsuperscript{112} A boarder from the 1970s also reflected on her attraction to the young priests and how, during Mass, the boarders would line up for Holy Communion twice when a young priest was the celebrant.\textsuperscript{113} There were, however, factors that mitigated against any personal exchanges between the boarders and the priests.

\textsuperscript{109} Esmond, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Father Daniel Moore, ibid., 3 February Telephone.
\textsuperscript{113} Chandler, "Interview."
One was the restrictive and closely supervised access to the students for any members of the public, religious or lay. The fear of the authority of the mother superior was acknowledged by bishops, priests and the public alike.  

Dr Grove Johnson who was parish priest of Yeppoon from 1964-1977 reflected on the way the students were protected in the school community. ‘The assistant priests and I adopted a friendly relationship with the sisters and the students but I don’t think the sisters’ own families were looked after as well as the sisters looked after the boarders’. The incident in which one priest did establish a relationship with a year ten boarder in the late 1940s caused great stress amongst some students and staff alike and is dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

**Mental health issues in a boarding school environment**

From the interviews, there were instances of student and staff behaviour that were not well understood at the time and would be perceived in today’s terms as undiagnosed instances of mental illness. The mentally ill were misunderstood and treated cruelly, beginning in the Middle Ages and up until the mid-20th century. There were no guidance counsellors, particularly in Queensland educational institutions, until the 1980s. Two interviews, one from a student who was at the school in the 1960s, and one from a student from the late 1980s, revealed two known instances of student behaviour in St Ursula’s boarding school that were handled differently by both staff and students in different decades. Instances of disturbed behaviour in a close dormitory and boarding school setting meant that several girls were caught up in the instances of a student's out of the ordinary behaviour. In the first instance, in the 1960s, there was generally a lack of understanding of what ‘cutting words into our arms’ really meant beyond being an unusual thing to do. Elizabeth Esmond reported,
There was even a sense of admiration among students that anyone could tolerate the pain of such an action. We did not want to do it ourselves nor did we as students condemn the student for her actions. Students in the dormitory observed the occurrence but there appears to have been no teacher awareness or intervention. We did not talk about it amongst ourselves or discuss the issue with parents or report to the sisters.\textsuperscript{118}

I interviewed a teacher from these years for comment and she could not recall ever being aware of disturbed behaviour, only that one student displayed ‘odd behaviour’. She was completely unaware of an instance of self-harming.\textsuperscript{119} In 1990, a year eleven boarder attempted self-harm in the dormitory but the situation was handled differently. Year eleven boarder, Jo Anne Adams, reported that she heard unusual activity in the next cubicle and that a girl in year eleven attempted to cut her wrists. ‘I followed her when she went to a classroom to self-harm and alerted another student who called the sister in charge of the boarding school. Sister Suzanne Gentle immediately called for professional help for the student, and those of us who witnessed the scene were taken to Rockhampton for the day for counselling’.\textsuperscript{120} Suzanne Gentle’s response in the latter part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, to a critical situation involving a student in her care, differed from the attitude of earlier years by school staff. This reflected society’s changed attitude to recognise the student’s behaviour as a health issue. Also, the sisters had established a different boarding school culture, where there was openness to accept help outside of the previously enclosed convent community.

\textbf{Discipline and punishment}

The memories of discipline and punishment occupied a considerable part of interviews about boarding school life from two specific time periods: the late 1940s; and the late 1960s to early 1970s. It was easy to transgress rules and regulations in boarding school life because there were so many rules regulating the ordered existence. These regulations were not modified until the early 1980s. By then,

\textsuperscript{118} Esmond, ”Interview.”
\textsuperscript{119} MacGinley, ”Interview.”
\textsuperscript{120} Adams, ”Interview.”
educators drew on the research in new sciences in child growth and development and psychology and were trained to apply more informed approaches to behaviour management in the classroom.\footnote{Jean Piaget, \textit{The Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child}, trans. Derek Coltman (Switzerland: Penguin Books, 1969).}

In the latter part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, as a result of the scholarship on approaches to establish positive growth and development of girls in the learning environment, teachers began to search for opportunities for more group work and to promote trusting relationships between girls and teachers.\footnote{Carol Gilligan, \textit{In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982).} St Ursula’s boarders in the mid-1980s reported that they were being required to take personal responsibility for their actions in circumstances unheard of in the past, such as leaving the school grounds unaccompanied. This one practice contrasted with the evidence provided in the interviews from earlier decades about the discipline imposed and subsequent punishment for breaches of rules.

Some boarders from the late 1940s lived at St Ursula’s for up to eleven years, which included their primary schooling. Their recollections of school discipline and punishment occurred when some primary school staff applied corporal punishment in their extra role as supervisors of high school students in the dormitories. References to corporal punishment at St Ursula’s of the late 1940s coincided with the years when there were numbers of very young Irish sisters appointed to teach in the primary school and to supervise in the junior high school dormitory.\footnote{O’Donoghue and Harford, \textit{Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967}, 229.} The Irish-founded Presentation Institute recruited young Irish girls, some coming straight after completion of the Australian equivalent of junior level in the secondary school in Ireland.\footnote{Sister Agatha Freeman, “Short Personal Histories,” (Presentation Congregation Clayfield: Presentation Congregation of Queensland, 1987). 81.} They were escorted to Australia, specifically to join the sisters in their teaching missions in Australia. They were given no choice about work assignment and some young women ended up as teachers, even though they may have had no
affinity for young children. They received minimal training and were placed with as many as sixty to seventy students in each classroom.

Yvonne McKenna, in *Made Holy: Irish women religious at home and abroad*, argues that, besides the obvious biographies of individual founders, we know very little about women religious in Ireland. This includes their personal lives and experiences, particularly those who lived abroad and never returned to Ireland. The Irish women religious who came to Australia to join the Presentation Sisters came from the pre-Vatican II era when the type of Catholicism that existed in Ireland was institutional, authoritative and ritualistic.\(^{125}\) The Irish sisters that McKenna interviewed, recalled that the most influential figure amongst the nuns in their growing up in Ireland was the missionary nun. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of an energetic, youthful and unfamiliar woman disrupting the day’s classes to tell pupils about her life in an exotic land and to engender in the young girls the sense of adventure.\(^{126}\)

This direct canvassing approach from the Queensland Presentation Sisters to girls in Ireland occurred in between 1931-32, when Queensland Presentation Sister, Patrick Madden, accompanied by a young Australian Sister, Rita Martin, visited schools conducted by the Presentation Sisters in Ireland. Six Irish girls volunteered to come to Queensland and enter the order.\(^{127}\) McKenna argues that the notion of ‘sacrifice’ was a valued quality in women, both in Irish society and in Catholic ideology. The reality of the permanence of separation is illustrated by the recollection of an Irish girl who volunteered for the missions with the Presentation Sisters in Western Australia. On arrival, her Irish passport was taken and burned in front of her in the convent fireplace.\(^{128}\)

In St Ursula’s primary school, half of the students would have been boys, with some enrolling not yet schooled for the classroom. These were a mix of factors that

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\(^{126}\) Ibid. 54-55.

\(^{127}\) MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*. 182.

\(^{128}\) Esther Jordan (Leigh), interview by Maree Ganley, December, 2015, Telephone interview, ACU Brisbane.
doubtless made for stressed teachers. Father Danny Moore was an Irishman and parish priest of Yeppoon in the 1960s. From his experience in Ireland, corporal punishment was the accepted form of discipline in Irish schools, and that even as a young adult during his seminary training in Ireland, he was struck over the head by the Irish rector.\footnote{Moore, "Interview."} O’ Donoghue, Harford and De Bare have identified the difference in attitude to discipline and corporal punishment between primary and secondary school teachers in the Irish and in later American school systems.\footnote{O’ Donoghue and Harford, \textit{Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967}. 124; De Bare, \textit{Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools}.} O’ Donoghue and Harford argue that Irish classroom control practices, including the nature and extent of the use of corporal punishment and by whom it was used, are very much under-researched and are deserving of attention.\footnote{O’ Donoghue and Harford, \textit{Secondary Education in Ireland: History Memories and Life Stories, 1922-1967}. 229.}

This section highlights the particular time frame between the mid-1940s to the early 1950s as a period of stress and unhappiness in St Ursula’s. Both staff and students suffered the consequences of some entrenched policies in religious institutes such as the unassailable position of the superior and the secrecy surrounding the affairs of convent life. The superior, Angela Murtagh was charged with the task of integrating into the boarding school a number of very young and inexperienced Irish sisters who had arrived as young girls, as young as sixteen years of age in 1946 to become Presentation Sisters.\footnote{MacGinley, \textit{A Place of Springs}. 214.} I located correspondence between, Bishop Tynan (1946-1960) the superior and an individual Irish member of the community about the unsettled conditions at the school, particularly throughout 1951.\footnote{Rockhampton.} In the correspondence, the bishop notes the difficulties but offers no guidance to resolve the ongoing problems, despite the fact that one of his priests had some involvement. The Irish sisters applied particularly cruel punishment from their primary-school classroom practices into boarding-school life. Imbedded in the Irish sisters’
approach to teaching and boarder supervision at St Ursula’s was something of Campion’s perception of 19th-century Irish convicts’ interpretation of Catholicism.\(^{134}\)

There were basic cultural differences, including confusion caused by the sisters’ Irish idioms. Trish Nielsen (1938-1944) was doing some fancy work sewing in the dormitory on a Sunday afternoon and the Irish dormitory supervisor admonished her that she ‘would pick the stitches of your fancy work with your nose in purgatory’ because she was seen sewing on a Sunday.\(^{135}\) Jim Pyle recalls that an Irish sister would repeatedly beat a student with an admonition, ‘You don’t love your mother or you would spell correctly’.\(^{136}\) It was during the era of the appointment of Irish sisters to St Ursula’s in the primary school and dormitory, that the boarders in night study created a disturbance. This event had repercussions, and was possibly the root cause of the ongoing unrest in the boarding school, until 1951.

The group reaction was a spontaneous occurrence and Trish Nielsen was amongst the students assembled in a classroom during an evening study period. She recalls that,

> Evening study was being conducted by an Irish born sister who collapsed. One student started a hysterical panic and we all joined in and ran screaming from the study room out to the fences of the St Ursula’s property and drew the attention of the neighbours. Boarders were not punished at the time but for some time after a sister would reproach me that I was “one of those in that stampede”.\(^{137}\)

Through this period of growing unrest amongst the boarders, the reputation of St Ursula’s came under threat. Priests travelling throughout the central west appeared to have been aware of and reported publicly the unrest between religious staff and students.\(^{138}\) Repercussions from the evening-study incident may have been the

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\(^{134}\) Campion, *Australian Catholics*. 6-9.

\(^{135}\) Latimer, "Interview."

\(^{136}\) Pyle, "Interview."

\(^{137}\) Latimer, "Interview."

\(^{138}\) Freeman, "Interview."
catalyst for ongoing punishment by the Irish sisters of the boarders, including one boarder, who was perceived to be the perpetrator of the disturbances. The Yeppoon parish priest at the time became involved in attempting to resolve the boarders’ unrest.

The priest’s daily presence in the school was noted as unusual by day and boarding students, as he adopted a protective attitude towards one boarder in particular. She was a fifteen-year-old girl from a remote country town who had been in boarding school from eight years of age. Both students and priest were deceased at the time of this study. However, some conclusions may be drawn from the many interviews I conducted about the cause of the unusual association of the priest with this one student. The parish priest’s involvement caused dissension in the community of sisters and was only resolved in 1951, when Ursula Kennedy transferred most members of the community away from Yeppoon to other convents in the state and appointed a new superior to St Ursula’s.

It has been difficult to ascertain the reason for the priest’s protective attitude towards this one student, but his advice to the student in question, ‘to give them hell’, would suggest that he was aware of questionable treatment by the Irish dormitory sister. He may also have been aware of the student’s difficult background as a young child in her country town. It is challenging as an interviewer not to draw some connection between the report from another interview in which I was informed of the case of sexual assault of this same student at a young age of eight years by a local in her home town. Her parents brought her to boarding school, away from the town because her evidence as an eight-year-old was not admissible in the court case and the offender was exonerated and freed to return to the small town.

The involvement of the parish priest in the unrest in the boarding school and his association with this one boarding student continued throughout her final year at St

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139 Smith, “Interview.”
140 Ibid. Pauline was a sister of the student caught up in the incident with the parish priest.
141 Bishops of Rockhampton.
142 Freeman, “Interview.”; Smith, “Interview.” In the court case of the girl’s sexual assault, her evidence was not admissible in court because of her age (eight years).
Ursula's. He would escort the student back to the convent from the parish church each morning and would often appear at the student's classroom unannounced.\textsuperscript{143} The priest remained in Yeppoon until 1956, well after the student he had seemingly protected had graduated from St Ursula's. The student's family considered that their daughter's behaviour in the boarding school was disruptive and somehow caused the consternation within the school community and the priest’s subsequent involvement.\textsuperscript{144}

At the centre of this community unrest in the late 1940s, was an ageing superior/principal, Mother Angela Murtagh (1940-1945; 1949-1951). Her reaction to a tragic incident during this same period reflected the discipline imposed on the girls in this era and may go some way to explaining the protective attitude adopted by the priest in a prior incident. On December five, 1951, a boarder from Monto in her Scholarship year, drowned along with her father while swimming at Emu Park near Yeppoon on the afternoon of St Ursula's annual prize-giving concert in the Myola Hall Yeppoon. The student had a leading role in a play for the event that evening. Murtagh reported the child's drowning to the assembled students before the concert began, and they were told 'to perform at the concert as if nothing had happened'. Marie Messer (1949-1950) was a young student in the play that night. She reports that ‘we did as we were told but it was an effort and we were congratulated on our behaviour at the end of the evening’.\textsuperscript{145} This form of discipline was unquestioning in these years and continued into the 1960s, but there were also societal and parental expectations to behave: ‘No one even thought of sneaking out or questioning the rules’.\textsuperscript{146} Charlotte Leane dealt with discipline in boarding school in different ways: ‘I was a very shy child. I tried to do what had to be done and slipped under the radar’.\textsuperscript{147}

In the late 1960s, the two rules of not leaving the boarding school unaccompanied, "out of bounds" and of not smoking were non-negotiable and were punishable by

\textsuperscript{143} McGrath, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{144} Smith, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{145} Messer, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{146} Rhodes, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{147} Leane, "Interview."
immediate expulsion. Although the strict rule of no smoking was understandable because of the multi-storeyed wooden buildings, these two rules were tested in more daring ways by the boarders, especially as many came from families where smoking was accepted. Jane Jordison remembered,

If we were caught eating milo in the dorm we were really in trouble. We used to get food parcels and they were stored in port racks under the convent building. We would go down there, Collie and me. She would be always sneaking a smoke and I would smoke with her down in the port racks; she was a rebel. There was smoking; no one got caught obviously. We got away with it for a while; I tried out smoking. The first thing my brother did on the way home after my dad died was he passed me a cigarette and said, "Here you'll need this"; I was fourteen.148

From the interviews, it seemed that there were instances of undiagnosed mental illness in the religious community which had an impact on the school, especially the boarders. In the case of the actions of a superior, she maintained the position of director of the boarding school as part of her administrative role for the full term of six years, despite obvious signs of distress amongst students and staff. The superior engaged in physical and emotional abuse as a form of discipline and punishment, and her behaviour was remembered many years afterwards as cruel and inexplicable. A sister in the community commented that this superior was never confronted, even by the women in her community, who were also the victims of her unstable behaviour.149

This situation confirmed that, despite the revision of the religious Rule concerning the role of the superior, higher superiors did not challenge this superior’s actions even though the mother general visited the community annually and interviewed each sister in the community. Included in the mother general’s official visit was discussion about the relations of members of the community among themselves.150

148 Jordison, "Interview."
149 Fleming, "Interview."
150 Presentation, "Constitutions of the Sisters of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady (Australia)." 78.
Student, Noelle Melrose found it difficult to accept the superior’s acts of favouritism towards certain selected students and her harsh treatment of others. One boarding student was subjected to harsh lectures and corporal punishment by this superior and another was deprived of attendance at significant student events because a boy sent her a letter.  

Noelle Melrose (1971-72) reflected on the treatment of this superior/principal many years after. What was important to her was the memory of how she could handle difficult situations because she and her classmates looked out for each other and they refused at the time to be crushed by the treatment. At the time, Noelle stated that some other sisters at St Ursula’s had different approaches to working around the behaviour of the superior, and they compensated by trying to make the boarders’ lives more tolerable. Sister Andrea treated the boarders kindly and looked out for them when there was a death in a boarder’s family. Sister Benedict treated the students kindly, and they also had a lot of fun, cooking and sewing, with Sister Margaret in Home Economics. These sisters would help the students to cook and sew for fun on the weekends.

From 1967 to the early 1980s, there were more wide-spread reactions to the regimentation of the school and dormitory routine by boarders, day students and staff. Sister Veronica Cruice (1974) was a full-time teacher and had responsibility for the year eleven dormitory. She compared the experiences of the St Ursula’s boarders with her days as a boarder at St Rita’s: ‘Of course I did not like regimentation myself. There were timetabled activities, even on the weekends, such as cleaning the whole school, the classrooms and dormitories; a lot of washing hair, and cleaning shoes’. A day student in the mid-1970s, noted that, ‘As a day student, I witnessed the strictness and the limited amount of free time for boarders; it was fairly tough seven days a week’.

151 Jordison, "Interview."; Melrose, "Interview."
152 Jordison, "Interview."; Melrose, "Interview."
153 Clarke, "Interview."; Cruice, "Interview."
154 Holm, "Interview."
Cathy Kehoe completed senior in 1978, and reflected on the impact of her experiences as a boarder: ‘I cannot go back and visit the boarding school physically. It was too constrictive and reminds me of a time when I was lacking self-esteem and worldly experience, despite my brash exterior’. Some religious teachers questioned the rigidity of the student routine but also recognised that they too were still subject to the same regimentation as women religious. Sister Bernadette Fleming commented that, in the late 1970s, ‘We just did as we were told’ and, about those same years, Sister Kathleen Tynan remembered that, ‘the kids also accepted their lot and they took all difficult disciplinary experiences on the chin’. She noted, ‘all was handled in good faith by them, but that does not mean it was the right thing to be applying harsh punishment to students for misdemeanours that could have been handled differently’.

From the mid-1970s, there were forms of adult and student protest for more relaxed conditions in the boarding school and convent life. Women religious made individual statements about the wearing of the religious habit, at the same time as students experimented with individual expression in student uniform. Roycelyn Pearson said, ‘We just respected the authority of our dormitory supervisor, Sister Elvera. We called her "sister golden hair" and she used to pull her belt in and to wear her veil further and further back’. Boarders attempted to change their appearance as no personal ornamentation was allowed in school time. This took the form of eyebrow plucking, change of hair colour, and attempts at non-professional ear piercing. On her arrival to St Ursula’s, Jane Jordison (1960-1967) was introduced to Therese Hale as the professional eyebrow ‘plucker’ who did the boarders’ eyebrows weekly. Changes in hair colour became a more common practice amongst the boarders from the 1970s, with more access to commercial hair dyes. In the late 1970s, boarders’ free time on the weekends was dedicated to plucking eye-brows and dyeing hair in the garden behind the science rooms. Cathy noted, ‘Those students

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155 Kehoe, "Interview."
156 Fleming, "Interview."; Tynan, "Interview."
157 Pearson, "Interview."
158 Gregory, "Interview." Sister Loreto had to seek medical help for students trying ear-piercing that often became infected.
159 Jordison, "Interview."
who were rich enough had napro rinses; otherwise, there was magic silver white or rose drops in the science lab sinks'.\textsuperscript{160}

The boarders never wore personal clothing, even on weekends, but boarders such as Maria Oram tolerated the style and muted colour of school uniform and after-school dress: ‘There was always competition amongst the boarders for clothes but girls were being very generous in lending things or sharing what they had to help you look good. I hated the afternoon frocks which were the same for all, but the same dress made everyone seem equal’.\textsuperscript{161} Kathleen Noonan also noted the social levelling effect of the common dress for the boarders: ‘I remember thinking those little pinnies were great because everyone was the same. I knew kids from properties who weren’t well off, and some kids who were better off and no one knew because you were not wearing brand names; they were all the same. There was not attention to vanity the way there is now’.\textsuperscript{162}

The boarders also challenged school authority by employing various means to limit the amount of certain foods they would tolerate or reject. Sister Bernadette Fleming reflected, ‘I regarded supervising boarders’ meals at night, dehumanising for them; I felt sorry for the kids’.\textsuperscript{163} From the interviews there were instances of student eating disorders that also were not well understood and were dealt with differently by individual religious staff. Refusal to eat would be perceived in past decades as a disciplinary issue. There were creative measures applied by the boarders to escape detection as they disposed of the unwanted food that was regarded as unpalatable.

Roycelyn was school captain in 1975. She reports that, ‘we year twelves complained about food one night and because the steak was so tough we just cut it to bits, messed it up and packed the plates. Sister Marilyn made us take it back and we did not know whose steak it was’.\textsuperscript{164} The sisters who detected signs of anorexia demanded that students ate something. Kathleen Noonan’s description of the

\textsuperscript{160} Kehoe, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{161} Oram, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{162} Noonan, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{163} Fleming, "Interview."
\textsuperscript{164} Pearson, "Interview."
refectory procedures (1981-1982) reflected how both staff and students dealt with issues of unpalatable food and with eating disorders:

Once you got to the meal table, this exercise was structured as well. I did not like food or eating much food. I didn't eat much food, and I got quite skinny during school. I made up for it eating burgers downtown, so it really didn't matter. I can't remember it being too bad. There were a couple of anorexic girls in various grades, and when that happened the nuns would be very strict on making girls eat, and I realised why that was happening; one girl was terribly anorexic.165

Cathy Kehoe, from the late 1970s, challenged school discipline and experienced the consequences. She and the McGoldrick twins came from North Queensland:

The McGoldrick twins and I spent the night in the Rockhampton railway station ladies’ toilets and the nuns thought we were abducted. A brother of the twins living in Rocky covered for us. In year twelve, I was boarding captain and I was told to leave school for organising alcohol for the year twelve graduation dinner. My dad calmed the waters with the superior Sister Andrea and somehow, I could remain and do exams and finish year twelve.166

By the end of the 1970s, with the changes in societal attitudes to authority, both students and women religious did begin to challenge more openly the authority structures imposed by a superior in boarding life and religious community. In education and adolescent development research, studies on girls’ psychological development by authors such as Carol Gilligan were becoming increasingly well-known.167 Gilligan’s work on gender differences in moral development opened a door for teachers to think about differences in boys’ and girls’ learning styles.

165 Noonan, "Interview.
166 Kehoe, "Interview.
167 Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. From the end of the 1960s, Queensland Presentation Sisters were attending external teacher training colleges and pursuing university degrees in education and therefore were being exposed to current research on girls’ education.
Teachers found that Gilligan’s work challenged their old ways of relating to girls, to be docile and nice.¹⁶⁸

Sister Marie Griffin was transferred to St Ursula’s from St Rita’s secondary day school in Brisbane, to teach economics in 1977. She was also in charge of the year eleven dormitory. She represented the newly appointed staff to St Ursula’s who applied a more informed approach to adolescent girls’ behaviour:

The country kids were good in comparison with city girls, as they tended not to operate in a subversive manner. I tried to maintain a more open communication with the boarders to minimise the instance of an underground culture by engaging them for open discussion on magazines such as Cleo I knew was being circulated in the dormitory. I adopted a non-confrontational approach to the supervision of the older boarders, even though I knew that if I had chosen to refer some issues on to the superior, they would have been dealt with in a punitive way. There were deliberate acts of vandalism in the refectory from students who did not want to be in boarding school, with one student deliberately dropping bundles of plates to draw a reaction.¹⁶⁹

Kathleen Noonan (1981-1982) from north Queensland boarded for years eleven and twelve. She reflected on the new age of student relationship with authority that was in place by the early 1980s and which required a new level of training and understanding by staff about discipline in a secondary school. She noted that, as a student arriving in year eleven, she had no awareness of school rules and boarding school expectations, and she tested the expectations of both parents and teachers to the limit:

We must have been aware of the rules. There was a rule you could only go down town and had to be back at certain times. In the early 1980s discipline was meted out with even handedness of being kept on a bit of a short leash, but really you felt as if you were autonomous, because you had to get

¹⁶⁸ De Bare, Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls’ Schools. 201.
¹⁶⁹ Griffin, "Interview."
yourself together, get your act together, do your own washing, etc. It was that sort of two handed thing, of thinking you were not being watched all the time but they were probably monitoring. There was more having the responsibility to get yourself to boarding school and getting home; to be responsible for yourself within that sort of environment of school. Coming from a big safe loving family helps you to be a bit street savvy, just being more independent, so when you go off to Uni it’s not a big leap.\footnote{Noonan, "Interview."}

There was smoking in the boarding school. We were sprung and we were suspended and sent home early. Dad could not understand because he was a heavy smoker. Another boarder near my hometown in North Queensland (I would kill my daughter if they did this) knew we had to be in boarding school at a certain time after free weekends or holidays. We timed flights telling parents we had to be there earlier than school entry. When we left the boarding school, we would get the latest possible flight to get home to Mackay. We went to Rocky and looking older than our age we drank in hotels and smoked before arriving home or back at boarding school.\footnote{Ibid.}

**Cultural changes in the boarding school**

The students from the late-1970s onwards included in their recollections more personal interactions with the sister in charge of their dormitory. This relaxation from the emphasis on the sisters being impersonal and detached in their relationships was formulated in the revised Presentation Institute Rule and Constitutions of 1973. The cautions expressed in the 1947 Rule about ‘avoiding familiarity with people’ gave way to a recommendation in the 1973 revised Rule that sisters ‘should respond to every human situation with true womanly concern and a deep respect for persons’.\footnote{Sisters for The Society of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Provisionary Constitutions of the Society of Australian Congregations of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary," ed. Australian Presentation Major Superiors (Northern Star Print, 1973).} There was no formal definition of what ‘womanly concern’ meant but there were personal testimonies from reunions of past students from the 1970s–1980s that some sisters had succeeded to create a more homely and happy

\footnote{Noonan, "Interview."}
environment. A past student recorded, at a twenty-five-year reunion: ‘Sister Zoe I remember you being so warm, loving and fun – thank you for looking after us and doing a great job’.  

When Sister Marion Kingston was appointed superior/principal in 1983, she established an environment where each student was encouraged to accept personal responsibility for behaviour. Joanne Adams (1987-1991) noted,

There was a trust established as we got older. On Saturdays we boarders went into Rockhampton on the bus on our own and bought material to run up a dress at two pm and be ready for a social at seven pm. We started boarding in the dormitory on the lower level of the old building in grade eight and progressed up each level like a rite of passage and over to the Golden Mile building for the upper grades. Sister Suzanne was appointed director of the boarding school and always appeared at the right time on the scene. There were no drugs present at that time. It was a fair regime so there was no outrage when two girls were asked to leave. Their leaving was regarded as fair treatment and justified.  

From the interview with Sister Suzanne Gentle, the director of boarding who suspended the girls mentioned in Joanne’s interview, I learned that all girls had a clear understanding of the consequences of leaving the school premises without permission during the night and not returning until the next morning.  

Marion Kingston built up a rapport with the senior students over her twelve years of office. Beth Wheeldon (1983–1984) regarded Sister Marion as caring and thoughtful and established a lifelong friendship with her and her boarding companions:

The boarders were close but we had very close relationships with a small number of day girls and we loved free weekends at a day girl’s place. There

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173 Fitzpatrick, "Interview." Sister Zoe had a collection of memoirs from past students.
174 Adams, "Interview."
175 Gentle, "Interview."
A lot of friendship and mischief of day girls sneaking into boarder’s rooms and talking late at night, of boarders spending time downtown sometimes skipping study and sneaking out to the beach. I would race from the common room down the street to buy chips and sauce—absolute treat. I made friends that I have kept for thirty years. I loved living with my friends in year twelve and all students were treated equally. There was room to explore my faith in not as formal a traditional way and there were lots of role models in the nuns. My memories are of sisters as strong women who lived their faith and who were good, kind thoughtful and considerate.176

From 1983, the Presentation Sisters began to involve St Ursula’s in a much broader cultural movement throughout Australia, whereby private boarding schools offered secondary education opportunities for Indigenous children.177 The school had no experience of how to incorporate the cultural needs of larger numbers of Indigenous girls as there had often been only one or two Indigenous girls at St Ursula’s who had come there for secondary schooling through original placements in Neerkol orphanage.

Kingston described her experience of the arrival of the first small group of Indigenous girls, and how it helped her to understand the cultural shift that would be required to address the needs of Indigenous students living away from home and in the confinement of boarding school: ‘I remember the Indigenous girls arriving with all their belongings in two plastic shopping bags and other new boarders arriving with very flash travel cases’.178 As the rule of enclosure no longer applied, Marion Kingston and the director of boarders would visit the students’ Indigenous families in their settlement of Woorabinda during school vacations. They built up an association with other educational institutions such as St Brendan’s, which had also introduced boarding facilities for Indigenous boys.

176 Oram, "Interview."
177 From 2005, Australian not-for-profit organisations such as Yalari established a scholarship scheme for Indigenous students to attend boarding school.
178 Kingston, "Interview."
From 1984 to 1991, the sisters began to withdraw from boarding school duties and a sister was appointed to administer the boarding school, supported by lay supervising staff.\(^{179}\) The convent finances struggled to pay boarding staff for any after-hour’s activities. Consequently, there were no musicals, after-school or weekend activities in the early 1980s, and boarders organised their own entertainment with talent nights.\(^{180}\) Engagement in competitive sport depended on lay staff willing to volunteer and organise training times out-of-school hours. Sister Therese Collins returned to St Ursula’s from 1979 to 1986. She noted the changes and reflected on the personal cost each sister had experienced of having been a full-time teacher combined with duties in the dormitory for seven day a week:

So, it was good this time back there, except I was really, really ready to leave in 1986. It was so tiring ... I had boarders, and I wasn’t studying then, but it was still full on. My last two years there I didn't have boarders. I ran out to the state high school and did patch work on a Sunday afternoon; adult stuff. I used to go swimming and I'd go just down to the beach by myself. I remember coming back and these boarders saying, ‘Oh, you've been swimming. Why didn't you take us?’\(^{181}\)

Sister Therese Collins reflected extensively on the experience of witnessing the transition from sisters to lay boarding staff:

In my second period back, there were lay boarding supervisors. Now that made a bit of a difference, but not as much as it should have, I felt. We still carried a lot of the load even though we had lay supervisors who weren’t teachers. So, they had the day off kind of thing, time off, and that was mainly at night. And I used to think, well, they (the lay staff) should be taking more of the meals and more of the study. I think it has a lot to do with the fact the sisters had done everything like it was our life and you instinctively would be

\(^{179}\) Fanton, “Interview.” In the transition between sisters as boarding supervisors and lay supervisors, the sisters noted behaviour being tolerated amongst students that they did not approve.

\(^{180}\) Oram, “Interview.”

\(^{181}\) Collins, “Interview.”
looking after them day and night, but you knew what you had to be doing (as a sister) and didn't ask why.

The lay staff would come from a totally different culture - that clock-in and clock-off mentality. We sisters began to think we can't ask them to do that because they're getting paid so much an hour for whatever. Later, we sisters, when we're together, people around my age, and we would say, how did we survive? We really survived because of friends. We were good friends and you just supported each other. I feel very blessed, apart from growing up where I did, and that time at St Ursula's as a student and then going back there twice and having those different experiences and seeing the changes and being a part of it, having a real hand in it.\textsuperscript{182}

The era of lay boarding staff

This section examines the transition phase to all lay staff administration in the school and boarding house from 1996 on, and the changes in attitude of boarding students to each other. These changes arose because of a different profile of boarding student enrolling and had something to do with the withdrawal of sisters from boarding house supervision. The population of the central west of Queensland had grown significantly, particularly as the mining industry expanded. The boarding schools and the small country town infrastructure could not adequately address the needs of the increased numbers of adolescents from regional areas.\textsuperscript{183}

The boarding school was becoming more frequently the safe place for girls from troubled backgrounds. There was a need to establish new guidelines for negotiating the challenges of close living with girls in the absence of the sisters and their structured supervision of the boarding school.\textsuperscript{184} For a time, the absence of a strong pastoral approach in the boarding school by the experienced sisters was most noticeable. Mrs Shirley Wilson was a past student and teacher at St Ursula's. She

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Mitchell, "Educational Needs of Isolated Secondary School Students with the Rockhampton Diocese."
\textsuperscript{184} McKeering, "Interview."
noted that, ‘In the 1970s-1980s the girls were well behaved with the sisters. Both teachers and students toed the line while the nuns were still in charge’. Lay boarding staff were untrained in dealing with the growing number of adolescents from troubled backgrounds who had been accepted into boarding school by the late 1980s.

Often these students experienced difficulties in interacting with large numbers of girls in close quarters. Their presence coincided with the transition period characterised by the frequent turnover at St Ursula’s of lay staff in both the school and boarding house as the sisters gradually withdrew. After Marion Kingston’s term as principal/superior was completed, students Maxine Hauff and Loretta McKeering noted the cultural shift as more boarders were admitted from dysfunctional family backgrounds with special needs. When their needs were not addressed adequately, there appeared to be a negative impact on peer relationships between boarders.

Loretta McKeering (1996-2000) noted, ‘In the late 1990s, there was a trend to enrol students with special pastoral needs. There was a distinct social and cultural change in dormitory life when a girl believed that she would never be expelled’. Maxine Hauff’s recollections of the years 1996 to 2000 were of negative experiences in peer relationships that I had not detected in the interviews of students for much of the previous sixty years. The sisters exited from staffing the boarding school at a time of enormous social change, including the growing influence of social media that impacted on the lives of students. Past student Maxine came from Blackall. She notes that,

It was a family and town tradition in Blackall for students to board at St Ursula’s and St Brendan’s. I experienced that the students were bullied who were confident, independent and self-reliant and who were prepared to be a leader and not a follower and were treated differently for these traits. I

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185 Wilson, “Interview.”
186 Adams, “Interview.”
developed the attitude that if the nasty ones break you, they win. I felt it was better to be alone and rely on self than to be a gutless follower in a bunch of nasty pieces; I kept busy to deal with it.\textsuperscript{187}

Maxine’s boarding school friend, Loretta McKeering, who also experienced bullying, gave me a copy of a poem which was written by a student by way of an apology to Maxine. The author was one of the 'nasty ones' to both Maxine and Loretta, and the poem was written after an incidence of bullying in the dormitory:

If you dare to be different-
And you do not join the crowd-
If they laugh at your honesty
If you are proud-
When the(y) (sic) talk of you in whispers and criticise-
Things you say or do –
Don’t fear them-
But forgive them-
Because they are more afraid than you.
Sorry, sorry, sorry.\textsuperscript{188}

Maxine completed her schooling to year twelve and pursued various career paths of receptionist, nanny, governess, station hand and mother. She did not have a positive experience of boarding school life and felt trapped by having to be in boarding school because there was no other option for secondary school education in Blackall. Both Barbara Searle and Madonna Lasker, from the late 1970s, attributed their unhappiness with boarding school life to the insurmountable difficulties of dealing with homesickness and suggested that personal assistance on a more one-to-one level may have given them the chance to adjust to separation from home.\textsuperscript{189} Others summarised their boarding school experiences with

\textsuperscript{187} Maxine (Sharpe) Hauff, ibid., 30 June 2013, Word Attachment.
\textsuperscript{188} Poem included with kind permission of Loretta McKeering
\textsuperscript{189} Searle, "Interview."; Lasker, "Interview."
statements such as, ‘I learned independence’, and ‘I had to stand on my own two feet’.  

There was much attention given in the interviews to the daily routine, but the past students also felt that the nature of peer relationships gave them the strongest sense of belonging in their daily lives as boarders. Statements were repeated, such as ‘we made lifelong friendships’, ‘these people were my family for a time’, and ‘we had each other’. In comparing the studies of boarding school life at St Ursula’s with the extensive studies of Lambert and Millham, there are a universal set of experiences created in a boarding school society, whether it was in more populated urban regions of England or the isolated seaside school in central Queensland. I originally thought that the culture of mateship associated with the outback accounted for the egalitarian nature of boarder’s attitudes towards each other. Rather, it was the boarding school society that tended to establish a climate of tolerance. That overall acceptance tended to change in St Ursula’s history in the late 1990s when the school accepted numbers of students requiring specialised behaviour management strategies, and before there was adequately trained staff specifically for student residential care.

Conclusion

The boarding school institution made a valuable contribution to education in the west of Queensland and the details of enrolment in the surviving register serve as a social commentary on the efforts families made to pay for a chance at a convent boarding school education. Students after the 1930s, described in detail the school and dormitory routines, despite neither teachers nor students recalling any documented code of behaviour or guidelines.

190 Williams, “Interview.”; Crawford et al., Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory. 186-87. In the spirit of the research in ‘memory work,’ Crawford et al. would argue that overall the boarders had established a sense of agency because they had to push the boundaries of childhood experiences and establish independence sometimes alone and not noticed by others.  

191 Jordison, “Interview.”
Student, Roycelyn Pearson reflected that, in the mid-1970s, ‘We were not presented with a code of conduct. It was an osmosis type of understanding of school rules. There was just a culture that you wanted to do the right thing and did not want to rebel. We did silly things in dorms which were very innocent.'\footnote{Pearson, “Interview.”} In 1989, Sister Suzanne Gentle was the co-ordinator of boarding. The definition of the role was not passed on to her. Rather, it was given by word of mouth and just developed as she went along.\footnote{Gentle, “Interview.”} In the mid-1980s, a report with recommendations for future efficiency for boarding school education in central Queensland addressed the pastoral needs of remote families.\footnote{Mitchell, “Educational Needs of Isolated Secondary School Students with the Rockhampton Diocese.”}

Religious staff did not always act merely as the dispensers of the strict code of practice of a convent boarding school, but at times they challenged many of the practices and attempted to make boarding life as homely as possible. Some students reflected that women religious were viewed sometimes as enforcers of strict rules, on the one hand, and as role models of independent and committed women, on the other. The training in religious life prepared women religious to be faithful to a strict rule of life, which fitted well with the routine of a structured school routine. They were not trained to be the mother figures that young girls would have searched for to help deal with personal problems in the absence of a family member close by. This situation proved particularly difficult when even letter writing to parents was censored until the mid-1970s.

The students had happy memories with the dormitory sisters when the sisters shared after hours’ time with the boarders. Together, they cooked, played music, played in a sporting team and sat on their beds after hours to help them to prepare for exams. Frequently, responses centred on the way some Presentation Sisters interacted with the girls, especially in extracurricular activities. At times, the students reflected that they often searched for the humanity from women whose lives seemed so removed from the daily activities of the rest of humanity.\footnote{Condon.} The sisters appointed
to the staff at St Ursula’s over eighty years had to fill several major roles, such as full-time teacher and dormitory supervisor, sometimes to the same students in class and dormitory. They also had a time commitment to the spiritual exercises as a member of a religious community. With few exceptions, the sisters with dormitory duties reflected that these were amongst the best years of their religious lives. When asked ‘why’, they reflected that, in that role, they could step away from the role of teacher and be more relaxed in relating to the students.\(^{196}\)

The main findings in this chapter were that interviewees remembered that, as children, they were aware that their parents in remote regions of Queensland were making financial and emotional sacrifices for the sake of education. This awareness made a lot of difference to the way in which students responded to the hardship of boarding school life. Past students had recollections both of the thrill of an adventure going to boarding school and the shock of separation from family and familiar surroundings. The separation from family was compensated for by the strong beginnings of lifelong friendships and the broadening of social class horizons by mixing with children from different walks of life.

Students experienced the difficulties of adjusting to the rigid routine, both in classroom and dormitory and the enforcement of a strict moral code of behaviour. The loss of autonomy was balanced by the creation of secret societies and experimental behaviour that challenged the rules and regulations. The positive lessons learned were the sense of independence of being able to hold responsibility and experience respect, and most of all being able to understand what it is like to do something independently.\(^{197}\) Vicki Koveos reflected on her experience of being a day student in a boarding school community: ‘I walked up the driveway to school, and felt a sense of calm and a place of learning and a search for betterment. I did not feel a sense of exclusion’.\(^{198}\) In Lambert and Millham’s study, a student boarder described the positive advantage as the underlying sense of being part of a community - an entity which enlarged the self in a union with others. Some saw value in individual relationships, but others had a mystical sense of belonging to

\(^{196}\) Sister Assumpta O’Flynn, ibid., 15 May 2013, Audio.
\(^{197}\) Williams, "Interview."
\(^{198}\) Koveos, "Interview."
something bigger than themselves; something which enabled them to be themselves; there was a sense of togetherness.\textsuperscript{199}

Students in dormitory life responded in different and complex ways to their experiences of boarding school. This chapter identified that the problems that arose in boarding school life were considerable for the students ranging in age from five years to eighteen. In this isolated society, girls broke into small groups and, amid all the gossip, busy routine and cliques, some found it difficult to make meaningful relationships with others and withdrew into themselves or ran away.

The conclusions drawn from this focus on boarding school life are that the positive experiences of an open acceptance of each other were generated through the common and shared experiences of the boarding school institution. Another explanation for the past students’ reflections overall on the egalitarian nature of boarding school life is that there was not a hierarchy established in the boarding school of a prefect system which was a common tradition of English boarding school establishments.\textsuperscript{200} Some past students did not share common positive experiences, and this coincided with significant changes in the history of the school. One change was the Presentation Sisters’ withdrawal from the school and boarding house staffing and administration, with their constant surveillance of the boarder’s routine. Overall, however, students’ memories remained positive in later life. This perhaps had something to do with the congruence between the sisters’ and the boarders’ lives.

\textsuperscript{199} Williams, "Interview." 432.
\textsuperscript{200} Pearson, "Interview."
Chapter 8

Conclusion

This thesis adopted an approach that asked fresh questions, examined previously unexplored territory and sought new perspectives in tracing the history of a secondary convent boarding school on the central coast of Queensland (1917-1997). Through the use of oral history, the thesis documented the history as it was experienced as well as planned by teachers and students.\(^1\) I operated from the perspective that students and teachers were agents of their own history. Reference to research into the place of memory, emotion and gender in oral history was vital in the preparation and planning in order to interpret the data effectively from the stories of the past. The interweaving of personal recollections, institutional memorabilia (such as letters and photos), official documents (housed in convent, college and ecclesiastical archives) and what was known of structures and plans, helped to complete this historical ‘Montage’ or ‘Sea Pictures’ of St Ursula’s. This thesis converted a school history into a dynamic entity by incorporating the lives and experiences of students and staff throughout the eighty years.

The history gave an insight into how the Presentation Sisters made some modifications to their rule of life as they initiated a plan to establish secondary education in isolated regions of Queensland. At times, the institute leaders of the Presentation Sisters overextended the capacity of the Queensland sisters to service Catholic parish primary education, particularly in the fast-growing regions of central Queensland. As a result, the personal wellbeing of the sisters was not accommodated adequately, and regular ongoing professional development in the fields of education and the supervision of children in boarding school institutions was ignored.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Freeman, “Interview.”
St Ursula’s, as a secondary boarding school, became established in the lower echelons of the class-based hierarchy of schools. Despite the public advertisements, it provided a service of secondary education for girls and, for a time, boys that would otherwise have been denied to working-class families in remote regions. This was due largely to the acknowledged tardiness of the Queensland State department to commit to secondary education in remote regions until the mid-1960s. From that perspective, the work of the Presentation Sisters could be regarded as pragmatic and prophetic, as they extended their capacity to establish secondary education.

The maintenance and development of the Presentation Sisters’ educational institutions in Queensland depended on an adequate number of girls choosing to enter the order and the willingness of the incumbent sisters to combine the extra role of boarding supervision with the administration of complex institutions such as a secondary school. The growth and development of St Ursula’s before the late 1970s depended more on the sisters’ training in self-abnegation and obedience than on access to specialised training to be both teacher and supervisor of girls in their adolescent years.\(^3\)

The Catholic Church, and some other Christian groups, used the services of the convent boarding school to enculturate its young members into religion. The wider population of remote areas of Queensland sought after the social prestige, quality teaching, human values, discipline and pastoral care that characterised a convent boarding school education. That opportunity was traditionally accessible only to those who could afford the privilege, until the Presentation Sisters opened the first affordable secondary boarding schools, firstly in Longreach in 1900 and then in Yeppoon in 1917.

At boarding school, students experienced complex subcultures and arcane customs foreign to many of their cultural backgrounds. This thesis shows that, although the customs and mentalities established by religious institutes in their schools were

\(^3\) McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia.* 628-29; Tynan, "Interview."; Fleming, "Interview."
transformative for some students, for others, the experience was oppressive and destructive. The experience of communal life, for the most part, provided girls with social skills to live with others and to accept their differences. The academic training for success in public examinations and the moral and religious formation in the hidden curriculum enabled girls to progress socially and economically. The negatives of the experience were the restrictions resembling convent like ‘enclosure’ for the boarders. There was an absence of opportunities for adolescents to respond to their growing curiosity about relationships. The rigid lifestyle also contributed to a loss of creativity and curiosity to explore subject areas beyond the narrow examination-driven curriculum.

Chapter two traced how religious orders brought, not just recent history from the time of their founding, but involvement in education for both the upper class and the poor reaching back centuries. The history of the curriculum and culture of St Ursula’s Yeppoon was traced to the earliest known convent boarding schools in Renaissance Italy. Later Catholic teaching orders of women religious, in 17th century France and later in 18th century Ireland, further developed this model of education for girls of the upper class. They eventually extended the skills in the ‘accomplishments’ curriculum to include literature, foreign languages, Latin and some mathematics.

Some religious congregations, such as the Ursuline Sisters, were formed specifically to address the needs of the education of girls of the poorer classes. The petite écoles established in the late 16th century in France became a model of schooling adopted by the first Presentation Sisters in Ireland in the mid-18th century. In the late 19th century, the Mercy and the Presentation Sisters initiated a broader concept of education for girls from the middle and poorer classes by introducing requisite subjects for public examinations into the accomplishments curriculum.

Chapter three tracked how the Presentations Sisters became involved in the introduction of an elite model of convent boarding school education in Australia, although their Rule and Constitutions committed them to focus only on the needs of the poorest in society. By the end of the 19th century in Australia, they had
established convent boarding schools in Presentation foundations of St Mary’s Hobart, Tasmania (1866), Star of the Sea Elsternwick, Melbourne (1883), Convent of the Sacred Heart St Kilda, Melbourne (1874), Presentation Convent Windsor, Melbourne (1877) and Presentation Convent Mount Erin, Wagga Wagga (1876). The Presentation Sisters established St Ursula’s in 1917 and retained much of the accomplishments curriculum but with an adaptation that balanced accomplishments with the curriculum and vocational oriented subjects.

The broader curriculum assisted girls to meet new social and educational prospects becoming available in Australia in the early 20th century. The success of the venture rested with the lifestyle of the Presentation Sisters, of their simplicity of life and willingness to share the difficulties of climate and isolation with the people of the west who sought education for their children. The sisters chose to remain geographically close to the vast region of central Queensland to develop a modern secondary school and to offer recreation and safety for bush children, especially in times of depression and war. This was especially critical in the years when the state government did not provide schools or support families financially to send children away from remote areas to learning centres.

Chapter four examined the experience of leadership in a convent boarding school over eighty years. It demonstrated the complexity of the administrative tasks of the superior/principal who, as a superior of a secondary boarding school, maintained the infrastructure of convent, school and student residence, and was accountable to Church and State authorities on many levels. I addressed in this chapter the challenge of recounting more than just the great achievements of religious leaders, which have been characteristic of previous religious histories. The testimonies through the oral histories included recollections of the consequences of allowing a superior of the Presentation Order to complete the Church approved canonical period of appointment in a religious community, despite her obvious ongoing erratic and harsh behaviour towards staff and students in the school community.

This history traced how changing wider community social conditions called for a change to the censorious style of religious leadership. There was a need for a
restructure of leadership models to accommodate new directions for religious life, developments in state secondary education and increasing school enrolments. The traditional style in which one person was both superior of the convent and principal of the secondary school was a unique administrative structure in a convent boarding school. The combination of those administrative tasks in one person as head of school and convent at times caused conflict and hindered progress. In St Ursula’s earliest years, the combination of these roles may have contributed to the smooth running of the boarding school when numbers were small. The report that superior/principal, Mother Evangelist Murtagh (1933-1939) checked into each classroom daily may have left little room for creativity in the individual teacher who was accountable as a religious sister and teacher to the authority of the superior/principal both in and out of the classroom.

In chapters five to seven, I constructed a history in which the interviews of past students and teachers were a significant core of the master story of the culture, faith and the academic life of St Ursula’s over eighty years. The voices of the past students and teachers have provided an authentic account of the impact of the educational endeavour by the Presentation Sisters at St Ursula’s Yeppoon. The sisters provided a Catholic curriculum in a boarding school setting. In the first forty years, country children had very few options to access secondary school education because of geographical and economic constraints. The standard of the St Ursula’s educational experience evolved from educational and spiritual traditions that were forged over centuries by women religious, particularly from those congregations which were committed to the cause of education for girls.

Chapter five examined the development of the formal secondary school curriculum for girls at St Ursula’s over eighty years, within the time-frame of advancements in the state secondary curriculum in Queensland. Despite the isolation from major centres to access financial and professional support, the Presentation Sisters produced graduates with the necessary competencies to enter the workforce or undertake further study. A standard of academic achievement was set from the early 1920s, when graduates from St Ursula’s were prepared for post-school studies in the arts and education. Led by Ursula Kennedy, the sisters laid the groundwork for
establishing modern secondary education in the 1930s when mathematics and a limited number of science subjects were introduced into the curriculum alongside the vocational subjects. Both girls and boys were sitting senior matriculation in the early 1930s and were taught by highly qualified lay teachers. In contrast, St Rita’s College in Brisbane did not have its first senior matriculation class until 1941.¹

The academic history of St Ursula’s over eighty years resonated with Rupert Goodman’s and Sophie McGrath’s assertion that the balance of education for the whole child shifted when Catholic schools responded to academic pressures to compete in the state public examination system.² The presence of three St Ursula’s students, out of a total of twenty women enrolled at the University of Queensland in 1934, suggests that there was a determined start to advance the academic standard of girls’ education at the school. This surge in advancing girls’ education to senior matriculation level died away at St Ursula’s in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II. There was the lack of bipartisan support from political parties that hampered progress in both the state and independent secondary schools for children in remote regions. Until the 1970s, there was an absence of strategic planning to co-ordinate the efforts of individual religious orders of women and men in the Rockhampton Catholic diocese. As a result, there was ongoing strain on personnel and resources to replicate resources in Catholic schools.

Educational institutions like St Ursula’s struggled for survival until Federal Government funding provided for science and library facilities in the early 1970s. However, there was also an absence of long-term preparation from within the Queensland Presentation Institute itself for the demands of new developments in secondary education. In the late 1950s, Ursula Kennedy was surrounded by an equally ageing group of pioneer sisters who continued to re-elect her as institute leader, despite her debilitating condition and poor health from a serious fall. Sister Kathleen Tynan was college principal of St Rita’s in the 1980s, and later Presentation Institute Leader herself (the later term for mother general). She argues

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¹ Barbaro, “The Origins of the Convent High School in Europe and Its Implementation and Evolution in the Antipodes - St Rita’s College, Brisbane, as a Case Study (1926-2008).” 185.
that the system persisted for too long, failing to look for a successor to Ursula Kennedy in her lifetime.\(^6\)

In chapter six, I examined the significance of the Catholic secondary boarding school within the mission of the Church. It functioned as a centre of enculturation into the practices and beliefs of the Catholic faith for families from remote regions who did not have access to a regular parish community and priest. The students learned aspects of the ‘habitus’ or cultural capital in the family of women religious. This occurred through frequent attendance at religious exercises, in religious education classes, and the lessons in moral behaviour expected of young Catholic ladies.

This study has identified a gap in the history of the contribution made by women religious educators to Catholic secondary education in the areas of faith formation, spirituality and social justice awareness. This is a rich area for further exploration to investigate how the models of pastoral leadership introduced by the sisters who chose to remain in education after Vatican II impacted on enrolment policies for Indigenous Australians and minority non-Europeans. The search to maintain relevant spiritual and reflective dimensions for all these diverse cultural representative groups in the curriculum in Catholic schools in the absence of committed religious leadership into the 21\(^{st}\) century, remains a tension that is currently being examined.\(^7\)

In chapter seven, the data from the student and staff interviews revealed changes, over eighty years, to attitudes and traditions regarding how girls established meaning and a culture of acceptance through boarding school life. The boarding school routine was a significant factor in fostering independence and embracing family background diversity. This acceptance generated positive attitudes to living and school, despite the long separation from close family and friends. Overall, boarders resolved to do their best as they recognised, even as children, the

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\(^6\) Tynan, "Interview."

endeavours of parents to provide for their secondary education. Girls referred to the ways their mothers committed to educating them by adopting business-like initiatives to pay for their daughter’s boarding school education.

The bush children reported positive experiences, but the incidents of children running away, demonstrating rebellious behaviour, and forming secret societies suggest that there were aspects of boarding school life that students found unacceptable. In the 1940s, students experienced difficulties with the actions and style of discipline of some Irish sisters appointed as dormitory supervisors. The aspect of how Australian religious institutes prepared young Irish girls through the recruitment process and subsequent enculturation for life in the Australian missions needs further investigation. In the late 1960s, the instances of what would be perceived in today’s terms as undiagnosed instances of mental illness of both religious and students compounded the difficulties in the boarding school society.

An ‘outsider’ view from 1976 by a local long-term non-Catholic resident of Yeppoon illustrates the perception of the insulated existence of St Ursula’s. Robert Medew wrote in his small memoir, Daughters of Time: stories of the Capricorn Coast:

From homes scattered far and wide in the hot inland, girls come to a school which a great Christian faith provides. St Ursula’s is at once their home and their scholastic prison for the time being … The recreation grounds are not very spacious but sufficient for some two hundred children to tumble around in noisy play, while from high vantage windows their black-robed guardians look out with watchful eyes.

Of his perception of the sisters at St Ursula’s he wrote:

I cannot help but think it is an advantage to being in the world and yet not of the world; to pass in the crowded thoroughfares, without fear, heedless of the unspoken mockery of the vulgar; in a world of tempest tossed souls, to
remain calm and serene. And yet, although I have said they are not of this world, I have seen them in the newsagents buying Christmas cards.  

The boarders declared that they always found it a challenge to perform the meaningless tasks in the routine of life in the boarding school. Their stories uncovered how they responded to the expectation to be resilient and independent and how they devised creative means to survive. Many attributed positive outcomes in later life-endeavours to experiencing the challenges of living away from home as young children. Allied with that search for independence and autonomy were the reports of how the girls tested the system. These actions were a protest against the rigidity of the convent boarding school routine or against being sent to boarding school as a means of resolving difficult family issues.

This study established a long-term view of an unbroken tradition of conducting a boarding school by a religious institute. It is therefore a unique contribution, given that many of the earliest girls’ secondary colleges in Queensland had closed their residential section by the late 1970s. The redefining of the relationship of boarding supervisors to students in the late 1980s, called for a more open involvement and presence of parents and guardians in boarding school life. The Presentation Sisters had governed the convent boarding school in the first fifty years by strict rules, in a culture where the superior wielded unquestioning power over both students and religious women.

In the age of more individual freedom of the late 1960s, and sanctioned by the resolutions of Vatican II, women religious explored more informed and creative approaches in their roles as teachers, administrators and community members. Religious and, later, lay boarding school staff were challenged often by the needs of a growing number of girls requiring more counselling support from professional community agencies. The transition to all lay staff caused difficulties, as students adjusted to a lay person’s authority without the external symbols of religious corporate strength in the common dress and strict routine of the sisters. The 1980s

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signalled the end of the ‘enclosure’ style of boarding school life, which had aimed to insulate students and staff from the influences of the outside world.

**Limitations of the study**

The time span of this study was considerable, and the biggest challenge was to access data from the earliest years of St Ursula’s Yeppoon when there was just one memoir by a Presentation Sister and one extensive family history, some newspaper reports, photographs and a few official documents. The superiors did not keep formal statements of school policy and procedure in the day-to-day operations of school and dormitory for much of the eighty-year history. These records could have provided an official version for comparison with the students’ recollections of daily school life. There were no principal’s annual reports retained by superiors or school annuals that would have included records of significant incidents in the daily and yearly function of a school. I attempted to compensate for this lack of documented material by targeting a larger number of interviewees from each decade, to draw a more accurate record of the routine and boarding school practices.

I was aware throughout the study of the silence of the parent voice in the construction of the narrative. This silence was a commentary of the unassailable position of the sisters in conducting their schools. It proved difficult to locate any correspondence or records of communication between the sisters and parents regarding the progress of students except through the report cards posted at the end of each term. During the interviews, students recognised that for their parents, the authority of the sisters was unquestionable and parents entrusted to the sisters the education and care of their daughters. The isolation of parents from the location of the boarding school was a contributing factor, especially in the first fifty years of St Ursula’s when communication through mail with parents was censored and limited to exchanges with the superior only. I often asked for recollections of parental opinion and input about the boarding school experience and could establish much parental sentiment and expectation from the student recollections.
This thesis aimed to document the history of the academic, religious and pastoral traditions of St Ursula’s, to contribute to the literature on the history of educational practice in rural and remote regions of Australia, and to the literature on educational leadership in remote regions of central Queensland. I aimed also to contribute to the literature on the involvement of women religious in Australian secondary boarding school education in regions other than major cities or regional towns.

This thesis has established a vital link, connecting the establishment of Catholic girls’ secondary schooling with the development of modern secondary education throughout Queensland. It is a significant resource for an examination of the work of women educators who established opportunities for the education of girls in Queensland from the early 20th century. It has presented a previously unexplored history of the contribution of the Catholic teaching sisters to secondary education in central Queensland prior to the 1960s modern era, after which the secondary state school system expanded into country regions.
The history of St Ursula’s is a timely contribution to the knowledge about Catholic women’s education in Australia, as over 8000 young women were educated at St Ursula’s in eighty years. The traditions of the accomplishments in the Catholic boarding school curriculum of music, drama and art contributed to the cultural life of remote regions. Girls returned to live in their hometowns and properties after boarding school and contributed culturally to rural society because of a boarding school education. There is, therefore, scope for further research to explore the extent to which the convent boarding school established in rural regions of Queensland strengthened the social and economic fabric of the country.

Schools represent a microcosm of society, acting as a key socialising agent, in concert with, and in addition to, that of the home, in developing academic and non-academic outcomes of the young. In many national contexts, boarding schools represent a significant sector on the educational landscape. However, there has been surprisingly little rigorous research into the historical background of what purpose they served for remote regions of Australia. In the national context, the boarding school represented a significant sector in the educational landscape to give students from predominantly white socio-economic levels, equal opportunity with their city counterparts. This history of a boarding school addresses the gap in historical evidence by examining the following areas: positive experiences of boarding school life; the attainment of educational goals; adolescents’ maintenance of positive relationships with family, teachers, and peers; and these adolescents’ coping strategies when dealing with challenging and negative experiences.

Boarding school students like Loretta McKeering (1996-2000) brought many personal skills and knowledge from their farming and rural backgrounds. She is a graduate in agricultural engineering and had never been inside a classroom until she boarded at St Ursula’s. She partners with her parents in running two properties in western Queensland. She classified herself as a ‘bush kid’ and summarised her life and experience of St Ursula’s:

The bush kids and miners’ daughters had a different outlook there and did not want to let their parents down. My memories of St Ursula’s are that we
were a mob of mostly poor kids who worked bloody hard to get what we've got, so we did not complain but appreciated what we had.\footnote{McKeering, "Interview."}

Loretta McKeering’s range of experiences and skills from life on a rural property remained untapped during her life at boarding school. In Queensland alone, despite many boarding schools in capital cities closing, there are thirty-two boarding schools operating, including five in the Rockhampton and Yeppoon regions of central Queensland. For boarding schools that continue to operate into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, data from this thesis will be valuable for further research that sheds light on how boarding staff, teachers, and parents may be able to optimise the role that the boarding school plays in the development of academic and non-academic outcomes for students from a variety of rural and social settings.

Papworth argues that data such as this is useful to probe more deeply into how in the boarding school, personal resources, relationships and interactions of the individual and the contextual environment could promote academic and non-academic outcomes.\footnote{Papworth, "Attending Boarding School: A Longitudinal Study of Its Role in Students’ Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes." 283-4.} St Ursula’s has a unique geographical setting and the school could explore how its proximity to the ocean and many nearby islands could provide unique opportunities for students from rural regions. The Queensland secondary school curriculum has flexibility for the school, because of its locality, to engage in academic pursuits in such areas as ocean eco-systems. This could be a unique advantage offered by the school, in addition to its proximity to the ocean being a recreational plus for boarders.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to further research and learning by enhancing St Ursula’s understanding of its unique history. I have gathered documentary evidence from public and church archives not previously assembled in the school’s 100 years of existence. Oral history interviews and transcripts have unearthed memories, unique and intangible, of other times in the life of the school. The oral history process conducted for this thesis could model an ongoing project conducted by the
school for public record. There were also exercise books, photos and report cards submitted for this research from private collections of student's descendants, with the owner's intention that they become part of a public-school archive.\textsuperscript{11} This is valuable school historical data not previously archived at St Ursula's. My discovery of the register of enrolments for the first forty years of boarders and day students in the Rockhampton diocesan archives, yielded valuable data about the historical and social contexts of life in the central west of Queensland for much of the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Further exploration is needed into how a thoroughly researched school history can become a dynamic instrument of primary source material and become integrated into many curriculum areas across the secondary school. Archivist, Jane Dyer of Presbyterian Ladies College Melbourne (PLC) established in 1875, has assembled archive resources similar to the resources assembled for this study. Students and past students at PLC can make personal discoveries, decisions and interpretations about their school's history and their place within the local, national and global context as they engage with the primary source material.\textsuperscript{12} Similarly, this history of St Ursula's could be made available for public reference.

Into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, St Ursula's is one of five secondary day/boarding schools, either single sex or co-educational, in central Queensland. The geographic isolation is no longer a determining factor in the decision to send children from home and family for much of their childhood. The convent boarding school is now a matter of choice by Catholics and by a wider, non-churched population for social prestige, quality teaching, human values, discipline and pastoral care. In 2018, St Ursula's is a Catholic secondary day and boarding school administered entirely by lay people. The school's population is just over 380 girls, of which fifty-two are boarders, including Indigenous Australian girls.

\textsuperscript{11} Cooper, "Interview." Margaret Cooper's family archive contained an extensive record of the history of four Whitwell children who attended St Ursula's from 1917.

Concluding reflections

When Edward Elgar composed Sea Pictures (Appendix 1) in 1899, the sea still represented the great unknown, navigable only in frail ships. Elgar’s chosen texts often relate to the dichotomy of fear and fascination held for the sea. This thesis addressed, in the history of St Ursula’s (1918-1998) something of the fear and fascination experienced by the Presentation Sisters who founded a convent boarding school in an isolated fishing village near the end of World War I. Fear and fascination was also experienced by students who left isolated and remote families for schooling in a seaside settlement. The words of Elgar’s second song, written by his wife, Caroline, summarise poetically the faith dimensions behind the work of the Presentation Sisters and the families who sent their daughters away for boarding school education. Importantly, the words summarise the fear and fascination for girls, some as young as five years of age, as they left home for school and life, far away. The sentiment in the song hints at the conviction that ‘together we can face anything’.

2. In Haven

Closely let me hold thy hand, Storms are sweeping sea and land: Love alone will stand. Closely cling, for waves beat fast, Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast; Love alone will last. Kiss my lips, and softly say: Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day; Love alone will stay. (Appendix 1)
Appendices

Appendix 1 Sea Pictures song

Elgar, Edward: *Sea Pictures*, op 37

I. Sea Slumber Song (Roden Noel)

II. In Haven (Capri) (C. Alice Elgar)

III. Sabbath Morning at Sea (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

IV. Where Corals Lie (Dr. Richard Garnett)

V. The Swimmer (Adam Lindsay Gordon) \(^1\)

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Appendix 2 Glossary

Nuns and sisters: Religious orders of women who took solemn vows were termed nuns and were bound by a rule of enclosure or clausura dating back to the 5th century ascetic practises in the church. Their charitable works and life of prayer were conducted only within the monastery walls and entry within the convent was restricted to a parlour or reception room only. Other women’s movements founded after the 12th century were given church approval to perform their charitable works outside the monastery and were known as Congregations or Institutes. These communities were bound by a rule of life under simple vows of a commitment to celibacy within an independent life-style. They formed local communities of sorores or sisters.²

Choir and Lay sisters in religious orders: Until 1952 there were in effect two communities living in the one convent known as ‘choir’ sisters and ‘lay’ sisters. The presence of the lay sisters stems from the Middle Ages and the incorporation of servants into the monastic domain as a form of religious life. The ‘choir’ sisters were the noble and educated members of a religious community and engaged in an institute’s external apostolate. The Queensland foundation of the Presentation Sisters led by Ursula Kennedy in 1912 discontinued the practice of accepting candidates as lay sisters and established the one category of choir sisters.³

The convent high school: The convent ‘high’ school as an initiative of female religious women educators had emerged during the Counter-Reformation, especially in France for the formal education of girls. With the spread of printing and the more ready availability of multiple copies of texts, more general education became a marked demand for the new religious reform movements. In France this move was a particular thrust of Calvinism. Influential in the spread of more available education for women was the example of the education model for boys developed by the Jesuits founded in 1540. Noted foundresses of convent boarding schools in 16th century France consciously based their curriculum in high school education for

² MacGinley, A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia. 25.
³ Ibid.
girls on the Jesuit educational model (ratio studiorum). Pioneers among these were the Baroness de Lestonnac in Bordeaux who in 1606 initiated her Company of Mary Our Lady and Madame de Sainte-Beuve who founded her distinctive Ursuline community in Paris in 1610.

**The French Ursuline style of education - elite convent boarding schools:** In 17th century France purpose-built dormitories and classrooms were added to the monastic complex within its enclosure and a graded syllabus was implemented. The monastic enclosure continued to be regarded as the ideal educational environment. Over time, there developed a more varied curriculum reflecting contemporary educational developments and they spread this essentially French-influenced construct to Catholic populations in English-speaking countries. The French-style of education in convent high schools in Ireland was modified in the later part of the 19th century by the more pragmatic and examination-oriented thrust of English developments in the education of women. The boarding fees in convent high schools were expensive hence the term ‘elite’ was applied to convent boarding schools. They were opened in Australia by religious and secular agencies to provide further education for women able to act as leaders in their local society.

**The select schools:** A further innovation to the convent high school model in Ireland was to introduce separate pay day classes for non-boarders where education was provided for a humbler social class that could not afford the boarding fees. These select schools provided a less extensive curriculum than the French-style education but made available secondary tuition. Both the convent boarding school and select day school models were forerunners of the modern secondary school in early 20th century Australia.

**The petites écoles:** The petites écoles were the parish based schools introduced by the Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation to educate children in the truths of the faith. Religious communities of women in branches of the Ursulines in Italy and later France conducted some of these schools initially in church buildings. The model of the poor school for destitute children was adopted by the Presentation, Charity and Mercy Institutes of women religious in Ireland who did not enter the field.
of upper-class education initially but later developed instead the select pay day school and the elementary poor schools. The education of girls was progressively enriched in the developments of the select convent high schools in Ireland. The 'poor' school became the model of the parish primary school adopted by religious institutes in Australia in the late 19th century where families paid very low fees or in some cases even the small fee was waived. Thus the three levels of elite, select and poor schools served social divisions in a European society becoming established in Australia where the demarcations of class were virtually insurmountable. From the early 20th century the process of the democratisation of education began to facilitate more broadly based inter-class mobility.

**Pennies, shillings and pounds:** There are twelve pennies (d) in one shilling (s) and twenty shillings in one pound. In 1966, one pound was equal to two dollars.

**Queensland geographical dimensions:** Land mass of 174 million hectares; twelve times the size of England and Wales with only 2.2 million hectares in private hands.⁴

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Appendix 3 Letter to potential interviewees

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: A history of St. Ursula's Yeppoon, 1918-1998

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mrs. Maree Ganley

PROGRAMME ENROLLED: PhD

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a project which I am currently undertaking. The project involves writing a history of the Catholic girls’ day and boarding college, St. Ursula’s Yeppoon. I am hoping to write a history which reflects not only what happened there, in a chronological sense, but also what it was like to attend this college. As there are not many boarding colleges left in Australia it is important to record the history of St. Ursula’s, and especially what it was like for students and teachers who attended it and what that experience means to them now.

To write this history, I am contacting former students and teachers in the hope that you will be willing to participate in some interviews with me. The interviews that I plan to conduct with you as former student or teacher are unstructured in that I invite participants to talk about their experience of being at St. Ursula’s. I emphasize that you are free to begin telling the story of your experience from wherever you choose. I will seek permission from you to audio tape the interview and to take notes and it should take about two hours. The transcripts from the interview will be made available after the interview so that you are able to modify any content you may wish. I wish to emphasize that you are free to refuse consent to participate altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason. The record of your experience will be an important element in this study, and if there is any part of the story that you wish to contribute as an anonymous participant you will be awarded a substitute identifier so that confidentiality is maintained to your satisfaction. Every effort will be maintained to ensure that that are no foreseen risks during your participation in this study.

I am also seeking any materials you have which could be relevant to the study, such as letters you wrote home, school reports, samples of school work, photographs, etc. If you have any such material that you wish to contribute, I would of course be willing to copy it and return it to you. Your stories and memorabilia will be essential elements of the completed study and you are able to indicate during the interview any content you do not wish to be included.

This history will form the basis of my doctoral studies being undertaken at the Australian Catholic University, Brisbane Campus. I hope that the history will be a contribution to the community of former students and teachers whether religious or lay, as well as to those interested in the history of education in Australia.
Included you will find the consent form. You are invited to request appropriate feedback on the results of the study from myself or the Principal Supervisor. Electronic access to the thesis is eventually made available through the ACU Library system accessible on the ACU website.

Any questions regarding this study may be directed to the Principal Supervisor:
Dr Marguerite Nolan
Deputy Head (QLD) National School of Arts/Faculty of Education and Arts
ACU Campus, Brisbane
Ph. 0736237182
Marguerite.Nolan@acu.edu.au

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. As a participant you are invited to write to the Chair of the human Research Ethics Committee if you have any query that the Supervisor or myself as Researcher have not been able to satisfy. The contact details are:

Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Campus
PO Box 456
Virginia QLD 4014
Tel: 07 36237429
Fax: 07 36237328

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in the study, would you please sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me as researcher.

...........................................................................................................................................................................................................................
(Supervisor) ...........................................................................................................................................................................................................................
Researcher
CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep


SUPERVISOR: Dr. Marguerite Nolan

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mrs. Maree Ganley

I................................................... (The participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants Form in the above-named research study and have discussed it with the researcher Maree Ganley. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this interview/focus group process for the agreed length of time required and for the meeting to be recorded. I agree that research data collected for the study in a form that may identify me, may be published but that confidentiality will be preserved by restricted access only to those involved in the work of the thesis. Also, I am free to indicate that any archival material I am invited to submit for the study may be kept anonymous.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ............................................................................................................................

SIGNATURE........................................
DATE..................................

SUPERVISOR: 
DATE: 
(And, if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER: ........................................................................................................................
DATE:
Appendix 4 Ethics approval from Australian Catholic University

| Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Marguerite Nolan Brisbane Campus |
| Co-Investigators: Brisbane Campus |
| Student Researcher: Maree Ganley Brisbane Campus |

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
Suspect stories from a convent boarding school: A history of St. Ursula's College a Catholic Girls' Boarding School at Yeppoon on the Central Coast of Queensland

for the period: 22/09/2011-31/12/2012
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: C2011 61

Special Conditions of Approval
Prior to commencement of your research, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the ACU HREC:
Presentation Congregation of religious sisters (received)

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007) apply:

(i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a Final Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an Annual Progress Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary.

date of the ethics approval.
Signed: .......................................................... Date: 22/09/2011.
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

L:\Public Relations\C2011 61\Approval Formbris.doc
## Appendix 5 Study interviewees

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<td>Bishop of Rockhampton</td>
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*Male or Female
Note: some boarders and day pupils also became teachers
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