

HISTORY OF METHODIST STATE AIDED INDIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

From very sketchy records and information it seems that this school was started in the year 1890 with about twenty pupils.

It all emanated from the missionary spirit of the early English Methodists from the Metropolitan Church, Chapel Street, Pietermaritzburg. Missionary work amongst the first Indians had already started and preaching in street corners, at the lower end of Church Street, was the order of the day. And at this time there emerged a colourful figure from Madras, India. By some good fortune he broke away from the Anglican Church and offered his services free to the early English Methodists to interpret the English language in Tamil to the Indian Listener in street corners.

He was no other than the late Mr John Thomas who subsequently became a minister. He was very well educated in the Tamil language and had a fair knowledge of English. He had a strong personality and commanded a great deal of respect from both the Europeans and the Indians.

According to records he was the first Principal. His one classroom was made of wood and iron. The Metropolitan Methodist Church provided some furniture which he converted to benches and desks. His work was to teach for five days in the week and preach on Sundays to his flock which was rapidly increasing. The school was then called the Wesleyan Indian School but his many pupils, and some of them are still living, it was called "John Thomas School."

As numbers increased at the school, Mr John Thomas, with the financial help from the English Methodists, added several more classrooms. At this time the school was the hub of all community activity. He was still the "Vathirara" and not the "Padre" which he later became.

When the Thomas Street Church was built in 1897, this wood and iron structure, with several classrooms, was solely used as a school and it was situated on the present playground.

It is not clear whether Mr John Thomas still continued teaching after being ordained. However the newly ordained minister Rev. John Thomas resigned as Principal in 1918 to take up full time ministry. He was succeeded in the same year by his son-in-law, the late Mr Vincent Vinden.

Many pupils who were under him have high praise for his leadership and enthusiasm. Mr Vincent Vinden is still remembered by his many pupils. He was transferred to Mount Edgecombe Indian School in 1926 and was succeeded by the late Mr Vincent George of Darnall.

Mr Vincent George assumed duty on the 5th October 1926. He endeavoured as much as possible, to cope with the arduous work of a Principal. It was during his Principalship that the old structure erected by Rev. John Thomas came down and was replaced by a double-storey building. The names that stand out in the building of the new school in 1935 are Rev. L.S.H. Wilkinson (Superintendent Minister), Rev. A.E.F. Garrett (School Manager), Rev. A.J. Choonoo (Resident Minister) and Mr Vincent George, the Principal. The cost of the building was made up as follows - $\frac{1}{3}$ was raised from public donations; $\frac{1}{3}$ of the value was a grant from the N.P.A. and $\frac{1}{3}$ of it was a loan from the M.C.O. which was to be repaid over 30 years. Mr Vincent George retired on the 14th December 1939 and was succeeded by the present and last Principal Mr M.G. Daniels.

He took office as Principal, on 28th January 1940 and has continued to date. Under the Principalship of Mr M.G. Daniels there has been much transformation in Indian Education. In 1943 all aided-school employees were taken over by the Natal Provincial Administration and received the same salaries as their counterparts in the Government Schools. In 1966 the Indian Affairs Department took over all Indian Schools and this has brought about a tremendous change for the better. The standard of education has reached new heights and is still going up. There has also been big improvements in the salary scales.

Mr M.G. Daniels was responsible in building several additions to the school in the form of storerooms, Caretaker's quarters and extra toilet facilities. He also liquidated the debt owing to the M.C.O. by means of having school concerts.

From an enrolment of 20 pupils in 1890 the last pupil to be enrolled carries the admission number 5623 as reflected in the school records.

Several doctors, hundreds of teachers, many principals, one advocate, two superintendent ministers and hundreds of successful businessmen have passed through this school. One of the most prominent being the late Mr P.R. Pather, Chairman of the South African Indian Council.

in 1973

Though this school will shortly be demolished, and will only remain a dream, it will, however, still live in the memory of all those who benefitted from it.