

William John Carney



"W. Jack Carney" was the Head Teacher at St Albans East Primary School #4714 for twelve years from 1957 to 1968. Locally, he was more commonly known as Bill Carney. He was the first Permanent Head Teacher of the school, but he was not the first Head Teacher there, as that was Noel Pruden who was appointed as Temporary Head Teacher in 1956 and established the school.

Carney's full name was William John Carney. He was born in 1907 at St Arnaud, Victoria, to William Henry Carney and Ada Catherine Bray. They had settled in "Balla Callan" in Riverside Avenue, Mildura, and became fruit growers. They raised a large family of eight girls and three boys, born between 1897 and 1918.

Catherine Bray's heritage goes back to 1839 in St. Austell, Cornwall, England; William Henry Bray (born in 1839) emigrated prior to 1860 and married Sarah Schuard/Shueard in South Australian in 1860. Ada Bray was their daughter.

The Carney heritage goes back to 1797 in Ireland; William Henry Carney emigrated prior to 1856 and married Catherine Sarah Stanton/Staunton at St Francis Church in Melbourne in 1856. William John Carney was their grandson.

Bill Carney's early teaching career is difficult to confirm precisely as there may have been another teacher named W J Carney working from the 1920s, and there are several men named William John Carney listed in ancestry records. W J Carney moved between schools quite regularly, which was a normal practice for young teachers looking for promotion opportunities. Sometimes they might stay for only one or two years before moving on.

Bill Carney probably started his teaching career in the late 1920s when he was aged about 20 – there was a William J Carney who obtained his Trained Primary Teachers Certificate at Ballarat Teachers College in 1927.¹

Country schools at the time were often small, single-teacher schools, so it's quite possible that the Head Teacher was young. W J Carney was in charge of Narrena East State School (Gippsland) from about 1930 before transferring to Benetook (Mildura) Wimmera in 1933.² In 1936 he was Head Teacher at Toolamba State School (Shepparton).³

In 1937 W J Carney graduated from Melbourne University with a Bachelor of Arts degree.⁴ He would have been teaching for a decade and was now aged about 30. He was active in Toolamba:

"A very large crowd was present at the Memorial Hall when the State School Committee, led by the head master (Mr. W. J. Carney) held a fancy dress ball. The children, in various types of fancy dress, made quite a pretty sight; in fact, the judges, Mesdames W. E. Green and E. J. Sullivan, had a difficult task in choosing the winners. The children and adults danced in turn to music supplied by Mrs. B. Cummins and Miss A. Alexander (piano), Messrs W. J. Carney (violin) L. Ludlow (saxophone), and A. Cross (cornet), and spent a very enjoyable evening. After supper had been served, Mr. Carney announced the prize-winners and presented the prizes."⁵

In 1938 Carney was upgrading his teaching qualifications with a Diploma of Education as he had been selected to take a free course at Melbourne University.⁶ He was promoted to fill the vacancy at Lara. During this time he completed his first year B.Ed. examinations at Melbourne University. He did not stay long in Lara as in 1939 he moved to Noojee (Gippsland) where he stayed till 1941.⁷

¹ Argus 18 January 1927 p8

² Sun News Pictorial 24 August 1933 p23

³ Sun News Pictorial 7 August 1936 p17

⁴ Herald 10 April 1937 p10

⁵ Shepparton Advertiser 30 Aug 1937 p3

⁶ Sun News Pictorial 11 February 1938 p52

⁷ Age 29 August 1938 p14

In 1941 William John Carney married Eva Dorothea May McLachlan. Eva was born in Seymour, Victoria, to Reginald Melville McLachlan and Marion "May" Eliza Vearing. Reginald Melville McLachlan was born in 1886 in Sale to Robert Stewart/Stuart McLachlan and Emily Parkin. The McLachlan heritage goes back to 1830 in Perthshire County, Scotland. Marion "May" Eliza Vearing was born in 1890 in Seymour to Alfred Vearing and Mary Jane Knapsy. The Vearing ancestry goes back to 1866 in Avenel, Victoria.

Bill and Eva Carney were on the move in the 1940s, mostly in the country. In 1942 Carney was promoted to BeeAc in the Western District⁸ but by 1946 he and Eva were at Sandringham. By 1947 Carney was promoted to Highton (Geelong).⁹ In 1949 William John Carney teacher and Eva Dorothea Carney were at Marysville (Healleville). His next appointment was to Portland on the Victorian south-west coast.¹⁰

William John Carney (B.A.) obtained his Bachelor of Education at Melbourne University in 1951.¹¹ He was based at Portland and was initiating some outreach work with teenage boys:

"From W. J. Carney, secretary Boy Scouts' Committee, asking that a public meeting be convened to evolve some plan to solve the problem of adolescent boys making a nuisance of themselves round streets after hours of work."¹²

"Youth Guidance Committee - The Committee appointed by the public meeting held on Tuesday, 27th November, 1951, has met on three occasions. The Mayor (Cr. A. J. Thomas) was appointed Chairman of the Committee, with Mr. W. J. Carney as Vice chairman, and the Rev. D. W. Risstrom as Honorary secretary."¹³

A more prestigious recognition of his social standing was when he was asked to assist in preparations for the Royal Visit, when in 1951, Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II) and Prince Philip made their first visit to Victoria:

Strongposts have been allocated to district municipalities for the Royal Visit in March, and details of the proposed arrangements have been forwarded to the Council. concerned, together with a plan of the town showing the route of the Royal Procession. ... Mr. W. J. Carney, of the Portland School, is to take charge of the singing of school children at Hanlon Park. He had called to discuss the matter, and the Portland Band has been asked if it would play the accompaniment for the singing. Mr. Carney agreed to procure the necessary music from the Education Department.¹⁴

In 1954 William John and Eva Dorothea were back in Sandringham, so their country sojourns might to have ended. They had a teenage son and maybe his secondary schooling required some stability.

Carney started as Head Teacher at St Albans East State School in 1957, and this appointment appears to have been his longest to date, staying for over a decade. Nick Szwed recalls that Carney was excited when he applied for the St Albans school as it was in Station Avenue, which he assumed was near the railway station and therefore close to public transport; he was disappointed when he discovered there was no close connection. According to Alex Stojkovic, Carney drove a shiny black Wolseley car to school. The family later moved to St Albans. Mrs Carney also had a close connection with the school as she worked in the canteen. Nothing is documented about her locally.

St Albans in the 1950s was experiencing a rapid population growth that was reflected in the student enrolments. At the first intake in 1956 there were 370 children from 23 countries. By 1968 the school population had tripled and was over 1,000 pupils. The St Albans populace had grown even faster, from 5,500 in 1956 to 20,000 in 1968 when Carney left. He was such an effective and popular leader that the school had become known as "Carney's School".

⁸ Age 13 May 1942 p5

⁹ Sun News Pictorial 23 May 1947 p24

¹⁰ Argus 20 May 1950 p43

¹¹ Age 9 April 1951 p9

¹² Portland Guardian 19 November 1951 p3

¹³ Portland Guardian 17 January 1952 p3

¹⁴ Portland Guardian 17 January 1952 p3



Bill Carney with St Albans East Primary fife and drum band 1960s

In the 1960s William John Carney and Eva Dorothy Carney were living at 89 Walmer Avenue, St Albans. They had had one child, a son Shane Lachlan, who was born in the early 1940s. In 1967 Shane Lachlan Carney was listed at 87 Walmer Avenue, St Albans. Elaine McNeill (whose mother Lorna Cameron was on the Mothers' Club committee) confirms that William and Eva Carney's son was named Shane. He studied medicine and graduated from Melbourne University in 1968. He married Ann Patricia and they were living in Balwyn by 1972. They were in New South Wales in the 1980s and Shane's career moved into academic and research realms through the University of Newcastle.

After living and working in St Albans for 12 years, from 1957 to 1968, Bill and Eva Carney left St Albans for Rosebud.

Eva Dorothea Carney nee Mclachlan died at Rosebud in 1972 at age 60 years, possibly of cancer. A memorial service was held for her at Springvale Botanical Cemetery in June 1972.



In 1980 William John Carney married Ellen Keene. Ellen Anne "Nancy" Keene was born in 1911 in Spencers Wood, Berkshire, England, and emigrated in 1912 as a toddler with her parents, Ben Keene and Nellie Kathleen Morris. Nancy married Gough Armstrong in 1936 and they had a daughter Elaine June. Nancy married Percy Cerruty in 1958; he was the Melbourne fitness guru of his generation in the 1950s and 1960s, and died in 1977 at age 80. Nancy married William John Bill Carney about 1980 and they settled in Sorrento.

William John "Jack" Carney died in 1993 at age 86 years and was cremated at Springvale Botanical Cemetery, Greater Dandenong City.

Nancy Carney nee Keene died in Sorrento in 2015 at 104 years.

Remembering Bill Carney

Nick Szwed – Carney encouraged students to study music and assembled several bands over the years, some with just fifes and then extending them with piccolos and even drums and cymbals. I recall one time when Mr Carney was supervising the kids going onto a bus for an excursion and I wouldn't go onto the bus. Mr Carney sternly asked me why I was not going on. I told him that my Dad had just been laid off work and we couldn't afford sixpence for the excursion. He looked at me, paused, and just said "get on the bus". He was a good man.

John Payne – I had a lot of time for Mr. Carney, firm but fair. Mr. Carney came from Ireland, I believe. He was a tallish man who often appeared quite stern but was actually in deep thought, always positive to teachers and students. Unfortunately, I was once on the end of his barbers strap for fighting at school. Never had another fight after that. If you were a Milk monitor in those days, collecting the milk crates and bringing them to the classrooms you would be given some cushy tasks in his office occasionally. He was big on sport and expected students to participate in school teams. It was a good time in life at St Albans East Primary, made lifelong best friends there. In those days we were all the same regardless where we came from.

Daphne Iris – My mum worked in the canteen with Mrs Carney, she enjoyed those times.

Elaine Mcneil – I don't remember him being called Jack, my mum was a steadfast Mothers Club member through five children going there and he was always Bill Carney. I do remember him as the best principal ever! Never saw a better one in my student days or in 30 years of teaching. His son's name was Shane and I was told that after his wife died of cancer, Mr Carney married Percy Cerutti's widow. That might help in the search. Very kind man even to those who were not that good at fife!

John Pokorzynski – I remember Mr Carney. He did live in Walmer Avenue. Our house backed onto each other. We lived in View Street. A true gentleman. He had the greatest mulberry tree that I used to jump the fence and pick every summer. Both he and his wife were beautiful people.

Riccarda Purcell – I attended from 1960-66 and knew him as a very good principal, but you never wanted to be sent to his office for bad behaviour, as you would see another side of his personality.

Katarina Skec – I was in his band and played the fife. I remember the smell of his cigars to this day. I often think of him as a kind and fair teacher. But you always knew where he was because he loved that smell of the cigar for some reason.

Luana Courtney – I remember him. I was in both the fife band and the recorder band. We'd play the music after morning assembly and the students would march to their classes and we would be the last to march out.



Bill Carney with St Albans East Primary fife and drum band 1968



Bill Carney with St Albans East Primary fife and drum band 1968

Joseph Ribarow
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