“We commemorate a hundred and fifty years of our school's history and enter beneath the archway to the new century with optimism and courage. Thus, we celebrate the closing of the first book of cherished memories and the opening of the new volume of the great serial of life at the Wooragee Primary School.”
Today Wooragee is not more than a way stop with a School, Tennis Courts, Hall and Fire Station but once Wooragee was a thriving community with over 400 people, 100 of whom were Chinese, as well as a transient Aboriginal population. Wooragee was originally known as Woorajay which was a native word for Peppermint Tree. Wooragee consisted of a Post Office, Bakery, Butcher, General Store, Methodist, Catholic and Anglican Churches, School, Fire Brigade, Railway Station, Butter Factory, Tennis Courts, Cricket Field, Race Course and 9 hotels, (Rising Sun, Diggers Rest, Galloway, Billson's Magpie, Star, King's, Half Way, Junction and the Gap).

Wooragee has had a colourful history from pastoral squatters to miners and agriculture. Three bushrangers were executed for their cold blooded crimes in Wooragee. Through all of this, Wooragee School number 653 continued and has lasted for 150 years.

First school

On the 8th of April 1861, a public meeting was held at Billson's Magpie Hotel in Wooragee to discuss the lack of education in the district. Mr George Billson having taken the chair, stated that the reason for which the meeting was convened, was to consider the idea of establishing a school for the youth in the district. Rev
John K McMillan requested that immediate steps be taken in the formation of a school and the erection of a suitable building to serve the purpose of a school and a place to worship. Mr Werner offered a site for the proposed buildings on his land and his generous offer was accepted. By the end of the meeting a sum of £25 was donated towards the erection of the building and a committee was appointed to act with the Rev. John K McMillan in carrying out the necessary arrangements.

**The first school committee consisted of:**

- Rev John K McMillan
- George Edmondson
- George Graham
- William Drummond
- John Frazer
- John Graham
- John Wilson
- Frank Werner
- George Billson
- William Johnstone

On the first of November 1861 William Duthie was paid £86/10s by the National School Board for building a brick school house measuring 27ft x 16ft with a shingle roof. Thomas R. Crimes was appointed the first teacher
on the 12th of November 1861 and on the 24th of December, Benjamin Lomax was appointed as the first head teacher with a salary of £85/6s/11d paid by the government and £17/11s in school fees.

In 1862 all public schools in Victoria came under the Common School System run by the Board of Education and each school was given a number. Wooragee became known as school no. 653.

In 1863 the school attendance was 29 students, 10 boys and 19 girls. Their education consisted of Arithmetic, English, Latin, Singing, Sewing, Sport, Geography, Empire Studies and History.

In 1866, 2 acres of government land had been allocated as a school reserve opposite Factory Lane on the main Beechworth to Wodonga Rd. The brick school building and land on which it sat had been reclaimed by the owner of the land, hence a new building was required.

The new school building was built at a cost £60, raised by the Wooragee community. It measured 30ft x 15ft and was constructed of weatherboard with a shingle roof. George Graham, secretary of the school committee, wrote to the Education Board asking for a grant of £50 towards the completion of a three roomed teacher’s residence, constructed from slabs of timber lined with canvas and with a bark roof which cost a
further £19 15s which was paid by the Wooragee community.

While the new school was being built, the pupils were taught in an old shop on the corner of Edmondson Lane. This building was a slab structure with a dirt floor and bark roof and became known as the “Dusty School”.

On the 1st of August 1873, Wooragee became a state school with Sarah Slater as head teacher, but by 1874 there was a concern in the community that Sarah was unable to control the large number of children at the school, in particular the boys. As more and more children were absent, a letter was sent to all families asking why they were not sending their children to school.

An article which appeared in the Ovens and Murray Advertiser on the 3rd of August 1874 highlights the concern families had at the time.

Sir- We, the Inhabitants, many of whom have received notice of the non attendance of our children at the School, did hold a Public Meeting at which we resolved to lay our grievances before you.

1) That we have many times requested a male teacher be appointed to the school, as we have a number of boys who are beyond the control of a female teacher,
and our children are making no improvement in their learning.

2) That the School House is not fit for children to remain in the cold without running the risk of losing their health.

3) That to compel us to send our children under such circumstances is unjust in the extreme, more especially when we have so many times requested that a master was wanted for this school, which the number of children being eighty, we think our request should be complied with.

Sir, - We, the undersigned Inhabitants of Wooragee, respectfully request that you will lay the same before the Board of Education.

John Turner

Henry Poyntz.

William Elliott.

Thomas Elliott.

Robert Johnson

Charles Trappold.

Edward Morgan.

Martin Maloney

George Edmondson

John Frazer

Charles Thornton

Christian Heffernen

Henry Gale

Benjamin Horsefall
David Davies.                             David Murray
Richard Johnson.                        William Perkins
Thomas Parnaby                          Emily Johnson
Joshua Oldfield.                        William Ward
Richard Kain.                           John Roulston
Michael O’Brien.                        William Le Pouple
Denis Scanlan.                          William Brewer
Henry Morgan.                           Charles Morgan

John Wilson

Although controversy surrounded Sarah, she stayed as head teacher until the end of 1877. The Ovens and Murray wrote on the 22nd of December;

_We understand that Mrs Slater, who for some years has conducted the State School at Wooragee has been informed that her services would be dispensed with. We presume that Mrs Slater, who we have reason to believe has been very attentive to the education of the children of that location, has been otherwise provided for by the Education Department, otherwise a cruel injustice will have been done._
In 1877 a third school was built measuring 24ft x 16ft by John Hall, a local contractor, at a cost of £313/11s/6d. The previous three roomed school was converted into a residence for John Jennings the new head teacher at a cost of £32/10s. Due to the increasing number of students, a 20ft x 20ft extension was added to the school in December 1879 at a cost of £149/10s.

In 1884 the school was at its highest attendance with 92 students, 53 boys and 39 girls, all of whom were under the guidance of John Jennings as head teacher and Hannah Nall as a working mistress, Mary Jennings, a daughter of John, also worked as a pupil teacher until 1888.

On the 8th of August 1891 Thomas H. Townsend became head teacher, and as he had a large family, two new rooms were added to his residence at a cost of £160.

On the 8th of November 1898 the Ovens and Murray Advertiser reported on the Anniversary Celebration of the school.

*The annual picnic and distribution of prizes in connection with this school were carried out on Friday last, and proved fully pleasant and successful as is invariably the case with these celebrations, although the weather was somewhat unfavourable at times.*
The attendance, consequently, was not as numerous as in some previous occasions but all present enjoyed themselves thoroughly. There was the usual profusion and variety of eatables, provided by the parents, the ladies of Wooragee being famed for their culinary taste and ability. These were distributed with due attention to everyone's requirement by Madams Matthews, Vigneau, Nall, Turner, Townsend, and Misses Kain, Johnson, Arundel. During the day a number of sports, including foot races, were arranged, the program being ably carried out under the direction of Messrs Birtles, Brandy, Armstrong, Wilson, Brewer and Jeffery.

Results for the day:

Boys under 7 years
1st W. Armstrong
2nd A. Armstrong

Girls under 7 years.
1st J. Birtles
2nd K. De Campo

Boys under 10.
1st J. Birtles
2nd E. Townsend

Girls under 10.
1st J. Kelly
2nd L. Kelly
Boys under 13.  
1st W. Armstrong  
2nd W. Brandy  

Girls under 13.  
1st J. Birtles  
2nd F. Armstrong  

Boys under 16.  
1st J. Elliott  
2nd J. Kelly  

Girls under 16.  
1st E. Morgan,  
2nd N. Birtles  

Other activities on the day were, men’s race, young ladies’ race, married men’s race, married ladies’ race, boys’ Siamese race, men’s Siamese race, potato race, sack race, hop, step and jump, arithmetic race, ladies nail driving contest, three standing jump, boot race, backwards race, skipping race, spelling for past scholars and open spelling.

The school prizes were distributed by head master Townsend, each child receiving an award in the order of merit determined by the official result examination. Wooragee School had once again attained a high percentage, which has placed this school among the best organized and most successful in educational ability in the North Eastern District. The funds for the purchase
of prizes were collected by the pupils themselves by means of subscription cards, the total amount thus raised being £16. The most successful in this direction was Miss Nellie Birtles, with £3.13s.10d and Master Walter Maloney with £2.1s.6d.

The day’s amusement was followed with a concert in the evening with every satisfaction to all concerned.

The whole school sang ‘Australia for Ever’

First class (recitation) Mrs. Hen and her Family

First class (recitation) The Cats Tea Party

Second class (recitation) The Chick

Third class (recitation) The Mouse and the Cake

Third class (recitation) Which Loved Best

Six Class (dialogue) What I’d like to be

The festivities concluded with a dance in which about 40 couples participated with the utmost enjoyment until daylight.

Education Department Inspectors would visit the school throughout the year and their reports would cover all aspects of the school. One visit in 1904 commenced at
9.15am and finished at 5.30pm. There were written reports on the following areas:

Grounds, buildings, organisation, instructions, singing, extra subjects, discipline, teacher and records.

Empire Day was also celebrated in Wooragee, on the last school day before 24th May, Queen Victoria's Birthday. The school day began with the raising of the Union Jack and singing of God Save the Queen, followed by inspirational speeches by students and songs such as ‘The Maple Leaf Forever’ and ‘Just Before’. The celebration would finish with a picnic, bonfire and fireworks.

On Empire Day 1905, the head teacher Thomas Townsend was preparing a boiling cauldron of tea with a view to serving the children before they left. Freda, Thomas’ 4 year old daughter, fell into the cauldron of boiling water where she received 3rd degree burns. Freda was taken to Beechworth where she died the following day.

Townsend stayed as head teacher until 1908.

In 1908 Education Department Inspectors reported on the agricultural plots started at the school under the guidance of head teacher John Grant. The school timetable chose agriculture over science. Grant was
very passionate about showing the children the importance of agriculture, and would often enter the produce of the school pupils in local shows, winning many awards in both Beechworth and Yackandandah and in 1911, in the Royal Melbourne Show.

The following is an essay written by Colin Bray, a pupil at Wooragee School in 1928, using a steel pen and an inkwell set in the hole in the front of his desk. Colin was then 11 years old.

Colin and his brother Lindsay were wards of the state and lived with Alex Edmondson and his family.

**EARLY DAYS IN WOORAGEE**

“In the early days Wooragee was part of a run known as “Reid’s Run”. Reid’s Run joined Mackey’s Run, one point of the boundary being at the large rocks known as the Three Sisters near Woolshed. Reid’s Run extended though Wooragee to the gap leaving the basin.

In the fifties and sixties, after the gold rush to Beechworth and Yackandandah districts, settlers began to take up land at Wooragee. (Mining was still carried out along the creeks).
Amongst the earliest settlers were Dr. Gemmell, Messers C. Morgan, J. Fraser, B. Edmondson, Drummond, J. and B. Graham, Wilson, Smith, R. Johnson, De Vigreas, W. Le Pouple and D. Mitchell.

Agricultural and pastoral pursuits were engaged in.

At this time Wooragee was a busy place. Coaches ran regularly between Beechworth and Albury. Beechworth, at this time being the principal town in the North East, had large cattle markets which attracted buyers from the surrounding districts, and even from New South Wales. For this and other reasons there was a good deal of traffic though Wooragee.

Through the end of the fifties the Star Hotel was built by Mr J. A. Wallace and another was built by Mr Billson, Hon Billson’s father.

In the sixties a small store and bakery was opened not far from where the store now stands. Soon after the store was moved to the site it presently occupies. A Post Office was opened.

In the seventies Wooragee was visited by bushrangers. Three men, Smith, Brady and White, came across country from the Chiltern district. They visited the store and so frightened the store keeper’s wife that she
died shortly after. The bushrangers then went on to the Hotel on the road. Shots were fired and the proprietor was killed. The men escaped but were afterwards captured near Chiltern.

Also, in the early days, Wooragee was often visited by Blacks, King Billy and his tribe from the Kiewa district. It is believed that their object was partly to look for Bogong moths which are said to have been found here at certain times.”

The first Wooragee Christmas concert was held on the 16th of December 1937. The children first gave a concert which was followed by the arrival of Santa Claus. The school was decorated with streamers which gave it a festive air and the big fir tree was fully decorated by all the district children. As head mistress Patricia Nash had received her notice of transfer, Bert Nankervis took the opportunity of congratulating Miss Nash on the children's performance and wished her all the best on behalf of the school community, after which the children partook in supper. The rest of the evening was given over to the adults and dancing was enjoyed until the early hours of the morning.

In 1942 head teacher Doris Tyack refused to allow the school to be used for war time fundraising, which upset the local community, as many Wooragee residents were
in the armed services. Some believed her to be a Pacifist and others a Communist, but no matter what they said, nothing would change her decision. All war time fundraising was carried out in the Methodist Church adjacent to the school.

In 1949 Bernard Ryan became head teacher but by 1951 the attendance had fallen to 6 pupils and the school closed and did not reopen until February 1953 under the head teacher Ian Scott, at a cost of £400.

On the 9th of October 1955 a meeting was convened by Mr H. Poyntz and held at the School, to talk about the need for electricity for the district. After several years of lobbying, electricity was connected in 1957. The official turning on happened at the school on the 30th of August 1957, with Parliamentary representatives and Councillor Sinclair from the Beechworth Shire. Mrs. C.E Payne (the local postmistress) was asked to perform the actual switching on ceremony. The evening finished in good Wooragee style with a bush dance and supper.

In the 1960’s the pupils numbered less than 10 and by 1962 the old school buildings and residence had fallen into disrepair and were believed to be below the standard set by the Education Department for a safe learning environment. The district architect decided that the old buildings had reached the end of their
usefulness, which resulted in the building being condemned. So after almost 100 years and 3 generations of students, the old weatherboard buildings were demolished, the residence in 1968 and the school in 1972. A new portable classroom was transported to take the place of the larger building.

The 3rd January 1962 saw the beginning of the centenary celebration of education in Wooragee. Mr Peter Dinsdale head teacher and Bert Nankervis President of the School Committee and their hard working committee made this a successful day. At 11am a former teacher, Mr. Lyle Potts, rang the school bell to bring both students and former pupils together. Many people dressed for the occasion in suitable school day clothes, however the Fanning family who took the prize, were in the limelight when young “Johnni Kettle” arrived late with a note which stated: “The pet cow died and we had to skin it so mum could cook it for tea”.

When the roll was called many of the crowd of 200 stated their name, current address and the year they began at the school. Mrs Margaret Mortlock née Edmondson from Wodonga had the honour of being the oldest former student starting at the school in 1878. Other students included Peter Birtles 1890, and his brother Jack 1891, Albert Elliott 1892 and George French in 1896.
In the spirit of the celebrations, a commemorative archway was erected over the main gate and was unveiled by Mr W. B. Frankling the District Inspector, who gave recognition to both past and present families in Wooragee.

“To those pioneers who showed the foresight and drive necessary for the establishment of a school for their children in the young settlement a hundred years ago.

To all the pupils whose footsteps, voices and laughter have blessed the school rooms.

To the long list of teachers who have borne the torch of knowledge here.

To all the parents and citizens who have been such an integral part of the school communities for a hundred years and, to the worthy men and women who are fostering its welfare now.

We, who are gathered this day, pay the highest tribute.

We commemorate a hundred years of our school's history and enter beneath the archway to the new century with optimism and courage. Thus, we celebrate the closing of the first book of cherished memories and the opening of the new volume of the great serial of life at the Wooragee School.
We honour our forebears; their example is ours in aspiration for the future.

This attractively designed and neatly erected entrance marks the celebration of a century of education in Wooragee. I now unveil the 1862 - 1962 Wooragee Centenary Gateways.”

The afternoon finished with the planting of the official trees in the mile long straight line of pin oaks trees. Each tree bears the names of every man, woman and child living in Wooragee. Other activities included a tennis tournament, best decorated bike, guessing the weight of the sheep and the crowning of the Centenary Queen won by Mary French at the Centenary Ball. The celebrations had the support of the whole Wooragee community.

In 1989, Wooragee School established the first junior Land Care group in Australia, winning several State awards, as well as the National Land Care Education Awards (presented by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in Canberra).

In the 1990's the school faced closure due to low enrolments and became annexed to Yackandandah State School until 2000 when it de-annexed and once again became a standalone school, under the guidance of Principal Sherril Hodgens.
In 2011 the school buildings were again demolished and by 2012, in time for the 150th anniversary, a new school complete with 3 classrooms, project space, library and a purpose built Stephanie Alexander Kitchen and dining hall was completed under a Rural School Replacement Program, Building Education Revolution and school funds.

Today, under the guidance of Principal Christine Varker, there are 23 students. The school conducts a weekly Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program and provides individualised, relevant and unique learning opportunities for each child. Visiting teachers for library, art, Spanish, (gecko) fitness, dance and music support each child in their learning and social development. Children are also provided with an exceptional range of extracurricular opportunities ranging from Land Care and local environment programs; cluster school activities with other small local schools for excursions, sports days, arts performances, bike safety, life education van, responsible pet ownership, private music lessons for a variety of instruments and school camps which should see the Wooragee School enjoy another 150 years.
The Wooragee Song

Not many people in Wooragee
Not many people in Wooragee
   There is no pool
But there is a great school
   Right in the heart of Wooragee

There’s a creek down the back at Wooragee
There’s a creek down the back at Wooragee
   Where the water flows
   And we get wet toes
When we are doing water watch at Wooragee

The Pin Oaks are tall in Wooragee
The Pin Oaks are tall in Wooragee
The Pin Oaks are tall, As tall as any Wall
And the leaves fall off them all in Wooragee

There’s an Australian Flag at Wooragee
There’s an Australian Flag at Wooragee
   It Flaps in the breeze
   And it’s close to the trees
We are so proud of Wooragee
There is a fire brigade in Wooragee
There is a fire brigade in Wooragee
There’s a fire brigade
The sheds in the shade
And they drink lemonade in Wooragee

The kids are happy in Wooragee
The kids are happy in Wooragee
The kids are happy
Happy little Chappies
Happy little chappies in Wooragee

150 years old at Wooragee
150 years old at Wooragee
We still don’t have a pool But we have a new school
Everyone is welcome at Wooragee

So very, very proud of Wooragee
Very, Very proud of Wooragee

This song was written by Julie Larkin, Maree Missen and the children of Wooragee in 2010 & 2012
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Teachers</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Lomax</td>
<td>1862-1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Cooke</td>
<td>1863-1870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Slater</td>
<td>1873-1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Jenning</td>
<td>1878-1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Townsend</td>
<td>1891-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Grant</td>
<td>1908-1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Sipps</td>
<td>1914-1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Thomson</td>
<td>1915-1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Debney</td>
<td>1917-1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Warner</td>
<td>1919-1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Fealy (Woodman)</td>
<td>1927-1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Phillips</td>
<td>1927-1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret McDonald</td>
<td>1931-1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Nash</td>
<td>1936-1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frieda Schneeberger (Stevens)</td>
<td>1937-1937</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alan Smith</td>
<td>1937-1940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Nankervis</td>
<td>1940-1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doris Tyack</td>
<td>1942-1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart Dawson</td>
<td>1944-1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice Castles</td>
<td>1948-1949</td>
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<td>Bernard Ryan</td>
<td>1949-1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian Scott</td>
<td>1953-1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor Waite</td>
<td>1958-1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Potts</td>
<td>1958-1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Dinsdale</td>
<td>1959-1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Walls</td>
<td>1963-1964</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Ellard</td>
<td>1964-1966</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrence Hill</td>
<td>1966-1969</td>
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<td>Guy Hansford</td>
<td>1969-1972</td>
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<td>Geoffrey Kerr</td>
<td>1972-1973</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Scales</td>
<td>1973-1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Witham</td>
<td>1974-1976</td>
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</table>
Stuart Reginald Barclay 1976-1982
Leonie Doody (O'Brien) 1982-1983
Neil Gladstone 1983-1985
Leona Hewitt 1985-1987
Andrew Woods 1987-1990
Lyn Brown Acting Principal for six months
Di Tyrell 1990 - 2000
  Wooragee Rural School annexed to Yackandandah PS
Barry Beechey 1990-2000
  School de-annexed
Sherril Hodgens 2000-2010
Christine Varker 2010-2012+