Western Cape Government
Education

EnviroNews

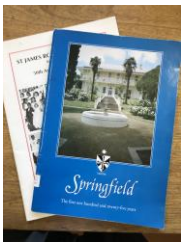
3/2017 September 2017

September is Heritage Month

Heritage is everybody's business. Everyone who reads this will have attended at least one school in their lifetime. Our schools have a proud history of providing education to their communities, and thereby shaping heritage. Yet their history often goes unrecorded. This issue of EnviroNews deals with:

Writing your school's history

Many schools already have a well-documented history. But there are others that do not. We would like to encourage all schools, whether they are **1 or 100 years old**, to write up their history. Some guidelines follow.



Why should you record your school's history?

1. It is really rewarding to discover your school's past.
2. It helps build a proud tradition.
3. It gives you cause to celebrate proud moments.
4. History is easily forgotten, especially the earlier past.
5. Every school is special and deserves to be written about; every school counts.

Who should write the history?

Anybody who is willing and has the time, which could include

- Past teachers, principals or learners;
- A parent; a member of the SGB or wider school community;
- A paid author.

Your school's founding date

Most schools know the date they started, but in the case of some, it is not so simple. Before the Department of Public Education was established, official school records were seldom kept and where there were, few have survived. Church school records can sometimes be found, with difficulty, in the archive of the particular church or diocese.

Also, schools are about more than statistical data; they are dynamic institutions that adapt constantly to the changing needs of their communities or the prevailing socio-political ideology. They change their names, location, function, language of tuition and curricula. They branch off into new schools when they grow; they amalgamate when numbers drop. They open their doors and sometimes are forced to close them. Some survive; some don't. Schools that survived the Group Areas Act and Forced Removals often became disconnected from their origins. We believe these schools have a right to reclaim their past. But if establishing your school's date is difficult, consider these points:

1. Take the earliest date from which there was continuous education linked to your school.
2. This means the history of your school's forerunners can be included and their contribution acknowledged.
3. High schools that have hived off from primary/public schools should consider taking the same date as the earlier school.
4. The same goes for a primary school that branched off from a college or high school.
5. When a school moves into a new building or changes its name, this does not mean it is a new school with a new date.
6. The date on the building is not necessarily the date of the founding of the school; it is often just the date of that building.

7. Schools that were forced to relocate or amalgamate with other schools due to the Group Areas Act have a unique challenge: mostly they pre-date 1950, and the amalgamated schools all have different founding dates.

We are happy to advise schools on this where we can, but if there is uncertainty about the date, the final decision always rests with the school.

Where to find the school's founding date and other information:

Secondary Sources

1. School magazines **(at the School)**;
2. Previously recorded history **(School)**;
3. Book written about the School;
4. Books on the history of your town/suburb **(Public Library)**.

Warning: if an error in documenting the school's history was made early on, secondary sources tend to replicate the mistake like a virus. Primary sources are best if you are serious about accuracy, but are harder to come by.

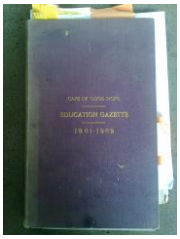
Centre for Conservation Education, 9 Aliwal Rd, 7800 Wynberg, Western Cape, South Africa
tel: +27 21 762 1622 fax: +27 21 762 8690 admin@centreforconservation.co.za www.facebook.com/centreforconservationeducation

Western Cape Government
Education

EnviroNews
3/2017 September 2017

Primary Sources

5. Correspondence, Attendance & Admissions Registers **(School)**;
6. Photographs **(School; local museum; past pupils; Facebook groups)**;
7. Your school building (especially if it is pre 1920s): the architecture, the architect, Foundation Stone;
8. Minutes of SGB (School Committee) meetings **(School)**;
9. Church records, especially for ex mission schools **(Church or church archives)**;
10. Education Gazettes (1901-1920s): Quarterly Statistical Returns **(National Library of SA; Centre for Conservation Education)**;



11. Government Blue Books (pre-1870): Educational Statistical Returns **(National Library of SA; Government Publications of the libraries at UCT, Stellenbosch University & UWC)**;
12. Local School Board records **(Western Cape Archives & Records Services)**;
13. Inspection Reports **(Government Publications at UCT; National Library of SA; Western Cape Archives and Record Services)**

14. Back issues of local newspapers **(Public Library; National Library of SA)**;
15. Box files on many but not all schools in the Western Cape **(Centre for Conservation Ed)**;
16. A growing electronic database with information on the founding and early histories of the older schools in the Western Cape **(Centre for Conservation Ed)**.

The role of oral history

Past learners and teachers can be a wonderful source of information. Not only will interviewing them verify facts you may already have, but it will add anecdotes and other interesting information you will not find in other sources. If your school has a Facebook page, invite past learners to answer specific questions about the school where you are needing information.

Putting it all together

1. The information must be logically set out & reader-friendly.
2. All historical information must be correct and verifiable.
3. Don't skimp on the history: it is all important.
4. Work chronologically: Start with an introduction: when, where, why the school was established (early history).
5. Give a good overview of the years: arrange in decades, or according to principals etc.
6. Mention teachers, principals and learners BUT: avoid the 'great men' stories that focus only on principals and sports achievers.
7. Write about interesting and/or controversial characters too!
8. Don't shy away from the school's dark periods; history that hurts.
9. List the achievements the school is proud of.
10. Don't forget extra-mural activities: clubs, sports, concerts, community projects, outings etc.
11. Include photos, maps, building plans, letters, reports, certificates etc – whatever you can find.
12. Include explanations of the school's motto and badge, and the school song.
13. Close with a summary of what the school has achieved; what it is doing now; what it still hopes to accomplish in the future.
14. List all sources in a bibliography.
15. Make it accessible to your community: put it on your school's website; give a print-out to your local public library; place a printed copy in the foyer and the School Library; or print it in book form to sell for school funds.
16. Keep extra information and original sources safe in a storage box. Consider starting your own museum with these items.
17. Keep collecting information so that you can update the history.

Please send an electronic version to the Centre.

In our Reference Library we keep hardcopy and electronic files (including pictures) on the histories of schools in the Western Cape. These are regularly consulted by other researchers.

Update your history annually:

Keep a record of everything that happens at your school in a year whether you produce an annual magazine or not. This way it won't be so difficult when someone has to write or update the history. Seen at Mountain Road Primary School: a flip-file on the Secretary's desk where teachers place items of interest. These are collated at the end of every term and so the School's history grows.

Greetings: Sigi, Anton, Mark, Natasha, Lynne & Andrea

Centre for Conservation Education, 9 Aliwal Rd, 7800 Wynberg, Western Cape, South Africa
tel: +27 21 762 1622 fax: +27 21 762 8690 admin@centreforconservation.co.za www.facebook.com/centreforconservationeducation