

The Cottage that Kids Built:

Jack's Mill School and the significance of architecture for progressive education in New Zealand in the late 1930s

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ABSTRACT: Even today, the tiny West Coast community of Kōtuku is difficult to find. In 1935, when Edward Darracott arrived to the position of sole teacher at Jack's Mill School, it must have felt very far removed indeed from the rest of New Zealand. Yet here, in what might be described as a Department of Education backwater, Darracott implemented an audaciously progressive educational experiment. Central to his teaching, Darracott embarked on two major projects with his students. The first (and in keeping with an interschool competition at that time) was the design and establishment of a garden. The second project would prove more ambitious. With responsibility for the planning and building passed to the students, Darracott initiated the construction on the school grounds of a three-quarter scale bungalow, complete with furnishings, running water and electricity. The "miniature bungalow" received national attention at the time, and survives today under the care of the Department of Conservation, but outside the interests of back-road tourists, Darracott's educational experiment remains largely neglected. This paper will provide an overview of Darracott's achievements in Kōtuku before focusing attention of the specific architectural interests he activated. This begins with the self-conscious civility on display in the garden, before moving on to the opportunities and consequences of domesticity at work with the cottage itself. Viewed in this way, it is hoped that the isolation of Darracott's achievement (geographically and educationally) will begin to be replaced by a well-informed alignment with international practices of the time. Moreover, it will be shown how these "radical pedagogies" saw architecture as a necessary - perhaps inevitable - tool of implementation.

Even today, the tiny West Coast community of Kōtuku is difficult to find. In 1935, when Edward Darracott arrived to the position of sole teacher at Jack's Mill School, it must have felt very far removed indeed from the rest of New Zealand. Yet here, in what might be described as a Department of Education backwater, Darracott implemented an audaciously progressive educational experiment. Central to his teaching, Darracott embarked on two major projects with his students. The first (and in keeping with an interschool competition at that time) was the design and establishment of a garden. The second project would prove more ambitious. With responsibility for the planning and building passed to the students, Darracott

initiated the construction on the school grounds of a child-sized bungalow, complete with furnishings, running water and electricity. The "miniature bungalow" received national attention at the time, and survives today under the care of the Department of Conservation, but outside the interests of back-road tourists, Darracott's educational experiment remains largely neglected. This paper will provide an overview of Darracott's achievements in Kōtuku, before focusing attention of the specific architectural interests he activated.

Born in 1904, Edward (Ted) Robert Darracott arrived at Kōtuku in 1935. At 31, he was at a point in his career where a senior role could

be anticipated, and it is probably that the distant location of Kōtuku provided leverage for an accelerated appointment. His background, to that point, could best be described as typical of the period. Through newspapers of the time his movement as a probational teacher through lower South Island schools can be traced (Musselburgh,¹ Matura,² Invercargill South³), leading to his appointment as head teacher at Jack's Mill

¹ "Appointments: Southland Education Board" (1925) p 95.

² "Appointments: Southland Education Board" (1929) p 78.

³ "Appointments: Southland Education Board" (1931) p 280.

School.⁴ Up to this point there is no indication of Darracott's exceptionalism, but in the following five years he embarked on two noteworthy ventures for the school. The first of these, begun almost immediately upon his arrival, was the establishment of a school garden. This, it should be noted, was in no way an innovative idea.

In 1936 the *Press*, reporting on "West Coast" news, carried the small story that the Kōtuku School Committee had applied for a grant to bitumen the garden paths. To which the Minister of Education at that time, Peter Fraser, said he would recommend the application, and promised that he would visit the school on his next visit to the Coast.⁵

Between 1920 and 1939, school garden competitions were a popular provincial activity, and the participation of Jack's Mill School could almost be described as predictable.⁶

⁴ "Appointments: Southland Education Board" (1935) p 47.

⁵ "Kotuku School Grounds" p 31.

⁶ It is important to say that school gardens were an international movement. At various times they were compulsory some places (Austria in 1869, Belgium in 1873, and France in 1887). They were also adopted in Germany, Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, Russia, the

Reporting on school gardens in 1922, the *Timaru Herald* praised the local Hurdley Shield competition, and paraphrased Mr GJ Sealey on the importance of "garden work" for bringing neatness and beauty, and instilling work "and not play" in students.⁷ We can also extract a summary insight about the garden school competition from this article where it reproduces the view of WG Armitage that the whole of the education system is too cultured, not practical enough, and that children must be educated so that they would prefer country life to town life.⁸

14 years later, the *Press* would similarly report on the McFarlane Shield school garden competition run in northern and mid Canterbury primary schools, singling out the work of Kaiapoi School, who had purchased an electric mower, but persisted in hand mowing the school grounds, which took a week, by which time it needed mowing once more.⁹

United States and Canada in the early years of the twentieth century, reflecting educational interests in nature-based learning in younger children, and technical skill instruction in older children. Forrest and Ingram "School Gardens in Ireland" pp 80-94.

⁷ "School Gardens. Hurdley Shield Competition" p 4.

⁸ "School Gardens. Hurdley Shield Competition" p 4.

⁹ "The McFarlane Shield" p 3.

The message in these, and many other newspaper accounts of the inter-school garden competitions of this period, is one of promoting rural values: hard work, practical skills and a commitment to New Zealand's agricultural economy were goals matched only by sporting success in small town schools.

Under Darracott's direction, Jack's Mill School punched well above its weight in these competitions, with early recognition of their fund-raising efforts.¹⁰ In only three years the barren school grounds were transformed into a formal garden displaying the distinct, if faint, whiff of English respectability.¹¹

I don't want to dwell on the garden unnecessarily, but it warrants attention for the formality of its design. With the school itself set back on a corner plot, the garden occupied the most prominent aspect of the school grounds. The design was organised by crossed diagonal paths that divided the school grounds into a pattern not dis-similar to a Union Jack figure. Around the path and plot edges were planted flower beds, and on axial

¹⁰ "Education Board" p 4.

¹¹ "A Model School in the West Coast Backblocks" p 4.

lines in the arrangement were simple pergolas. Overall, it displays the simplified elements of a romantic Victorian garden, and which bears easy comparison to a garden illustration reproduced in *Two Years in the Infant School*, published in 1938 under the supervision of Enid Blyton.¹² The whimsical undertones to the Jack's Mill School garden were further emphasised by a centre piece statue of Peter Pan, and reinforced by miniature grotto models featuring characters from Disney films, especially Snow White.

That Peter Pan should figure so prominently is not unpredictable. He first appears in JM Barrie's 1902 story *The White Little Bird*, and in a substantially more developed form in his 1904 play *Peter Pan; or, the boy who wouldn't grow up*, from which Barrie developed the novel *Peter and Wendy*, in 1911, and the first film adaptation in 1924.

So, the association of Barrie's character to a school garden in this period is hardly surprising, but it does create a problem I will address further on. For now, it is sufficient to observe that Peter Pan serves as a motif for everlasting childhood and innocence. In 1912

Barrie commissioned sculpture George Frampton to produce a statue of Peter Pan for display in Kensington Garden as a gift to the children of London, and another six from the same mould were cast for the same dedication (the nearest to us being installed in Queens Garden, Perth, in 1927). The association of Peter Pan to children and gardens became such a rapid cultural icon that Robert Milligan donated a version to the children of Oamaru in 1927.

It must then be observed of the Jack's Mill School garden that it was a romantic *mise en scene* that took its source material from popular commercial material of the day: film, illustration and theatre. This, it could be argued, is an important example of a design recognising the agency of its actors. That is, Peter Pan, for better or worse, is a figure the springs forth from a child's world view. But the other way to read it presents a more patronizing view of children as innocents, and childhood as a precious fantasy the exists fleetingly before the reality of adolescence takes command. Which version might be the more accurate depends absolutely on who drove the inclusion of this narrative.

The Miniature Bungalow

But if the garden required such efforts, we can only image what discussions took place to the proposal that the school add a cottage to the grounds. Moreover, one that would be designed and built by the students themselves.

Even today the miniature bungalow represents as an achievement. Although its modest size is amplified by the novelty of building to the scale of a child, the substantial undertaking of the project remains clear in the construction that utilised the same materials and techniques we would find in any house of that period. For such a modest enterprise, the plan displays remarkable economy to include two entrances, a bathroom, kitchen and lounge, all at a three-quarter ratio for the heights, and a half-scale ratio in plan. Viewed in person there is a certain squatness to the proportions as a result of the scale shift, but the overall effect is one of extraordinary quaintness, and it is not until an adult is viewed in the spaces that the fitting of the scale to the size of a child becomes apparent. But in all other ways the miniature bungalow reproduces standard housing construction practice of the late 1930s.

¹² Blyton *Two Years in the Infant School*.

While the miniature bungalow remains a marginal object in New Zealand's architectural heritage, it has, nonetheless, an established mythology. This is summarised by conservation architect Chris Cochran in the report he produced for the Department of Conservation, in 2006.¹³ He repeats the claim that the design of the bungalow was by 12 year-old Rosemary O'Brien. Local business, and some "further afield," provided the materials, with the boys responsible for constructing the house, and the girls designed and made the soft furnishings, with appropriately-sized bathroom fittings acquired through a Christchurch architect.¹⁴ Cochran notes that the building, finished in 1940, still appeared sound in structure in 2006. The miniature bungalow is an architectural oddity, but it derives its heritage status from its association to progressive education in a remote location rather than any specific architectural quality (proportion aside). Were it a regular-sized bungalow it would have long disappeared as ordinary, and were it built to a diminutive scale in any other context it might well have been dismissed as a play

¹³ Cochran *Jack's Mill School Kotuku Conservation Report* p 6.

¹⁴ Cochran *Jack's Mill School Kotuku Conservation Report* p 3.

house (such as that one built by Winston Churchill for his children at Chartwell).

Cochran provides a full, detailed and illustrated description of the miniature bungalow in his conservation report, and I don't think it serves to recycle his excellent work. What I would like to explore is the significance made of the bungalow as a demonstration of progressive education, and the cost to its architectural history.

This narrative starts with the claim made that it was designed by pupil Rosemary O'Brien. Without tangible qualification – a drawing, for example – it is hard to know what is meant by the term "design." If we take it in a professional sense, then it seems highly unlikely that a 12 year-year old prepared constructional documents. However, if we take the word "design" more openly it can be expanded to encompasses the overall concept for the bungalow, which becomes more feasible. But now we need to consider what the architectural world-view of a 12-year-old.

The answer, I will suggest, is painfully obvious. If we take the creative concept of the garden, with its inspiration and derivation found in JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*, then the miniature bungalow is nothing less than the

small house that fairies built around Wendy in Neverland, after she was shot by the Lost Boy, Tootles. It is, to use the term extracted and popularised from Barrie's work, a *Wendy House*, and an archetypal image of it can be found in period illustrations by Alice B Woodward.¹⁵

This interpretation lacks a hero, but it crystallises the presence of a neglected figure in the story. I mentioned the "appropriately sized" bathroom fittings sourced by a Christchurch architect. We should firstly acknowledge that half-scale bathroom fittings are not easily specified or sourced, and it is probably the case that they were manufactured especially. This, in turn, implies an architect of some considerable persuasion. A full list of donors to the miniature bungalow is reproduced in Cochran's conservation report. In a buried line of this document, the "supervising architect" is identified as "Mr Trengrove, Christchurch," who we must take as the Christchurch link.¹⁶

¹⁵ Woodward was one of the most prolific illustrators of her time. She contributed 28 coloured plates to *The Peter Pan Picture Book* (1907), written by Daniel O'Connor. "Alice B Woodward, 1862-1951" n.p.

¹⁶ Cochran *Jack's Mill School Kotuku Conservation Report* p 16.

While perhaps not a familiar name today, William Trengrove was a well-regarded and successful Christchurch architect whose work spanned the war years. He was supervising architect to both the Christchurch Railway Station and the McDougal Art Gallery, and he designed Cathedral Grammar School (1923), which fused Neo-Georgian features with emergent open-air classroom trends.¹⁷ So, to think that his contribution to the miniature bungalow would be superficial would be naive.

Trengrove's obituary identifies an extraordinary life that starts with 12 years as a carpenter and joiner before beginning architectural studies at Canterbury College of Art.¹⁸ These were interrupted by war service that included participation in the siege on Le Quesne, which signalled New Zealand's last active engagement in the Great War. A brief period at the Architectural Association in London followed, before his return to New Zealand where he passed the RIBA exams,

¹⁷ Cecil "Statham, Cathedral Grammar School" n.p..

¹⁸ In 1916 Trengrove passed examinations at the school of Art with excellence in Free Drawing, Principle of Planning, Perspective, and was awarded a special NZIA prize for most improvement in architectural work. "School of Art" p 8.

and was admitted to the NZIA. During the years 1937-38 he travelled through England, Scandinavia, Europe, the United States and Canada. But of particular interest is his involvement as an honorary architect to the Christchurch Free Kindergartens Association, for whom he made plans for the Selwyn, Linwood, Richmond and New Brighton buildings.¹⁹ Indeed, upon his death in 1953, Trengrove was honoured with the opening of a new kindergarten in Fendalton in his name in recognition of his contribution to the Free Kindergarten movement in Christchurch.²⁰ This is not small coincidence, and we must ponder the professional experience Trengrove brought to the miniature bungalow, and entertain the extent to which Darracott and the Jack's Mill School project might have influenced his decision about involvement in the Christchurch Free Kindergarten.

The relationship of Trengrove to Jack's Mill School's miniature bungalow is also a good reminder that changes in educational practice almost always demanded changes to school design, which is where I turn next.

¹⁹ "Obituary Mr W. H. Trengrove" p 13.

²⁰ "News for Women: Official Opening of New Trengrove Kindergarten" p 2.

Small Towns as Educational Incubators?

The educational context in which Darracott's experiment took place was a particularly progressive, although this isn't as evident in New Zealand schools as it could have been. Much of our educational reform is attributed to Clarence Edward Beeby, but the implementation occurs in the post-war period and coincides with the baby boomer generation.

In 1934, CE Beeby, until then still a promising university lecturer in psychology, resigned his appointment with Canterbury College to undertake the newly created position of Executive Officer within the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in Wellington. The Council had existed only since June that same year after a generous endowment from the Carnegie Corporation made it possible to act on an acknowledgement that educational practices found in New Zealand's primary and secondary schools were falling behind international peers.²¹

Beeby would only be with the NZCER for four years, but, in that period, he transformed

²¹ Alcorn *To the Fullest Extent of his Power* p 55.

a small group of idealists into a nationally recognised organisation which, in the words of Beeby's entry in *Te Ara*, was "respected for its independence and the quality of its research and commentary."²²

Some measure of the NZCER's success, and its radical nature combined with real-world application, can be found in the three most important publications from this time.

First was Crawford and Gwen Somerset's *Littledene, the Study of a Rural Community*, in which they described their early explorations in what became known as social science research.²³

The second, by LJ Wild, was the authors account of an "experiment in school

²² Renwick "Beeby, Clarence Edward" n.p.

²³ Somerset. *Littledene, the Study of a Rural Community*. While it is well understood that Crawford and Gwen were equal partners when researching and writing this book it speaks to the moors of the time that it was published under his name alone. The model for *Littledene* can be found in the work of Robert and Helen Lynd, especially their book *Middletown: a study in modern American culture* (1929). This in turn points to a more general interest in this period to small rural communities in America, such as Charles William Super's *A study of a Rural Community* (1922).

government" at Feilding Agricultural High School (to where Gwen and Crawford Somerset moved in 1938).²⁴

And to complete the set was JE Strachan description of his educational experiments at Rangiora High School.²⁵

Beyond their common interest in exploring child-centred learning it is observable that all three found their experimental applications in rural locations. However, the reasons for this pattern are not unexpected. Working in a small rural school afforded to progressive teachers an opportunity to introduce novel educational approaches in a low-key manner and beyond the immediate oversight of officials. This is not to say that the Somerset's, Wild and Strachen were reactionary extremists (they weren't, in each example their experimental practices followed international examples), but small-town New Zealand did allow these skilled educators to implement significant changes to their teaching practices with integrity, and the knowing support of Beeby back in Wellington. Beeby's legacy in the NZCER would have been assured on these

²⁴ Wild *An Experiment in Self Government* p 1.

²⁵ Strachen *The School looks at Life*.

publications alone but the event that was to domineer his success was the international New Education Fellowship Conference held throughout New Zealand in July, 1937.²⁶

It is well beyond the limits of this paper to explore the circumstances and impacts of the Fellowship conference, but some broad facts demonstrate just how important it was for New Zealand teachers. Drawing on his international connections Beeby sought to piggyback New Zealand onto the Australia leg of the New Education Fellowship Conference. In this way he was able to bring to New Zealand many of the world's leading educational thinkers of the day.²⁷

Beeby's reorganisation of primary and secondary education was concerned with a consolidated curriculum around common core subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic). The architectural shape in which this learning took place was of secondary importance to Beeby, but school buildings in this period did become more systematic.

Beeby's commitment to education was due in

²⁶ Couch "Progressive Education in New Zealand from 1937-1944" pp 55-72.

²⁷ Alcorn *To the Fullest Extent of his Powers* p 31.

no small way to the influence of James Shelly, Canterbury University's first Professor of Education. The product of an artisanal homelife, Shelly is described as displaying "astonishing skill" with pencil and paint, wood and metal, but parental opposition curtailed a career as an architect.²⁸ And while it goes too far to draw any conclusion from this point, it might be suggested that an appreciation of architecture fortified Shelly's conviction as an educationalist.

In 1920 Shelly immigrated to New Zealand on the expectation that our reputation as a social laboratory would provide parallel opportunities in educational reform. Instead, he encountered hostility in the Department of Education toward progressive reform, and much of his radicalism as an educationalist only found a willingness in his students (including Beeby).²⁹ However, one area where his educational and architectural views did coincide was his promotion for open-air classrooms, which found their strongest adoption in Canterbury, advocacy for which was only one topic among the many he addressed in more than 1000 public lecture in

²⁸ Carter "James Shelly" n.p.

²⁹ Carter "James Shelly" n.p.

16 years.³⁰

John Dewey and the Project

Shelly was an exceptionally influential intellectual figure, but his views were not forged in isolation. The first decades of the twentieth century are notable for the degree of pedagogic experimentation, and the dominant figure in all these discussions is John Dewey.

It is also beyond the capacity of this paper to address Dewey, but in making sense of Darracott's experiments at Jack's Mill School it is important to understand that the philosophical, ideological and practical influences can call be tracked back to Dewey's work in at the University of Chicago, which he joined in upon its formation in 1894, setting up the Laboratory School, which in turn became the basis of his formative book, *The School and Society* (1899).

Dewey's time at Chicago was brief, and ended in a cloud. In 1902 he succeeded Francis C Parker as director of the University's School of Education, but declining rolls and criticism over his wife's appointment in the same department lead to his resignation, in 1904.

³⁰ Carter "James Shelly" n.p.

Nonetheless, the Laboratory School is a benchmark in the development of twentieth-century educational transformation that placed the experiences of the pupil, rather than a curriculum, at the centre of learning. One of the un-anticipated implications of encouraging the students to pursue their own interests, was the number of allied social organisations that were formed within the Laboratory. These in turn began to compete for room in the school and demonstrated a need for dedicated space.

Out of this pressure the students identified the need for a club-house and following their own pedagogic principles this became a "student project." Under the guidance of their teachers the students planned, built and furnished the club-house themselves. Committees on architecture, building, sanitation, interior decoration, and "ways and means" were formed. Moreover, the students integrated the problems presented by the club-house into their learning. Club-house location was the outcome of studies on soil, drainage, climate and light/wind studies, from which all members were asked to draw a plan for the house.³¹

³¹ Edwards and Mayhew *The Dewey School* p 111.

From this a general study of the architectural character of Chicago followed that included geological, cultural, social and historic considerations. Developed considerations included a study of architectural history to agree enduring principles of beauty and structure, and drawing classes introduced perspective sketching. In execution, significant amounts of the construction were carried out by the students in their free time.

The extent of student agency in the Clubhouse project is thoroughly described by Edwards and Mayhew, and it is worth quoting them at length to fully appreciate the significance of the work:

No part of the interior finishing was attempted until working drawings had been completed. ... on the completion of the working drawing of the stairway, the front door, the window trim, and interior finish, the children so thoroughly understood what was to be done that in the shop all the different structural parts of the stairway were taken charge of by the girls in the class, each being responsible for the art selected. The boys assumed responsibility for the front door, cut the stock, and on its completion considered the difficulties which would be met when they put on the hinges and hung the door. On the stairway, the different structural parts such as the stringers were carefully marked out to show the proper size of treads and risers, and the upper and lower ends labelled to make the proper connections with the adjoining parts, whether the first part, the landing, to the

second story floor. The four stringers were all nicely sawed from 2" X 12" planks and put up. The joists, posts, and framework of the two landings were then prepared, and work commenced on the treads and risers. All the pieces and parts were made in the shop by individuals working from the drawings and were then assembled in the clubhouse by the entire class.³²

This, then, was not an educational conceit, or a patronising exercise in supervised experimentation, but a full manifestation of Dewey's view that children should govern their own learning as a democratic requirement.

Criticising what he saw as the "sentimental idealisation" of the child in the interests of the superiority of adult experience, Dewey argued for giving flexibility and leeway to the child to determine their own learning world.³³ Essential to this view was the importance of direct engagement as a learning. Writing in 1903, Dewey would demand:

What is primarily required for that direct inquiry which constitutes the essence of science is first-hand experience; an active and vital participation through the medium of all the bodily organs with the means and materials of building up first-hand experience.³⁴

³² Edwards and Mayhew *The Dewey School* p 111.

³³ Edwards and Mayhew *The Dewey School* p 112.

³⁴ Dewey "Democracy in Education" p 200.

Placed in motion with the Clubhouse, the only part of the project that was not left to the discretion of the students was the fireplace for which, on the insistence of parents', a mason was employed to ensure that any risk of fire was avoided.³⁵

While the clubhouse provides an easy exemplar for "project" based pedagogy it has more recently been extended as an example of rhetorical education. Manke has argued that rhetorical practices – principally discussion and consultation – underpinned all aspects of the educational environment:

They informed one another on what it would take to build a structure that was safe, that adhered to the

³⁵ Edwards and Mayhew *The Dewey School*. chapter 5. While the students were empowered to undertake the design and construction of the club-house there were consultants operating in the background. Frank Ball, head of the Manual Training Department, Chicago, managed the project, while Althea Harmer Bardeen, of the home economics department, directed choosing the site and contributed a course in sanitation (Harmer Bardeen had studied art and design at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She was married to Charles Russell Bardeen, the first dean of the University of Wisconsin Medical School, and their son, John Bardeen, would go on to be awarded the Noble Prize in Physics twice). In particular Clinton S Osborne (mathematics) and Lillian Cushman (nee Valler) directed the plans and helped the children select materials and write the specification.

guidelines set by Chicago at the time, and that met the needs that had inspired the work in the first place.³⁶

Integral to this approach was the collapse of engendered labour divisions among the students that extended through construction. This doesn't appear to have dissolved gender distinctions altogether but there is evidence of a levelling in action. At one point the girls assumed responsibility for building the stairs while the boys worked on the decidedly simpler task of the front door.³⁷ Photographs of the school workshops also show both genders working on furniture for the clubhouse collectively.

However, in other areas traditional division remained in place. This was an expression of equality that asked more of females. As Manke observes,

the girls had not been solely relegated to the traditionally feminine tasks of sewing and decorating. Instead they were just as active in the clubhouse construction as the boys, and their gender warned no remark save to say that they were "treated alike"³⁸

However, there is no mention of the boys

entering the realm of domestic industries. But by implication it seems sound to conclude that democratic equality for the girls featured the privilege of doing their work and well as sharing the "real" work of construction.

If anything, the clubhouse project showed a division based on age where the younger students assuming the less glamorous and more repetitive tasks. Former Laboratory student Margaret Bell (who would go on to become an MD and Professor of Education at the University of Michigan) would reflect thusly:

I think Phoebe's Group VIII did the "fanciest" work on the club house. We were allowed to do all the meanest jobs – and pound a nail here and there. We shingled a good deal – when it came to using the creosote stain we were unanimously elected.³⁹

Anyone who has ever handled creosote will understand the lowly status this "election" signals. What does remain important about the clubhouse project is the extent to which it enabled the pupils to take ownership of their educations. As Manke concludes:

The occupational curriculum and the emphasis on dwellings – on homes – ensured that students maintained as embodied connection to any topic they considered or endeavor they undertook. Together, these elements of the Laboratory School led to the discovery of a pedagogy that was at once pragmatic and also, we would now say, deeply rhetorical.⁴⁰

In 1927 Dewey would elaborate on the role of community essential to project passed learning by distinguishing between *scientific* symbol and *artistic* symbol where the former contain generalize knowledge that fits into a system, and the latter is concerned with bring a conscious community into being. If the *scientific* symbol, as found in the form of didactic instruction and vicarious educational experience, had proved the limit of education in the nineteenth century, then the *artistic* symbol promoted a deep social value that contained experience, and consequentially and educational end in itself.⁴¹

At this point it is very important to repeat that New Zealand teachers were not ignorant of these international movements in education. Shelly may have been disappointed by the conservative reality of New Zealand, but

³⁶ Manke *Welcome to the Club* p 157.

³⁷ Manke *Welcome to the Club* p 231.

³⁸ Manke *Welcome to the Club* p 158.

³⁹ Margaret Bell quoted, Manke *Welcome to the Club* pp 159-160.

⁴⁰ Manke *Welcome to the Club* pp 164-165.

⁴¹ Schultz "John Dewey's Conundrum" p 285.

nonetheless his arrival indicates the international reputation New Zealand had as a socially progressive society. This was reflected in developments in New Zealand's preparation of teachers, reaching a frenzied peak with the mentioned New Education Fellowship Conference (NEF), which has been described as arguably the single event from which three decades of educational reform sprang.⁴²

A critical part of educational developments in New Zealand was the availability of John Dewey's work. A prolific writer, his influential work, *Democracy and Education*, was published in 1916. The previous year Dewey published, with his daughter Evelyn, *Schools of To-Morrow*. Both books described the designing and building of a bungalow by the pupils of Public School 45, Indianapolis.

John Dewey and the Project Method Clubhouse

Dewey's experiments at the University of Chicago would become known as the "project method" of teaching. However, the broad dissemination of this approach did not occur until 1918 when William Heard Kilpatrick's

⁴² Terney *Working Paper* p 16.

article "The Project Method" appeared in the September issue of *Teachers College Record*. This was, in the words of Herbert Kliebard, "the single most dramatic event in the evolution of the movement to reform the curriculum through projects."⁴³ The positive reaction to the article was such that the Teachers College Bureau of Publications felt obliged to issue 60,000 reprints.⁴⁴

As Kliebard tells it, there was no obvious reason for the essay's reception at this particular moment. Heard Kilpatrick was in his late forties and having trouble securing a professor at Columbia Teachers College. Moreover, the project idea superseded its vocational roots in agricultural education, and other educators (including David Snedden) had previously published on the topic.⁴⁵

In Kliebard's view, Heard Kilpatrick's easy writing cadence struck a note of optimism among teachers aligned to the view "that somewhere in the child lay the key to a

⁴³ Kliebard *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* p 159.

⁴⁴ Kliebard *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* p 159

⁴⁵ Kliebard *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* p 159.

revitalized curriculum."⁴⁶

In "The Project Idea" Heard Kilpatrick makes no claim to have formulated the approach – indeed, he states that he is oblivious to its origins – so what we have here is a broader discussion of the merits of the project method, especially where it offers a "unifying idea" against the limits of "fundamental principles." What might have caught the interest of teachers was the Heard Kilpatrick's emphasis of the collective role of the project. As he writes:

Speaking for myself, however, I consider the strongest points in its favor; and contrariwise the tendency toward selfish individualism one of the strongest counts against our customary set-task sit-alone-at-your-own-desk procedure. Moral character is primarily an affair of shared social relationships, the disposition to determine one's conduct and attitudes with reference to the welfare of the group.⁴⁷

In exceeding foundational principles, the project method sought to promulgate building stronger social cohesion in a democratic model. The "project method" must therefore be understood within the context of a

⁴⁶ Kliebard *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* p 160.

⁴⁷ Heard Kilpatrick "The Project Method" n.p.

particularly American nationalism, and the rise of social democracy, so that progressive education and healthy civic functioning are seen to be companion activities.

Heard Kilpatrick's essay may not have conceived the Project concept but it did mark the liberation of publication on the subject:

These included not only Kilpatrick's most influential book, *Foundations of Method* (1925), but those of his growing number of disciples and like-minded contemporaries such as James L. Stockton's *Project Work in Education* (1920), Junius L. Meriam's *Child Life and the Curriculum* (1920), Margaret Wells's *A Project Curriculum* (1921), John A. Stevenson's *The Project Method of Teaching* (1921), E. A. Hotchkiss's *The Project Method in Classroom Work* (1924), James F. Hosic and Sara E. Chase's *Brief Guide to the Project Method* (1926) and Mary H. Lewis's *An Adventure with Children* (1928). With such discipleship, it was inevitable that the impact of the project curriculum should be felt in school practice, albeit not always in its purest form.⁴⁸

But most significantly for this account was the publication, in 1936, of Mayhew and Edwards of Dewey's work at The University of Chicago, including a detailed account of the Clubroom project.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Kliebard *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* p 167.

⁴⁹ Edwards and Mayhew *The Dewey School*.

These publications provided any receptive teacher with the sufficient means a clear model for a student led design/build project. They do burst the bubble of isolated brilliance that we might insulate Darracott with, but they also provide an important appreciation of the international intellectual environment that even a small rural school in New Zealand could operate in. But a question remains as to how much Darracott fully understood the pedagogic significance of Dewey's philosophy, and how much the realisation of a miniature bungalow at Jack's Mill School, or simply a magnificent piece of educational mimicry?

Conclusion

When viewing the miniature cottage at Jack's Mill School in person, it is hard not to be struck by the physical isolation of Darracott's great educational experiment. But it would be a mistake to conflate the geographical remoteness of Kōtuku with the pedagogic uniqueness of the cottage.

In practical ways, Darracott, like other new teachers of the period, was educated in a largely social-enlightened environment, and was exposed to the literature of progressive educational experimentation (especially that

of John Dewey). Under the ideological influence of James Shelly, and later the political leniency provided by Beeby, a conditional space for new learning practices was available. However, it served the interests of all that these experiments were not conducted in highly visible, and therefore accountable, places.

So, while it might seem extraordinary to a visitor to find a radical educational experimental in such an insignificant and inaccessible location as Kōtuku, the reality is that a sole charge position in a small out of way community school provided Darracott with perfect conditions for his pedagogic aspirations.

However, it seems to me that Darracott had to warm to that opportunity. His first success with the school garden was driven by a popular regional school competition for the beautification of school grounds, which in turn says much about New Zealand's dependence on a rural economy.

That the students and community of Jack's Mill School responded so resoundingly to the challenge, and with such success, I suggest, gave Darracott the confidence to act more

ambitiously on John Dewey's model in the University of Chicago Laboratory clubroom project, as he understood it through contemporary publications.

If we focus only on the miniature bungalow we might be led to retrospectively classify Darracott as a pioneer educationalist in the model of democratic pedagogy promoted by Dewey. But if we look to the garden refurbishment at Jack's Mill School, I think we find evidence that this view would be wrong. In particular, the evocation of eternal youth in JM Barrie's figure of Peter Pan introduces a sentimental idealisation of childhood that is at odds with Dewey's view that the child should be an active agent in their own learning.

If this infantilisation is not obvious in the miniature bungalow, then this is due in no small way to its architectural integrity. Responsibility for this has been placed with the school's pupils, and especially its child-architect, Rosemary O'Brien, but credit must be extended to the entire Kōtuku community and, I feel, a neglected but critical role played by William Trengrove.

It is Trengrove's hand, I suspect, behind the architectural sophistication of the miniature

cottages' design and execution, but against this hypothesis is a reciprocal one that suggests that Darracott's influence may have played a role in Trengrove's dedication to the Canterbury Free Kindergarten?

Darracott left Jack's Mill School in 1942 and his career becomes hard to track. However, he reappears prominently in 1961 as the founding principal of Tahuna Normal Intermediate in Dunedin, which he held until his retirement in December 1965.⁵⁰ As a Normal school, Tahuna had a relationship with the College of Teacher Training in Dunedin, but there is no indication that he brought anything more than professionalism and dedication to his role, and his retirement brought obscurity. He died in 1974.

Postscript

There is an addendum to this story. Around 1950, WH Trengrove employed a pre-consciously talent who had just completed his architectural studies in Auckland. The graduate didn't stay with the firm for long, but his connection was sufficiently genuine that his sister Pauline met, and married, Trengrove's architect son, John. Together, the

three would buy a rundown heritage homestead in Governors Bay, which they would transform into one of New Zealand's most cherished romantic English gardens. That property, Ohinetahi, has been gifted to the City of Christchurch, and the public can are welcome to wander the whimsical Neverland created by the Peter Pan of New Zealand architecture, Sir Miles Warren.

⁵⁰ *Tahuna Normal Intermediate* n.p.

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