

SCHOOL

NARALING HALL - 100 YEARS

Overview

Naraling, a former townsite in the Upper Chapman district roughly 54 kilometres north-east of Geraldton, once supported a small government school that served local farming families for three decades before closing in the 1940s. Its educational story mirrors that of dozens of tiny, short-lived "cross-roads" schools scattered across the Chapman Valley wheatbelt during the district's pioneering and rail-siding era, almost all of which have since disappeared as populations declined and motor transport made centralised schooling in larger towns viable. Today, no school operates at Naraling itself; children in the district attend Chapman Valley Primary School at Nabawa or Yuna Primary School, with secondary students bussed into Geraldton.



Myrtle Gray circa late 1930's at Naraling School

Origins: Schooling in a Pioneer Farming District

Education in the wider Upper Chapman district began modestly, with the earliest school opening at Narra Tarra in 1878 to serve families connected to the nearby copper mine. Under Education Department rules of the era, a settler community became entitled to apply for a government school once it could demonstrate ten or more school-aged children living within a three-mile radius; smaller or more isolated communities could instead operate a Sparsely Populated District (S.P.I.) school by directly employing and boarding a teacher for a guaranteed £60 per year. Where a district could not meet even that threshold alone, neighbouring communities often shared a single teacher on a part-time roster, commonly three days at one school and two at another. Many of these schools operated out of small, transportable timber-framed classrooms with canvas

walls and a galvanised iron roof — informally called "tent schools" — typically sited on a fenced corner of a farm block at a crossroads, which became a de facto community landmark.

Naraling School (1914–1944)

The Naraling School opened in October 1914, following the establishment of the Naraling townsite in 1910 after the opening of the Wokarena–Naraling branch railway line. It served the growing population of farming families drawn to the district by the new rail connection, alongside the town's shops, blacksmith's shop and RSL hall. The school building stood opposite the site later chosen for the Naraling Church Hall (built 1926), which itself was constructed on the site of the former blacksmith's shop once that business relocated.



Naraling School 1935: Rear: Len Lipple, Nixie Criddle, Mait Gray, Les Stokes, Next Row: Joan Cox, Doris Calder, Pearl Criddle, Rose Calder, Merle Criddle, behind Jamsie Criddle, Reg Giltrow. Row 3: Hope Rumble, Lynette & Mollie Criddle, Joy Rumble, Myrtle Gray, Lulu Gray, Muriel Giltrow. Row 4 Ron & Arthur Criddle, Clarry Giltrow. Front Row Reg & Trevor Criddle, Leo Cox, Shirley, Fae, Rae, June & Yvonne Criddle.

Naraling's school life was disrupted early on: a severe cyclone struck the district in February 1915, unroofing a large weatherboard cottage and moving the school off its foundations, along with partially wrecking several other buildings in the fledgling townsite. The Government School itself closed in July 1944 as the local child population declined, but classes continued afterward as an "Assisted School" held inside the Naraling Hall until December 1947, after which formal schooling at Naraling ceased altogether.

Broader Pattern: Rise and Fall of Small Rural Schools

Naraling's closure fits a district-wide pattern in which numerous tiny schools — Narra Tarra, Chapman River, Oakabella, Dindiloa/East Bowes, Mount Erin East/Durawah, Chapman East, Yuna Well/Rockwell/South Yuna/Marrah, Protheroe, Bowes Estate, Yuna East and Waggrakine — opened and closed repeatedly through the early-to-mid twentieth century as farming families moved in and out of the district and as school-age populations rose and fell below the threshold needed to keep a school open. Many closed permanently once motor buses began transporting children into larger consolidated schools; the Waggrakine School, for example, shut for good once a bus service to Geraldton was introduced, and the same centralising trend eventually left Nabawa (as Chapman Valley Primary School) and Yuna as the only two surviving primary schools in the entire district.

Education in the Naraling Area Today

No school has operated in Naraling itself since the 1947 closure of its Assisted School, and the old school site itself is not among the heritage-listed structures still standing in the area, unlike the surviving Naraling Church Hall. Local children today attend Chapman Valley Primary School at Nabawa or Yuna Primary School, both within the Shire of Chapman Valley, while secondary-aged students are bussed daily into Geraldton for high school education. This shift to centralised, bus-serviced schooling reflects the same forces of population consolidation and improved road transport that also concentrated the district's grain handling into fewer, larger CBH receival sites over the same period.

Heritage Value of Naraling's Education History

Naraling's school history now survives largely through community and historical society records rather than physical remains, documented by groups such as the Chapman Valley Historical Society drawing on sources including John Rikkers' Schools of WA, Battye Library records and the Shire's own 2012 Heritage Inventory. For local heritage and archival purposes, Naraling's education story — a school opened at the height of the town's brief rail-era prosperity and closed as that prosperity faded — offers a useful case study of the broader social decline of small wheatbelt settlements across the Chapman Valley through the mid-twentieth century.



Naraling School early 1930s Rear LtoR: Mait & Hansel Gray, Bob McClintock, Keith Stokes, Olive Sanderson (Teacher), Ted McClintock, Mel Gray, Les Stokes. Centre: Jamsie Criddle, Lulu Gray, Rose Calder, Greta & Audrey Criddle, Doris Calder, Pearl Criddle. Front: ??, Bill Calder, Mollie Criddle, Myrtle Gray, Ron Criddle.

Note: All information sourced from available records, anecdotal information and may be subject to minor change.