

To the Editor,

When in Masterton recently for a reunion I met a number of friends and others who were confused about the early days of the Free Kindergarten movement in Masterton. The idea started in Masterton West when a small group of mothers decided a Kindergarten would be a benefit to the town. It was in the early days of the World War II and many fathers were in the army. A meeting was called and a committee elected, consisting of grandmothers as well as mothers and the wife of the MP for Masterton. A survey of the area between Cornwall St and Renall St was made to ascertain the number of children who would be attending the proposed Kindergarten. Funds of course had to be raised and shop-days, street-days, small private parties etc were organised. It was decided to become an incorporated society. Mr ~~Tim~~ Jordan mayor was our legal adviser and supporter. Mr Michael, editor of the Times-Age encouraged us. We had much help from the Wellington Free Kindergarten Society and several speakers came up for meetings. As no Government funds were available except for prosperity, rent, salaries, and equipment had to be funded by the committee. It was several years before enough money was raised for this. At this time the Anglican Church had decided to build a hall at the top of Renall St and had agreed it would be available for us to rent. As the hall was not quite ready when the opening date arrived, the Whatman Home loaned us their playrooms for a few weeks. Miss Jill Stevenson was in charge and Miss Lois Tooby her assistant. The community interest had grown and the second Kindergarten opened in the Lansdown Presbyterian Hall. East followed in the Orange Hall. Unfortunately this Hall proved inadequate and there was no other building available. Unless we could provide a building this Kindergarten would have to close. A Building Fund had grown and West had a section. However West and Lansdown waived their prior right to a building as they were both suitably accommodated. Mrs Eric Hodder and I spend many hours looking for a suitable site and one in MaCara St was finally bought. Several of our Masterton girls went to Wellington for training and returned to take over the running of our local Kindergartens. Miss Marion Hodder, Miss Elizabeth Daniel and Miss Joyce Falloon were our first trainees. The new building was officially opened by Miss M Gallagher and was renamed Una Williams Kindergarten. By this time each Kindergarten had a committee and a Mothers Club and all worked in with the Council of the Association. Much progress has since been made as attendance at Kindergarten is now a regular part of our education system, and the movement has become the Wairarapa Free Kindergarten Association (Inc).

*Una Williams*

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