

OPENING OF THE E.D. McKINNON WING  
AT BALLARAT COLLEGE, BALLARAT, VIC.  
ON 13TH OCTOBER, 1962.

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Speech by the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Sirs,

As the weather appears to be threatening, I think I had better begin by declaring the E.D. McKinnon Wing open. (Laughter) (Applause)

I am really not the best qualified person to do a task of this kind because, in my own fashion, I am a bigoted - what is the word? - Ballaratian, or Ballarat. I have been called worse names than that in my time. But, Sir, I want to thank you for what you have said about my wife and I am happy to tell you that I have no reasonable doubt that by the time she arrives back in Australia she will be completely restored to her normal and almost turbulent vigour. (Laughter)

I was delighted when I heard about this appeal. I was a little taken aback when my colleague, Dan McKinnon, procured somebody to write to me about it and gave me a broad hint that a little donation from me would not come amiss. And, as usual, he succeeded. I am not an old Ballarat College boy. I am an old boy of a school in Ballarat which has long since disappeared and if I am feeling a little expanded occasionally, I always explain to people: "Grenville College, you see." But it disappeared twelve months after I left it. (Laughter) It was a small school, and when I look back on those days, towards the end of the first decade of the century - many of you won't remember it - I remember Grenville College - a school so small that I got a game in the football team (Laughter). There was Ballarat College, too, just around the corner, under the headmastership of a gentleman, who I think I am right in saying was irreverently referred to as Joe Garbett. I am open to correction on that point.

Grenville College was nearby, and across the street, was the boardinghouse of Ballarat College. We had - well let's say about 35 boys in our declining years. Ballarat College might have had 50 or 60. The Ballarat Grammar School, well, it was small in numbers but high in Anglican pride, and between the lot of us, we didn't amount to more than a fraction of the other schools. The Agricultural High School was established. Oh dear, St. Pat's next door.

And I want to tell you that I can very well remember an occasion in the winter when, strangely enough, the snow had fallen in Ballarat, fourteen inches of it, and we, being less than the dust, went around to Ballarat College and they - between us - less than the dust. We collected the Ballarat Grammar School and still we didn't have enough numbers and we went to the School of Mines where we secured a few earnest volunteers. Having recruited our strength in this fashion, we went up to St. Pat's, determined to storm them out. (Laughter) That was where we fell in, because with that low cunning that characterises some people, they had waited for us (Laughter) and we were stormed out and we recovered some form of order about a mile south of Lake Wendouree. Anyhow, these are simple recollections.

But the great thing was that just as these schools looked as if they might fade out and disappear, there came about here a great pride in the idea of the schools, and what has happened since then to Ballarat College - what has happened, on the other quarter of the Lake to the Grammar School? These things give me immense satisfaction. In the case of Ballarat College, I am happy to say that I expect them, because there is no greater tradition in the world than the Scots tradition of scholarship. It would have been a monstrosity if Ballarat College had disappeared. As it is, it is in the full flight - this magnificent growth, this great Appeal so magnificently successful, under the auspices of my distinguished friend, Mr. Dan McKinnon. These are all proofs of the fact that our tradition from Scotland is a tradition of scholarship, a tradition of pride, a tradition of independence.

I used to be rather fond of telling people that years and years ago, being in Scotland on the estate of a well-known man, I walked out on a Saturday morning and found myself talking to what is described in Scotland as his cow-man. This was his hired man. In most countries he would have been regarded as, instinctively, a rather illiterate fellow but very good with the cattle. And inside ten minutes we had walked to the corner of the field, and inside another ten minutes, we were leaning on a railing, and he was talking better philosophy and metaphysics to me than any professor I have ever met. He was the man in charge of the cattle. This is a tremendous inheritance, a tremendous instinct.

The other thing I want to say to you is that there are a lot of people who think that schools exist, even good ones, and universities exist to provide people with a certificate that will enable them to earn a certain amount of money a year. This, of course is, in a sense, true. But in a profound sense, it's false. The great task of a great school is to produce, not necessarily great men - that's a matter of chance - but men of quality, women of quality, people who have a sense of the community in them, rather than a sense of their own individual advantage. Therefore, I hope the day will never come when schools like this - church schools, independent schools - will disappear in the great name of uniformity. In fact, Sir, that brings me to the last thing that I want to say to you. Because the rain is falling.

There is, in our own country - I say this to you after great experience and thought - a frightful passion for uniformity. This is a disastrous passion - whoever goes to school in Queensland must be taught in exactly the same way as whoever goes to school in Tasmania; whatever rules apply to people who live in the tropics must be exactly the same as the rules that apply to people who live in the half-frozen south. This, I venture to say, is nonsense. The genius in our race, and in the history of our race, has not been a genius for uniformity. It's been a genius for difference, for individuality, for personality developed, for a superb conflict of mind with mind, so long as they are all instructed, civilised, sensible minds. And that's why I hope the day will never come when schools like Ballarat College will have been submerged in the broad stream of purely State institutions.

Don't let us be too uniform. Let us be individual. Let us have our own character. Let us believe in our own tradition because if we do that we will contribute to the sum total of Australian nationhood something superbly valuable and indeed imperishable.

Now, on the whole, I am getting wetter than you are, but I think the time has come to say, "You are now relieved from duty." I have the singular privilege of declaring the Dan McKinnon Wing of this great and famous school open.