

# Difficult Decades !

The Great Depression of the 1930's and the Second World War of the early 1940's were significant world events that had ramifications in all communities.

The Depression began in October 1929 when the value of stocks and shares on the American Stock exchange plummeted. Considerable sums of money were lost at government, business and individual level. Worldwide, banks, factories and retailers closed leaving millions of people penniless and jobless. Depressed economic conditions witnessed the rise of autocracies and dictatorships in the Northern Hemisphere as societies struggled to look to alternative forms of government to solve the many social problems that arose from the Depression. Australia did not escape the problems of these two decades. Job losses, dole queues, the inability to purchase staple foods, rationing and in many cases the loss of the family home all impacted on the social fabric of communities. Families learned to go without.

Australia's involvement in the Second World War depleted schools of staff, equipment and money. As teachers joined the armed services, young student teachers were appointed to rural schools. During vacations teachers worked in factories or on the land to assist the war effort. In schools teachers worked with children to raise funds to help the wider community. Ration tickets were issued to restrict purchases of food, clothing and petrol. At war's end everything was in short supply.

Teachers faced difficulties when salaries were cut and promotions temporarily 'dried up'!<sup>26</sup> The following account provides a useful illustration of the difficulties that faced women in the teaching service. For Miss Henrietta Hurdle, the loss of her job would create additional hardship.

In late April 1932, Head Teacher, Victor Baudinette wrote to the Education Department outlining his reasons why Miss Henrietta (Hettie) Hurdle should be kept on at the school after her marriage. Hettie had been appointed to Ringwood North as the school's sewing mistress. In her letter she stated that her future husband had a job with the railways and was supporting his widowed mother. "At the present time with Reductions and Rationing his salary appears small for ourselves and the assistance we will have to give his mother."<sup>27</sup>

In supporting his sewing mistress, the Head Teacher stated that Miss Hurdle was a "conscientious, painstaking sewing teacher. She is ever ready to help, is regular and punctual". He added that she had a good knowledge of the regulations after 10 years

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<sup>26</sup> With the passage of the Financial Emergencies Act, teacher salaries were cut by 20% in July 1931. *Vision & Realisation*, vol. 1; pp 376 – 378, Education Department, Victoria-1973.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence Files, (VPRS: 640, Box 3038), Henrietta Hurdle to the secretary, Education Department: 26 April 1932.