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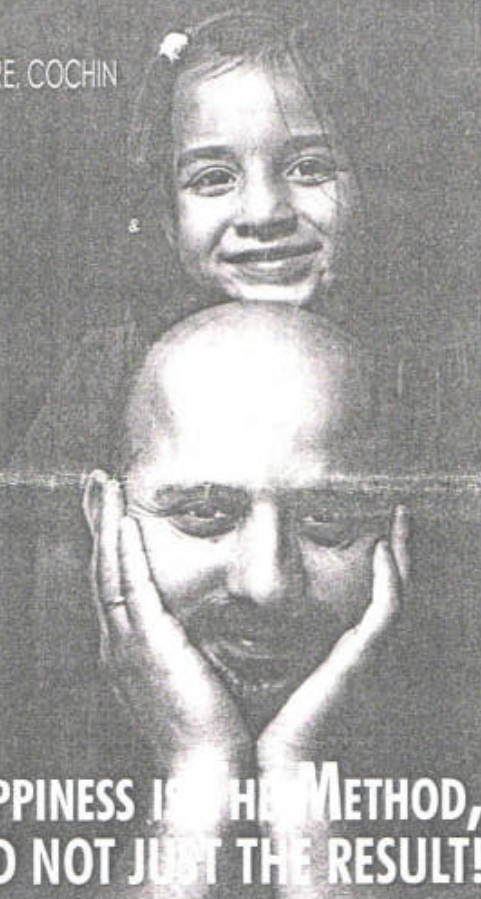


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FINEST INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS



HAPPINESS IS THE METHOD,
AND NOT JUST THE RESULT!

“How Great Schools, Used To Be”

There are two kinds of international residential schools – the modern, high-tech ones in the city, and the mature, heritage schools like the Nilgiri's Laidlaw Memorial School & Junior College. Which type each parent prefers, depends on what they expect from an international residential school. If you value the heritage of a school – like its roots, origin, founders, alumni, pedagogy, co-curricular culture, and time-proven systems for pastoral care, you should make a trip to Ketti, a beautiful valley in the Blue Mountains, home to Laidlaw Memorial. With a legacy dating back to the British Raj, Laidlaw Memorial features an expansive 300 acres sylvan campus between Ooty & Coonoor, a right mix of comfort and disciplined living, a concern for the underprivileged, and a strong culture of public speaking, debate, drama, arts, & sports. No wonder then, that Laidlaw Memorial still ranks top in the minds of discerning parents – whether they are NRIs or from India. Laidlaw students won't miss the target, even if the only thing that they would learn is the stories of their Founders, Benefactors, & Principals – a string of legends like Rev. J Breeden, Sir Robert Laidlaw, Dr. A Francis, David Todd, EA Hammick, and TD Walsh; not to mention the successive Governors of the erstwhile Madras State who were the Presidents of St. Georges Homes, the Society which runs Laidlaw Memorial. Since 1981, this heritage school is under the stable leadership of WR Gardner, whose simple words tell the whole story – “Laidlaw is how great schools used to be.”

Our winding drive down from Ooty to the Valley that is home to Ketti Village and Laidlaw Memorial School, was punctuated by frequent stops to enquire with the villagers – “Which way to go for Laidlaw Memorial?” And almost always, their faces brightened up to say – “St. Georges Homes, right? This way, Sirs.” Such enthusiasm from the poor community surrounding an international school was surprising. But, Laidlaw Memorial is not your stock international residential school that delivers the world by charging skyhigh.

In fact, St. Georges Homes had its roots in a

philanthropic mission – to care for the orphan and destitute children in the Anglo-Indian community. Over the decades since its inception in 1914, the social relevance of such an objective has definitely faded, but it is a fact that

even today Laidlaw Memorial is one of the most affordable international residential schools in the country.

Driving through the Laidlaw Memorial campus, one can't help making comparisons. If there ever was a truly sylvan school campus in the whole of Nilgiris, this was it. True woods. If there ever was a truly limitless campus in the Blue



Mountains, this was it.

We quickly found somebody to shoot the obvious question at – “How big is this place?” They were a group of very young boy-Georgians, barely into their 5th or 6th grade, walking back to their hostel rooms excitedly, after an afternoon of hard play.

“200 acres, Sir.”

Unbelievable? It won't be, once you are physically there. The core buildings and facilities are centrally located in the middle of the 200 acres.

Ah! Buildings. How school buildings should be. Straight out of fairy tales. A young Georgian cycling past our vehicle, showed us the first of these structures – the Principal's Bungalow.

“AR Gardnet,” read the nameplate.

The day we visited the campus, was an especially busy day for Principal Gardner. Tall, aristocratic, and warm, Gardner explained to us why even the evening of that day was busy for him.

It was something that would make many young boys reading this to exclaim, “Cool”. Principal Gardner was hosting an interschool party that day to celebrate some achievements in Cricket. Later, we learnt that Gardner was a passionate cricket enthusiast. Cool, isn't it? A Principal who is as interested in cricket, as his students!

He has also handled responsibilities as the President of the Nilgiris District Cricket Association (NDCA), and as a Vice-President of Tamilnadu Cricket Association.

Despite the ongoing party, Principal Gardner found enough time to explain to us the uniqueness of Laidlaw Memorial.

“Why do parents send their children to this 92-year old school, which is 6800 ft above sea level, in these woods?”



STARTED IN 1914,
LAIDLAW MEMORIAL
HAS A GLORIOUS
HERITAGE SPANNING
92 YEARS.



Gardner asked us, and answered the question after a brief pause – “To develop self-reliance.”

Be it academics, or co-curricular skills, or just growing up in a school campus, the focus at Laidlaw is developing self-reliance in each and every student.

It starts from a simple bank account that each student will start at the Ketti branch of State Bank of India. All fund transfers from their parents would be restricted to this account, and the students themselves fill out the withdrawal slips, with a countersign by the Principal. This forms the pocket-money, and the maximum allowed frequency is once per week.

Self-reliance is implemented in academics, by disallowing private tuitions of any kind, either by the school teachers

or at outside tuition centres. The result is well-attended classes at the school, where both the teachers and the students realize the importance of making the best of the class time. And Laidlaw has always been famous in certain key academic areas like English fluency and pronunciation, with Georgians getting noticed for their internationally intelligible English delivery.

But self-reliance really shines through, when it comes to the co-curricular activities, which is compulsory for all Georgians. Though every major art and sport is encouraged at Laidlaw, special emphasis is laid on those self-reliance and leadership skills that every aspiring leader requires – public speaking and debates.

It is not uncommon to find Junior Georgians deliver fine elocutions, sometimes their own creations, and sometimes from famous orators ranging from Mahatma Gandhi to Joan of Arc, and participating enthusiastically in prepared debates. At the senior level, things get more challenging, with Senior Georgians delivering both public speeches and participation in debates in an extempore fashion! Laidlaw also hosts inter-school speech and

debate competitions among Nilgiri schools, annually.

Self-reliance also extends to the boarding side. Georgians are accommodated, according to their age, in 8 cottages. Each cottage features 3 to 4 dormitories, and is spacious enough to accommodate 45 to 80 students. Some of the staff reside in these cottages, and each cottage is administered by a Warden and a Matron, who take extra care to make the children's stay pleasant and comfortable.

Crafted beautifully, these 8 cottages – Smith House, Hesketh Cottage, Hammick Cottage, Blackburn Cottage, Preston Cottage, Oldham Cottage, Lewis Cottage, & Oakshott Cottage – are almost heritage class. But those parents and children expecting star facilities – as is the case with some international schools – will be somewhat disappointed. Exemplary hygiene and all the necessary comforts are there, but no indulgences. It is the perfect way to bring up disciplined, responsible youngsters.

"This culture, is something that even NRI parents appreciate," says Principal Gardner.

Self-reliance is also the formal motto of Laidlaw Memorial.

The school has also taken care to keep the academic infrastructure technically updated. The school has several dedicated laboratories – one each for physics, chemistry, biotechnology, & geography, two for biology, and three computer labs.

The sheer advantage of studying at a campus like Laidlaw – the perfect blend of heritage and modernity – is evident from these labs. For example, the Laidlaw biology lab features the



LIDLAW MEMORIAL

largest butterfly, moth, & egg shell collections in the whole of Nilgiris, while the Laidlaw biotech lab features advanced equipment like Laminar Airflow.

The 3 computer labs at the school are modern and inter-networked, and deployed with all the necessary software. Two packages among these require special mention – 'Virtual Lab', which teachers can use to demonstrate experiments, and 'Class On The Web' that makes

available all model examination papers in Science & Maths, for Grades VI to XII. The computer labs also feature instructional aids like LCD Projectors.

To enable library-centric and multimedia learning, Laidlaw has also deployed a well-stocked library and a modern audiovisual room.

Like self-reliance, another pillar of the school is competitiveness. Enabling this, is a well-designed House system, with the entire student community divided into four Houses – Cockburn, Hamilton, Laidlaw, & Plummer. All curricular, co-curricular, & extra-curricular activities witness intense competition among these four houses, with the ultimate aim being the annual Cock House Shield that is awarded for the best House.

Laidlaw has a full-fledged sporting infrastructure, taking advantage of Ketti's geographical advantage to promote activities like hiking, scouting, camping, cross-country runs etc, as well as providing all facilities for conventional games like Cricket, Hockey, Football, Basketball, Tennis, Table Tennis, Chess, Badminton, Gymnastics and Athletics. Qualified instructors are available for coaching children for both inter-house and inter-school meets.

The school also has a unique sporting facility – a world-class mattress for pole-vault and high jump. Indeed, the school has also produced a pole-vault gold medallist at the National Schools

LIDLAW HAS A
REMARKABLE CULTURE
OF INTERNATIONAL
ENGLISH, PUBLIC
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DRAMA, & SPORTS



LIDLAW MEMORIAL

level, who is also currently New Zealand's junior champion. The gymnastics facilities at Laidlaw are also noteworthy.

The school also has a great tradition in Drama, with Houses actively preparing for the annual drama competition, reproducing classics like Shakespeare, nationalist themes like Tagore, and contemporary ones like Vikram Seth.

Moral instruction is compulsory for all students, unlike religious instruction which is optional. Being an Anglo-Indian institution, the religious instruction and worship follows Protestant Christian tenets, even though provision for Roman Catholic worship is there. The school admits students of all religions, faiths, castes, & nationalities, and makes no distinction or compulsions on them.

Laidlaw Memorial is a private, co-educational school from Grades IXII, administered by a Board of Management, and affiliated to the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). The school follows the Council's ICSE and ISC syllabi, which are patterned on the Cambridge Exams, and recognised abroad for entry to Universities in the Commonwealth including those of England, Scotland, Wales, & Australia, as well as in USA. Indeed, many Georgians have secured admission at prestigious Universities in these countries.

Yet, for all its achievements, Laidlaw Memorial is most valued for its heritage. Started at Kodaikanal in 1914, in a modest way, by noted missionary Rev. J Breeden, the school was shifted to its present campus at Ketti in 1922. During its initial years, it was Rev. Breeden's passionate efforts for charitable grants, from both UK and India, that sustained the institution, which finally

resulted in a considerable financial aid from Sir Robert Laidlaw, for this honourable cause.

Dr. A Francis, one of the early Principals is credited with managing the complicated shift from Kodaikanal to Ketti, for which he prevailed upon the South Indian Railway to carry the whole materials free of cost!

LIDLAW STUDENTS
HAVE SECURED
ADMISSION TO
SOME OF THE BEST
UNIVERSITIES IN THE
WEST.

The school had a string of such legendary Principals, one such later day head being EA Hammick, who had a uniquely long and eventful life at Laidlaw Memorial; as a student, teacher, Headmaster, & Principal – an unbelievable stint of 62 years! The house where Hammick lived for long, has subsequently become a Cottage for the boarders – the Hammick Cottage. Nobody helped shape Laidlaw Memorial's later day destiny, as EA Hammick did, and he continued to be in the Board of Management even after his retirement in 1976.

Principal Gardner had instructed some senior staff to show us around the sprawling Laidlaw campus, which they did exhaustively and enthusiastically.

When we walked back to our vehicle after strolling around this campus, all of us were feeling the same thing – this kind of heritage environment, and these kind of leaders to inspire; how can Georgians grow up to be anything less than the best?

The air was also light. Without even a whiff of the city smoke. Like how it is, only in the mountains.