

History-making mothers

General consensus at a rare reunion of the fund-raisers for the original Athlone Nursery School (8 of the original 9) was that while they have been overlooked on the Maynardville plaque as the first to recognize the garden's potential as an outdoor theatre, they are happy to have made history as pioneers of coloured nursery school education.

It was through their efforts that the Athlone Nursery School opened its doors to 25 pre-school coloured children some 36 years ago and the Athlone training college for nursery school teacher training was set up shortly after.

By coincidence the congenial lunch table hosted by Jean Bernadt heard from Lorna Thompson, one of the "gang" and an honorary life mem-

ber of the Athlone Nursery School board, that their ultimate goal had been achieved. Both the Athlone Nursery School, much-grown since its early days and the college have been taken over by the Department of Education, the college to be renamed after Sally Davies, principal of the Barkly House Teacher's College for nursery school-education who did so much to get it established.

With the help of a few of the Barkly House staff who gave their services free to train the first teachers.

It was at the Buxton Nursery School that the idea for similar facilities for coloured children came up. Jean Lorna, Margie Molteno, Dulcie Cooper, Rosemary Lieberman, Joyce Hennessy, Ann Harris and Margaret McKenzie, mothers

with pre-school children enjoying the privileges of supervised care, initiated the lobbying.

It was in the course of their fund-raising that they looked at Maynardville, imbued Dulcie Howes with their-enthusiasm, and converted what was once the croquet court, "knee-high in daisies", into a theatre.

With their gardeners they chopped, for days, a path through the overgrown oleanders lining the drive. Dulcie recalled having helped — physically — prop up the creaking portable stage. Conductor of the CTSO for their first presentation was no less than renowned conductor Enrique Jordá. His Ho

Artist John Dronfield designed a programme with a ballerina logo — still used by the University ballet.

The committee re-

calls making pounds of fudge and selling tickets at half a guinea. Insurance coverage regarded as something of a joke by the company they approached was an indication of their practicality. On the last night (Sylphides) the rain teemed down, although at the opening a full moon had appeared obligingly at the psychological moment.

The Athlone nursery school committee ran open-air seasons at Maynardville for three years by which time the nursery school was equipped and operative.

After Athlone, (shortly to move to the larger premises of a stable with more accommodation and better facilities) came Blouville at Retreat.

Correct pre-school care for the children of working coloured mothers had come to stay.