

Stories from the Archives: The Panama Hat at PLC

The Panama hat is part of many school uniforms. At PLC Sydney we can document it as early as 1904 in a photograph of four tennis players who, according to the caption, were “Victors over Kambala”.

Today the Panama is a compulsory part of the Junior School uniform. Girls in Pre-Kindergarten to Year 6 must purchase a Panama hat “to be worn on request of staff for excursions outside the college and on Speech Day”.

What the wearers say

“The Panama hat looks good on excursions and keeps the sun off your face. But the strap makes my chin itchy and chokes me.”

Amy Hur, Year 6, 2015

“There were two school hats. . . one summer, Panama, cream, upturned brim. . . Those of us who travelled by steam train often had to stand outside on the platform. First thing we did on arrival was to ‘empty’ the brim of soot.”

Judith Hincksman (née Hummerston), student 1951-1956

Did you know?

“Panama” hats were first made in Ecuador, perhaps as early as 4,000 BC. The Ecuadorians plaited the hats from leaves of the *Carludovica palmata* plant, known locally as the toquilla palm. The Spanish, who first arrived in South America in the 16th century, encouraged locals to produce Spanish-influenced hats and over time the handmade hats evolved into the style we know today.

To be exported, the hats had to be taken to the Isthmus of Panama, hence the association with “Panama”. Both the name and the hat enjoyed widespread use by the early 20th century when workers on the Panama Canal wore them as protection against the hot sun and heat.

Since then Panamas have become fashionable all over the world, worn by world leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt and Nikita Khrushchev, writers such as Mark Twain and Graham Greene and actors such as Gregory Peck, Keira Knightly and Johnny Depp.

A number of panama hats are currently on display in Marden Heritage Centre



School gates, 1968

Photo donated by Jennie Walters, student 1964-1972



Tennis group, 1904



Geology Excursion to Balmoral, 1932

Photo donated by Margaret Roberts, student 1930-1934