

## **The Community Minded Bryce Sisters**

The Bryce sisters, Isabella & Phyllis contributed significantly to the Maleny community. They were born to a pioneering and hard working farming family but all this work did not hinder them from being active in the life of the community.

Their parents were Ben & Priscilla (Bridge) Bryce who married in 1914. They had 3 daughters, Isabella born in 1914, Phyllis in 1916 and Marjorie in 1922. The three girls were involved with the farm as soon as they were old enough. Their father Ben became blind from the age of 21 and from the age of 4, Isabella used to steer the horse, up front on the saddle taking a 40L can of cream to the factory.

Ben Bryce & his brothers were involved in building the First Union Non- Denominational church on land donated by the Dunlops in Bunya St. This church which was later shifted to the corner of Myrtle & Coral Streets and became the Methodist Church. This was sold when the new Uniting Church adjacent to Erowol was built.

The three girls started school in Maleny and rode into school on their ponies. When Isabelle was 14 she left school after completion of a music scholarship in piano. This in turn led in tuition in the organ. Isabelle played both instruments for the rest of her life. She played at the Uniting Church services, at weddings and various social events. Family entertainment when the Bryce girls were young was a gathering in the home with songs around the piano. Ben passed away in 1944, Priscilla in 1971 and only 6 years later, Marjorie too passed away aged 55 years.

By means of hard work and frugal living, Isabelle & Phyllis Bryce, with the help of Bob Pointing were able to add to the family land holdings. They had large acreages at Mt Mellum, Baroon Pocket and on the eastern side of the range at Montville. They held over 2,000 acres which they attended to regularly by travelling on horseback, taking a packed lunch and returning late at night. These properties were eventually sold.

In addition to their farming commitments, the Bryce sisters were involved in many local organisations over many years. When Isabella was presented with a Rotary Paul Harris Award, she had been involved in the Red Cross for 50 years, Girl Guides 26 years, Endeavour Foundation 23 years, Scouts 21 years, Beaver Masters 21 years, QCWA 17 years, Committee for the Ageing 13 years, Senior Citizens 13 years, Maleny Retirement Living Board 17 years, Riding for the Disabled 10 years, Hospital Auxiliary 6 years, Meals on Wheels 3 years, had been the church's organist for over 50 years and for most of the other churches in Maleny at some time, Guides Tea Stall at Boxsells Cattle & Calf Sales for 21 years. She received an MBE, OBE, the 4NA Community Service Award and was named the Shire Citizen of the Year. The MBE was awarded by the Governor, Sir John Ramsay in 1984 for her contribution to the community. At the time of receiving this award, Phyllis was in hospital and able to share it, but was unable to attend her investiture.

Phyllis was awarded a 4NA Community Service Award in 1977 and the British Empire Medal for her community work in 1984. She too had been involved with a long list of community organisations, including 45 years with the Red Cross, including war service. Isabella & Phyllis donated their farm, "Erowol" to the Uniting Church's Centres for Retirement Living (CRL) in 1980 and work began on the first four units. Phyllis became secretary of the Retirement Village Committee but passed away in 1985 aged 68 years. A 53-bed hostel was then built, with an additional 10-bed wing in 1992.

In 1992, Isabella married Mord Wright. They had met 10 years before at the Maleny Calf and Cattle Sales, of which Isabella was the convenor. After Mort's first wife died, they snatched a few moments courting over in the Bryce cow shed as Isabella did the milking. They were both living in the hostel when Mort proposed in 1992. They were married at the local Uniting church on August 1 and spent their honeymoon at an Aged Care Facility at Palmwoods. From Isabella's room, she could see her home, "Priscilla Cottage" being moved to the Historical Village and attended the Opening Day. Nothing was thrown away over almost a century and Isabelle donated everything from her home to fit out "Priscilla Cottage" as a heritage landmark to Maleny Pioneers.

Isabella suffered a stroke and passed away peacefully on March 15, 2000 aged 86.

The site selected for a \$3 million, 26 bed nursing facility was where the Bryce Family home stood.

The current (2015) Uniting Church building was constructed on part of the Bryce farm.

The church is indebted to the significant contribution made by the Bryce sisters to its work over many years. This legacy will continue into the future.

*Acknowledged Maleny Historical Society. Adapted by Murray Robertson 2015*



"Erowol" C1930



Bryce sisters at Erowol C1930  
Marjorie, Isabella & Phyllis



Isabella & Phyllis on their Welsh ponies at "Erowol" 1930