



Maleny District Sport & Recreation Club Inc Newsletter

Conondale's Quiet Achievers

The Sunshine Coast's pioneer history would not be complete without the stories of the pioneers who took up land and lived in the sheltered fertile valleys of the Conondale district where creeks flow into the headwaters of the Mary River valley.

In 1841, the Archer brothers took up Durundur Station which was about seven kilometres from what is now the town of Woodford. This country was very desirable as it contained rich stands of fine timbers, including blackbutt, ironbark and cedar along the river banks.

Cleared grassed areas made the area one of promise for settlers looking for grasslands to raise cattle, sheep and horses.

In 1851, Donald McKenzie lodged a land tender for the head water of the Mary River and named his station 'Conondale'. Though experienced with sheep, he was not an experienced stockman and his cattle in the Conondale hills became unruly and unworkable.

A mortgage was foreclosed on the property as Mr McKenzie could not meet his liabilities. A J McConnel then bought Conondale Station and his homestead looked over the fine Mary River country.

Three routes that traversed the Conondale Range were used by early explorers and settlers. One went past Durundur, along the Stanley River, and up the steep spur to the crest of the Conondale Range crossing and continued down the northern slopes to Conondale Station, following the Mary River. An extremely steep path on the southern side of the range was the Postman's Track which was used to provide a weekly postal service with packhorse and is still in use today.

When gold was discovered in Gympie in 1867, hundreds of gold seekers passed that way to the Gympie gold fields by the rough track. The gold seekers travelled through the isolated region along Postman's Track then followed the rich flats of the Mary River towards Durundur and Conondale.

The only transport that could cross the range were bullock drays and people pushing wheel barrows and tramping along on foot.

When the station at Conondale was divided for settlement, the township kept the name Conondale. Some of the early Conondale pioneers included Carl Ehlerth, who arrived in 1891. He and his son Carl, aged 11, built

their home on Portion 148V, Conondale from pit sawn timber. Ernest Ehlerth, born in 1892, later became a world champion axeman.



Pioneer George Ahern came to Conondale in 1897 soon after Conondale was cut up into smaller blocks. There was no road when George Ahern took up his selection so for years the family herded their pigs and turkeys to market with the aid of kelpie dogs. Later his descendant, Conondale's Mike Ahern, would become Premier of Queensland.

George and Annie Tilney came from the Woodford district to a selection at Conondale in 1909.

(Continued Page 3)

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Conondale's Quiet Achievers

(Continued from Page 1)

They rode horses and in steep parts walked and carried all of their possessions. Life was lonely and Annie Tilney was determined that her children would be educated. She rode a horse to Landsborough, took a train to Brisbane and visited the Department of Instruction to see if a teacher could be appointed.

How did Annie feel when she was told that the minister was engaged that day? She must have met with some success because by 1912 a provisional school had started in Conondale.

The Tilney family established a dairy and young teenager Daisy Tilney used to pack saddle the cream on horseback in five gallon cans up the isolated range to Witta. Daisy would leave the cans of cream in a hollow tree for the cream carter to pick up and take to

the Maleny Co-operative butter factory which started operations in 1904.

In the early 1920s, Richard and Elizabeth Beausang moved from Gympie to Conondale. Elizabeth had seven children, including son Jack Beausang who became the long standing shire chairman of Landsborough Shire and the first mayor of Caloundra City. He also became president of the Queensland Local Government Association.

When Eumundi-born Minnie English moved to Conondale in 1928 her 14-year-old son "Tiger" and a school friend walked their dairy herd from Eumundi to their new Conondale farm, taking three days to reach their destination.

Another Conondale identity was Sir Manuel Richard Hornibrook OBE who was born on August 7, 1893. He was the second son of seven children of Irish-born John and Catherine Hornibrook who took up farming near Conondale in 1896. At the age of 13, Manuel became an apprentice to HW Fookes of Adelaide Street, Brisbane and learned the building and joinery trade. Manuel Hornibrook made his reputation as a bridge builder, including the construction of such bridges as the William Jolly and the Story Bridge in Brisbane, with the Hornibrook Highway named after him.

The majority of the ironbark timber used in the construction of the Hornibrook Highway was supplied from the Conondale and

Maleny areas by Hornibrook's Conondale mill.

Two other mills in the Obi Obi district, run by Hamilton Sawmills Pty. Ltd., which was a subsidiary, also supplied timber for the famous Hornibrook Highway bridge. The Conondale Timbers Sawmill is now listed on the Queensland Heritage Register.

Another claim to fame was that his company Hornibrook Constructions was responsible for the super structure of the Sydney Opera House including the sail-like roof. Manuel was awarded an OBE in 1957 and knighted in 1960. Sir Manuel's lack of formal education was compensated for by common sense, vision and a hard-working spirit.

Times were difficult for the early pioneer families in the isolated region of Conondale. Names such as Fleiter, Ahern, Tilney, Sirl, Raddatz, Minchenton, English, Tesch, Layt and many others are to be acknowledged in the development of the region. Their sheer tenacity and remarkable accomplishments in the face of such adversity, showed a group of people that "got on with it", achieving so much with so little during tough times whilst appreciating the good.

Today Conondale is a small thriving community with a store, school, a swimming pool and magnificent state forests which can be accessed with guided walks and camping areas for all to enjoy.

(Continued Next page)



Jack Beausang
in his tennis whites

Conondale's Quiet Achievers

(Continued from Page 3)

Conondale Memorial Recreation Park is the home of the Australian Motocross Championship, a major event that attracts participants and spectators from throughout Australia.

Thanks to Sunshine Coast Council's Heritage Library for this story and Picture Sunshine Coast for the images.

Conondale State School Centenary 2012



Marjorie (Tilney) Prior, Joyce Smith & Roy Sirl