

The Fleiter family - farming for five generations

Conondale is small in size, but big on stature and country spirit.

Personifying the heartbeat of this rustic idyll is the pioneering Fleiter family who for five generations, have been farming the fertile banks of the Mary River.



by JUDY FREDRIKSEN



Lloyd and Ian in the shed with their quad bikes

The country welcome is typical – a cheery handshake with Ian and Nance Fleiter and Ian's younger brother Lloyd before we make ourselves at home around the family table – embellished with an endearing display of family photos across the years.

As with many of Australia's pioneers, Ian and Lloyd's grandparents left their home country of Germany for a better life – no plan in place – merely armed with hope and determination.

"After landing in Brisbane, they came to Maleny and stopped at what is now known as 'Fleiters Hill', explains Ian.

"They must have liked what they saw and decided to stay," he says.

"They settled on top of the hill, they set a dairy up and they dairied for a number of years".

Over time, the Fleiter land holdings were expanded with Fred Fleiter, Ian and Lloyd's father, later taking up a farm at Conondale. By the 1950s, it was capable of growing an impressive produce display of the

magnitude usually only accomplished by entire districts in the Brisbane Exhibition.

The farm bore fruit, vegies, grains, honey, milk and even cotton. As was the necessity at the time, fruit was preserved and vegies were made into pickles enabling the family to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Ian and Lloyd continued to dairy until just before deregulation of the dairy industry in 2000, when they turned their attention to raising beef cattle.

Along the way, Nance's family had moved to the region and after meeting Ian at a dance, the most common means for romance at that time, they married.

Nance was a country girl who was very much at home with horses and cattle, having grown up on a property on the Macintyre River near Inglewood. She was also a dab hand with a fishing rod, a passion she still loves today. Photos of Nance's grandchildren holding up fish that are nearly as big as the kids themselves, attest to the shared family passion.

Meanwhile in 1961, Loyd married Mary Grundon, a girl he had gone to school with.

"Mary was a teacher," says Loyd. "In those days, there was no high school in Kenilworth or Maleny. When she finished primary school, she went to boarding school in Brisbane. She did her teacher's training there and then she came back and her first posting was Conondale."

A community stalwart, Mary Fleiter recognised the importance of preserving social history and wrote two books about Conondale. The first in 1987 was a history of the town written for the 75th anniversary of the Conondale School and the second is a heartfelt tribute to the pioneer women of the Conondale district called, *They all had a Heart of Gold*.

The latter depicts the isolation and harsh conditions that our early settlers faced, yet met the daily challenges without complaint.

Respect for Mary was such that when she passed away in 2005, shops in Maleny closed so all the staff could attend her funeral.

Over the years, each generation of the Fleiters became heavily involved with the Conondale community.

Ian, Nance and Loyd fondly describe a vibrant dairy industry in a lifestyle devoid of modern amenities, punctuated with the fun of fortnightly dances, euchre nights, picnic races and an annual rodeo.

It is quickly apparent that the Fleiters were like the glue that held the Conondale community together, creating shared experiences and industriously crafting the building blocks of communal pride.

"The rodeo committee raised a lot of money for different organisations in Conondale over the years, but it got to the stage where the insurance side of things just became too expensive," explains Loyd.

"In those days, there used to be a dance every second week probably, there was no TV much, so you had to make your own entertainment.

"A lot of people used to come from Kenilworth and Maleny (to the dances) and in turn, we used to go to Kenilworth and Maleny if there was something on there, patronise each other's function. But that's all gone by the way now," laments Loyd.

Money raised at the dances and rodeo would go towards the maintenance of the hall; volunteers would band together and paint the hall or carry out repairs. In other cases, donations were made to local organisations to help the community.

The picnic races at Green Park were a popular event – "a good day out". The ladies dressed up and the races were generously supported by local sponsorships.

"We were lucky with sponsorships," says Ian. "Butler, McDermott and Egan, solicitors in Nambour led the way -

Loyd with his parents, May and Fred Fleiter with produce from the family farm, Brisbane Exhibition 1954 ▼



Loyd, Nance and Ian Fleiter at the table embellished with family photos ▼



▲ Mary Grundon and Loyd Fleiter on their engagement



Ian and Loyd as boys