

School life is born on the Blackall Range

This coming Easter, the Maleny State School will celebrate a Century of Education on the Blackall Range with a gathering at the Primary School in Bunya Street.

A PART FROM Maleny township schools the celebration will include the Blackall Range Provisional, Witta, North Maleny, Bald Knob, Curramore, and Booroobin schools, as well as the Maleny State High School and the Ananda Marga River School.

A weekend of activities has been planned including a Wine & Cheese Meet & Greet, a parade of past students and staff starting from the original school site in Cedar Street and finishing at the High School in Bunya Street. There will also be a mini fair, displays, memorabilia, stalls, the opening of two time capsules, a formal centenary dinner and a Sunday morning ecumenical service.

The need for education

As settlers moved up to the Blackall Range in the late 1800s they tended to gather in small separate communities, and the many children of these families soon needed their own schools. For at least three decades there was a flurry of building activity as one room schools served communities not far from the McClarty home. It was only one long room with a smaller annex at the end. This served as a bed-sitting room for an early teacher, Mrs O'Sullivan, a widow with two children.

In 1892 the Witta School opened, followed by the Bald Knob School in 1902. A small school in a slab hut was constructed near the junction of Burgum and North Maleny roads, but insufficient pupils gave it a short life.

Emma Jane Milligan was the teacher of the new Peachester Provisional School in 1901. There were at least

30 families in the district but Emma Jane could never be sure of the number of pupils each day due to distance, terrain, flooded creek crossings, and the ongoing need for children to help around the house and farm.

Bald Knob Provisional School opened in January 1902 on land donated by Captain John Palmer, and two of his six children were amongst the original students. The first teacher was Miss Margaret O'Mahony who boarded with the Palmers and later married an older son.

After the Maleny butter factory was opened in 1904, it became obvious that Maleny would become a substantial service town and a more central school was needed. In 1912, land was acquired in Cedar Street, where the Guide Hut stands today, and the school was built and opened in April 1913 with 52 pupils enrolled by the end of the first week.

The same year that Maleny State School opened, the Curramore School opened and in 1919 the school at Booroobin opened also.

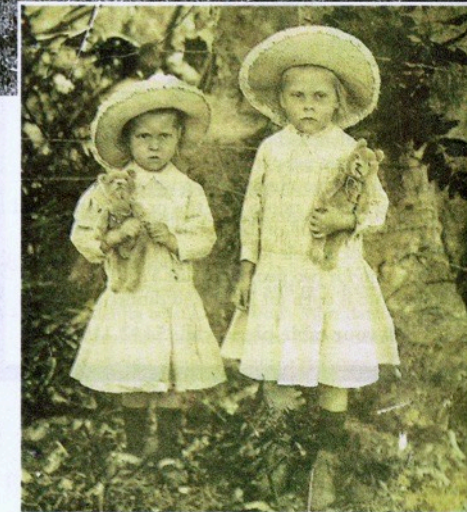
Over the years, the smaller schools struggled to keep their numbers and the Maleny State School became the main school. The school was purchased in Bunya Street. A new building was built and the High School moved to this site in 1957. Some of the old schools from around the district and buildings from the Cedar St site were moved to the new Bunya Street site and they were joined to form the primary school. The new school was officially opened in 1959.

In 1986, construction began on the new high school at the top of Bunya Street and a year later, the Maleny High School was opened.

It celebrated 50 years of education in 2004.



ABOVE: The opening of Maleny's state school in April 1913 in Cedar Street.



ABOVE: Emily and Molly Hapgood in Maleny in 1910 comforted by their teddies as they start at their new school.

Memories of the old school yard...

one of the kids came racing up to her saying "Miss Roberts, there's a snake in the girl's lavatory."

"I was expected to be this big brave teacher who could deal with anything. So, followed by the fourteen kids I poked my head around the doorway and above the toilet seat rose a seven foot carpet snake. There were 14 kids behind me but I was first out.

"So I told Murray, one of the older boys, to get a couple of sticks and take the snake way down the steep hill to the horse paddock. Murray bravely got the snake and we all

followed him past a heap of stones and wild raspberries. A second snake came out to greet us. It was too much 14 feet of carpet snake so I said Murray kill them both!"

Bert Brooker was an assertive young lad to say the least. He reports that probably aged five, in 1916 he got "the cuts" on his first day at Witta school because he pushed another kid off the verandah. Afterwards he went out and pushed the same kid off the verandah again for dobbing him in.

Bert recalled that during WW1, the school had slit trenches dug out the back, but because of the wildlife in the vicinity, they had to clean them out every couple of days. The boys would usually be called upon to get rid of any unfortunate animal and/or snakes that had fallen in between clean-outs.

At around the same time Pearl Burgess recalls a teamster's dog chasing a koala outside the Bald Knob school grounds. The koala took refuge in a small cedar tree growing outside the school. The teamster started beating the koala with his whip, says Ms Burgess. The teacher came out and remonstrated with the man who finally desisted, not before the koala was hurt and badly frightened. It was an incident never forgotten by Ms Burgess later to become Mrs Pearl Oxenham.

In later years, Bert had the cream run from Curramore to Maleny and also the school run in the same truck from Curramore to Witta school and Maleny.

To save time and travelling, he used to put the kids and the cream in the back of the truck. The kids would then help him to unload all the cream and put it under a bush, load up the planks for seats, put the mesh across the back, and carry on to school. Bert would come back later to finish the cream run. Bert said the kids didn't mind, the parents didn't mind and of course the cream didn't mind.

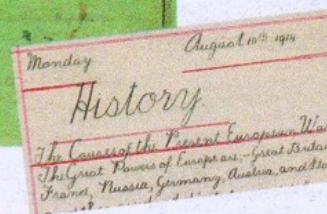
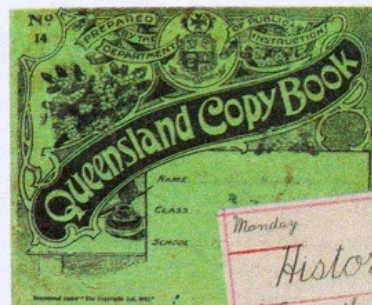
Despite simple, one-room schools in those early years, parents were eager to see their children educated. Some children showed a devotion to their schoolwork despite having commitments to work on their parents' farms and rural businesses.

The Hapgoods arrived in Maleny in 1910 from Ulladulla in NSW. They were a typical family, pitting their wits and strength against a vibrant but unforgiving environment. Mum and Dad Joe, Ben, Molly Emily, Dora, Anne, Edna, Dave and Harry lived and worked on various Range properties including Thynne's farm (incorporating present day Mary Cairncross Park) and Porter's Farm at Witta.

The Hapgood girls in particular were keen students - Emily's copy book is a model for copperplate script and polite letters to fictitious bank managers and potential employers. One of her siblings at Maleny school attempted an ambitious history composition sitting in this one room school in the bush.



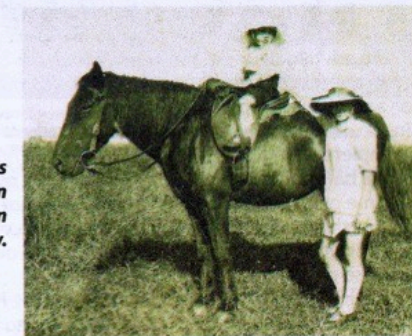
ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT: The Department of Public Works contracted Mr McKinnon of Nambour to shift 8 classrooms including furniture and fittings from the existing site in Cedar Street, across the bridge to the new site in Bunya Street in 1957.



The Queensland Copy Book was for years the way to learn how to fill in official forms, how to write business letters and fill in Customs forms. Emily and Molly Hapgood (pictured right) wrote in perfect copperplate script.

She wrote at the top of her page ... Monday August 10, 1914 ... The Causes of the Present European War, and then went on to explain the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand.

Since Maleny's first school opened in 1913, the Blackall Range has flourished, and so has the education of its children. Both Maleny state and high schools have continued to provide a high standard of education for thousands of Range families whose children go on to higher education or continue to run the family farm. The centenary of the birth of Maleny schools is well worth celebrating and recording for posterity.



RIGHT: Many isolated families sent their children to school on horseback. Here Allan and Evelyn Lawley set out for Maleny.



RIGHT: Beryl Newton in 1937 - a teacher at Maleny school is one of many who regularly "rescued" students from local fauna... in this case two 2m carpet pythons.

