

Peg (McLean) Burnett

By the time Peg went to the Maleny State School for her Primary schooling the school was attended by 130 to 150 pupils, with a headmaster and three teachers kept very busy. The school was situated on the hill where the Girl Guides Hut is located in 1999, the move to its



Peg, right
1928 Grades 4 to 7 Maleny SS

present location near the Town's swimming pool not taking place until 30 years later. Peg passed her State Scholarship at the old Maleny State School and Mr and Mrs McLean sent her off to board at Somerville House in Brisbane for her Junior and Sub-Senior years.

She has fond memories of those years. "Maths and Debate were my favorite things at Somerville House." When the position as the first librarian at the newly formed Maleny Library, attached to the School of Arts, was offered, her mother was very keen for Peg to take the job. Although Peg came to love working with books, she freely admits to hating leaving school because it meant she sacrificed her Senior year at Somerville House.

Having been trained as a librarian Peg spent the years from 1930 to 1939 building up the Maleny Library, but was obliged to resign when she was married. "In those days it was frowned on for married women to hold down a job!" Because of those happy years of involvement she was very sad when the Library was partly destroyed by fire in 1951. Even though she was then a busy mother she was encouraged to return to assist with the restoration of the books and other treasures which had survived the flames. In 1967 she returned as Librarian and began the practice of charging sixpence a book to raise funds for replacing books which had been lost in the fire. There was a tremendous response from the Maleny community with books and magazines donated, but it took some years to fill some of the gaps on the shelves. Nowadays the Caloundra City's Mobile Library caters for many of the Town's keen readers.

Attached to the Library in the then School of Arts there were music, dancing and elocution lessons, which meant it was the centre of the cultural activities for the community before the fire. When the new Community Centre was built in 1967 these activities were again catered for. Over fifty years or more Peg was involved in many of the activities which made Maleny an interesting place to live; Hospital and Erowal Auxiliaries, Rotary, Bridge, Quilters, Arts

and Crafts, Reading Groups, Meals on Wheels and Neighbourhood Watch. As a honored recipient of a Paul Harris Fellowship from Rotary and a number of civic recognitions she is happy to just go on serving the worthwhile causes of Maleny.

One of Peg's fondest interests is her garden. Dahlias have always been popular locally and Peg was one of the organisers of the first Floral Carpet in the RSL Hall, which has become a feature of Maleny. She also loves her orchids and is still an active member of the Garden Club, being an enthusiastic flower arranger for weddings and other functions in St George's Church. She loves the Theatre and has for over twenty years organised regular bus trips to theatrical and cultural events.

"Some of the local people depended on the Library for their books and cultural attachments. One person who specially loved his books was Mr Bruce, an engineer from the New Zealand Hydro-Electric Corporation, who lived across the street from us. He worked with the six Westaway boys in the clearing and milling of the timber off Meriden Plains near Caloundra. They operated a large mill there and there is still a sawmill in the area. As the timber was cleared the men went into other fields and the milling gave way to farming. Mr Bruce was a great help when the Maleny Library was restarted in 1956."

Peg met her future husband, Rixson Burnett, when he moved to Maleny in 1930 to manage the Maleny Hotel for his parents who'd been the proprietors since 1923. Rixson had studied accountancy after leaving school at Gympie and had a good position with Burns Philp & Company in Brisbane, which he gave up because of his parents' poor health. This was a high-standard hotel with exclusive first-class accommodation which catered for tourists, many from New Zealand. It was a popular destination for bowlers after the Burnetts established the Maleny Bowling Greens on land beside the Hotel. Peg built her home overlooking the Bowling Green but, paradoxically for a keen sportswoman, bowls was not one of the games she was interested in. "I didn't think I was old enough! "

"With the outbreak of the World War II everything changed and many of the local young men, and some women, left the district to join up. The beer quota was cut back to the extent that when two Australian Army camps were set up in the locality, there was an acute shortage of kegs when the soldiers descended on the hotel. I guess they were entitled to be thirsty because those army men built the road to Montville and the road to Woodford!

"After we were married in 1939 Rixson continued to run the Hotel with his parents, but I was never directly involved. We built our home on a block of land beside the Hotel to allow him to be handy when he was required. That home has been mine and my family's happy residence for the past 64 years. Rixson decided to sell the Hotel 1950 and turn his attention to the farm. We had previously purchased three dairy farms in the Reeseville area which he had managed with the help of some farm families. On three separate occasions, for up to three months, we moved our necessities out to the farm and kept the operation going when staff were off sick, but I never really lived there.

"In 1955 Rixson was elected as a Councillor on the then Landsborough Shire Council and served an unbroken term of 27 years, during which time there were many improvements in

the living conditons of the Maleny area. When he did not seek re-election in 1982, he was reported to have said that his main achievements on the Landsborough Shire Council had been the development of better roads. As a cattle breeder he built up a successful Jersey stud at Reeseville.

"This he handed over to our son, David, who had worked as a jackeroo and overseer on properties in Western Queensland and the Riverina for eighteen years. David married Rosemary, a southern girl, and they have two sons, one a Churchie boy and one a Nudgee boy, both of them graduates in agriculture-related fields. David and his sons ran our farm in Burnett Lane for twenty years until the three separate titles of the land were sold in 1996. They moved their Fresian herd to set up a dairying operation on the Mary River near Gympie.

"My three daughters all have good husbands and lovely children.

"Margaret and Peter Zillman, who are teachers, live at Caboolture; Jenny is a public servant and Colin Christensen, her husband, an electrician; and Pauline and Ron Thomas live at Kawana where she looks after the dialysis unit at the Nambour Hospital. I am proud of my eleven grandchildren.

"It has always been my good fortune to be able to do what I could for the community, by serving on committees and supporting worthwhile causes. My kids all attended the old school up on the hill and I was one of the people who started the first tuck shop there. The roster for the tuck shop was based on the several school bus routes where each bus route ran the tuck shop one day each week.

"I realised that it was different for me than for the farm mothers. They had enough work to do on the farm and weren't looking for other jobs. However, working together with other women in areas like tuck shops was a valuable social gathering for many women. When the new State School was built near my home I was able to again assist in setting up their tuck shop. It has given me much pleasure to set up the flower arrangements for functions at our beautiful new St George's Church.



Peg, 2004 at the Maleny HS Golden Anniversary

In November, 2003, Peg moved to Caloundra Rise Retirement Estate at Little Mountain. Here she maintains her interest in gardening and again her library skills have been called upon to establish the library in the estate's community center.

Her Christian upbringing and strong faith have sustained Peg through her busy life. She has carried a family tradition of community service to new levels, her philosophy being 'You only get out of life what you put into it!

