

Selectors Green - a Tribute to Maleny's Pioneers

They journeyed for months at sea, often in unsanitary and rough conditions, fleeing poverty and war in Europe and the United Kingdom. Any inkling of romantic adventure was squashed by the survival instinct to secure a personal date with that alluring but demanding mistress – Opportunity.



▲ *Selectors Green Advisory Committee: Back L to R: Bill Henman, Jeff Cornfoot, Dot Jupp, Mike Norman, Penny Edwards, Max Whitten, Garth Cottrell, Lionel Tilley, Winston Johnston, Spencer Shaw. Seated L to R: Tom Malone, Desley Malone, Gail Denver, Karen Shaw - image Gail Denver/MDSRC*



by JUDY FREDRIKSEN

Early European settlers arrived in Maleny armed with little more than hope and courage in their hearts, willing to battle whatever Fate may throw at them. For some, it was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – the simple chance to own enough land to become self-sufficient. For others, it was more like a cauldron of snakes at the end of the earth – hardship and death was a normal part of daily life.

In either case, the harsh remote lifestyle in Australia was still far better than the oppressive 'old country' and as we relax in our trendy cafés, drinking our coffees, enjoying the company of friends and greeting passers-by without raising so much as a sweat, it's time we acknowledged these trail blazers – both the men and women – whose weary souls haunt the creeks, the valleys and the rainforests across the Blackall Range.

Their spirits now live on to inspire and comfort us in Maleny's newest park – Selectors Green – which sits on

the cooling banks of the Obi Obi Creek, overlooking the Maleny Community Precinct and the Maleny Golf Course.

Selectors Green is an initiative of Maleny Blackall Range Lion's Club's Winston Johnston, and is a contemplation of the important role of this heritage-rich area's early female pioneers.

The name 'Selectors Green' (as opposed to Settlers Green) was carefully chosen out of respect for the local Indigenous people who settled here before the Europeans arrived.

"I became aware that over the years there was no place around Maleny that celebrated the women who were the pioneers, the women who were left behind whenever the men went to war and all those sorts of things," explains Winston.

"I said it would be really good to have an area that celebrated that, a place where people could go and rest, read history boards – a place where trees could be planted.

"Those trees would then have a plaque at the base which would refer to the history boards and it would name the women who came here with the selectors."

When the European settlers arrived, they had the opportunity to take up a Crown lease, with the first application being received from Isaac Burgess in 1878. In the following four years, 16 applications were received and amongst those, two ended up being overseen by women which was highly unusual in an era when women generally did not own property.

These two remarkable women – Jane Dunlop, the first white woman on the range, and Margaret Hankinson, a widow with nine children – endured unimaginable hardships. Their graves outside the Maleny Primary School greet all newcomers to the township in much the same way their occupants, when alive, would have been eager to overcome their loneliness and greet visitors back in the 1800s.

The European settlers had to prove their worthiness of becoming property owners with several conditions being attached to the lease. They paid an annual rent of sixpence an acre, they had to reside on the property continuously for five years, construct a dwelling, clear, fence and cultivate part of the land.

In some cases, they also had to be head of a family (not an individual) and if they were not already British, they had to become a naturalised British subject.



Selectors Green, Maleny - image Gail Denver/MDSRC

Winston explains further:

"The condition on the lease was they had to clear the land, plant grass and start agriculture. They would clear this, and then the men, to get some more money, would go off and work somewhere else or work in the timber industry.

"If the women didn't stay here and keep the home fires burning, when the Crown inspectors came around, they would go into the cabins and feel the fire hearth. If the hearth was cold, they'd come back a month later. If it was still cold, you had to show cause as to why you shouldn't lose your lease. Sometimes you just lost it."

Before a proper timber dwelling could be erected, the huts were feeble. Jane Dunlop's family lived in two bark humpies, while stories from early settlers indicate most huts were 10-foot by 12-foot, had four-foot walls of palm with a tarpaulin spread over them.

Imagine living in these conditions, looking after numerous children, trying to be self-sufficient by keeping a milking cow, chooks, and growing vegies, warding off snakes and dingoes, battling heavy rains and floods, and not having medical help nearby. Often infants did not survive and women died in childbirth.

With all this in mind, our early pioneering women deserve hero status so on March 8 – International Women's Day – I encourage you dear readers, to head out to Selectors Green, take some time to read the history boards, enjoy the specially selected heritage plants, then sit under the magnificent fig tree to enjoy the view and send a heartfelt thank you to our brave, unselfish pioneering women.

In our next edition, we chat to Bill Hankinson, one of the direct descendants of both Jane Dunlop and Margaret Hankinson and share some insights around the survival instincts of these two incredible women. 