

Isla Stamp –Setting the record straight

By Terrence Hoffmann, *Newsangle December 2010 p35*

Isla Stamp Court in Aireys Inlet commemorates a former resident of whom several stories are told and retold until it is difficult to know what she really did to be honoured with having a road named for her. I have interviewed a number of her contemporaries, friends and relatives as well as checking Shire records to try to set the record straight and to honour the memory of one of the builders of our community.

Born in 1906, Isla grew up in Melbourne where she attended Scotch College at the Parkville High School campus. She left school at fifteen to travel with her family through Europe for two years. On her return, in 1923, she studied music at the Conservatorium and cooking at Swinburne College. Her interest in pre-school children began when she became a voluntary helper at inner city kindergartens. She decided that she wanted to attend the Kindergarten Teachers College, but first had to complete year 10 of high school. In 1929 she began studies at the Kindergarten Teachers College in Melbourne, but after two years again set off with her family for a tour of Europe. She completed her final year and graduated in 1932. Then followed a series of positions in Kindergartens (Carlton, Fitzroy, Northcote) and as Director of the Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre in Hobart followed by two years as the Principal of the Kindergarten Teachers Training College in Perth. In 1945 she became the Federal Education Officer for the Australian Association for Pre-school Child Development in Melbourne. While working in this job she completed year 12 of high school so that she could further her studies overseas. The only place where early childhood development was taught was at Columbia University in New York. From 1946 to 1948 she completed a Bachelor of Science and a Masters degree in New York.

Returning to Australia she was appointed Principal at the Brisbane Kindergarten Teachers College, but just for two years, as her thirst for knowledge was not yet satisfied. She returned to New York to complete a Doctor of Education becoming a Clinical Psychologist. Between 1955 and 1968 she held the position of Head of the Pre-school Guidance Program in the Victorian Department of Health. She also took up the role of Education Director for the Australian Pre-school Association in Canberra and worked there until her retirement.

She moved to Moggs Creek as a permanent resident on her retirement, living in a house divided into separate sections so that she and her friend Joyce Tuddenham, could lead their lives there independently if they wished. Moggs Creek in the 1960s had a close-knit group of residents. A small community, the township was physically isolated from neighbouring settlements having its own atmosphere and social life. One person attracted to the beautiful physical setting and then who gradually felt at home there was Isla Stamp.

At the time, Dr Isla Stamp was a senior Victorian public servant, working in the Health Department as Head of the Pre-school Guidance Program. She lead a very

busy life, publishing two books during this period, conducting research and developing her Stamp Observation Method for helping teachers to identify psychological problems in pre-school children, and working in her field of child psychology. On top of this was her active involvement in professional bodies such as the Australian Psychological Association and OMEP, an international organisation for pre-school education. Hers was a truly brilliant career.

What must have attracted Isla to Moggs Creek was a sense of belonging to a real community. She had moved her home a lot in order to pursue her studies and career. Moggs Creek was, perhaps, a base from which she could retreat from the pressures of her busy life to relax and enjoy things. When she returned for holidays, she could invite her family to stay and get to see her nieces as they grew up. There were also the Christmas and new year parties with neighbours and the celebrations associated with the fabricated founder of Moggs Creek- "Sir Samuel Moggs". An invention of the locals, Sir Samuel had a monument commemorating his "life". Those in on the joke could build fanciful tales about him for visitors. This has established a tradition that continues today. Visit this site to see where the legend has developed - www.moggs.org.au/History.htm

Burnt out in 1983 in the Ash Wednesday fires, Isla moved to Aireys Inlet where she built another house separated into two. This time the other half of the house was for her family and visitors. The shared kitchen was the main common ground. The house remains in the family as she left it to her two nieces.

Isla was an active member of several community groups in Aireys Inlet. She worked in AIDA and chaired a committee to establish accommodation for the aged in Aireys Inlet. Isla would possibly been amused at the rumours surrounding her role in getting the aged accommodation established. Many believe that she donated the land to the Shire. However Shire records show that the land was purchased by the Barrabool Shire from Prudence Cooke in 1988. Others believe that she was an extremely wealthy woman who left behind a considerable sum of money held in a trust to be used to build housing for the aged. Her nieces inherited her estate and have seen her will and they have stated that this is not true. The truth is, that while comfortably off, as any high ranking senior public servant would be, Isla was not a rich woman. Her contribution was not in gifting land and leaving money to fund a project, it was in having the sensitivity to see the need in the community, and then to throw her energy and will into the task to see the aged accommodation built. Rather than becoming something like "Sir Samuel Moggs", Isla is a genuine founder of our district and one of which the Aireys Inlet community is justly proud.