

Esther Waters: From Spring Plains to Willowdell



Ashleigh Saville, Isabel Michael and
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Deniliquin High School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Local Land Services and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to agriculture and natural resource management issues.

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. www.wirraminna.org

Murray Darling Association

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. www.mda.asn.au



Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. www.envirostories.com.au

Esther Waters: From Spring Plains to Willowdell

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School: Deniliquin High School

Local Land Heroes

In 2014, students involved in the **Creative Catchment Kids** program researched and wrote stories about 'Local Land Heroes' - people, businesses or industries who contribute to productive agriculture and healthy environments along the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. The program was generously funded by Murray Local Land Services and Riverina Local Land Services.

Local Land Heroes acknowledges the United Nations 2014 International Year of Family Farming.
www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/



Local Land Heroes is part of Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.



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Esther Nevinson was born in a Poitiers Street private hospital in Deniliquin 1942. She began life at her families property 'Spring Plains' approximately 47 kilometres from Deniliquin, just north of the small town of Wanganella. She discovered a love for animals at a young age and describes some of her fondest memories when horseback riding, and playing on the plains. Esther's farming experience as a child formed her passion for the land and this interest has shaped her life.



Esther pictured (far right) with sister Margaret, whilst her father, Charles, and brothers Paul and John sit on their cart at Spring Plains.

In 1898, Rachael and William Nevinson and their growing family of five moved to Spring Plains, Wanganella. They arrived with covered wagons, tents, horses and dogs. Rachael and William worked at 'The Black Swamp' Cobb and Co change. William worked as head horseman, where horse teams were fed and looked after for the next stage of the coaches' long journey. Rachael provided food for coachmen and passengers.



Rachael and William Nevinson and the family out the front of the Spring Plains homestead.

As a young man, Charles Nevinson, son of Rachael and William Nevinson, worked off their property pursuing dam sinking, droving and horse breaking. In 1936, Charles met May Moppett in Deniliquin. They later married and had four children named Paul, Margaret, John and Esther. To support his family, Charles worked hard on their sheep property 'Spring Plains'. Esther's mother, May, had a hard life. She had to cook on a wood fire, wash clothes in a big copper pot and iron with a heavy metal iron. She also supervised their children's correspondence school work to Sydney.



Esther's parents, Charles and May, on their honeymoon.

Esther enjoyed life on Spring Plains. As a child, Esther milked their house cows daily, separating the cream from the milk and making butter by hand. During shearing time Esther helped May cook food for the shearers and prepare their quarters. Esther and her siblings enjoyed climbing trees, playing tennis, riding the horses, carpet bowls and bobs (ball / board game). When overrun by pests the Nevinson children enjoyed catching rabbits and foxes.



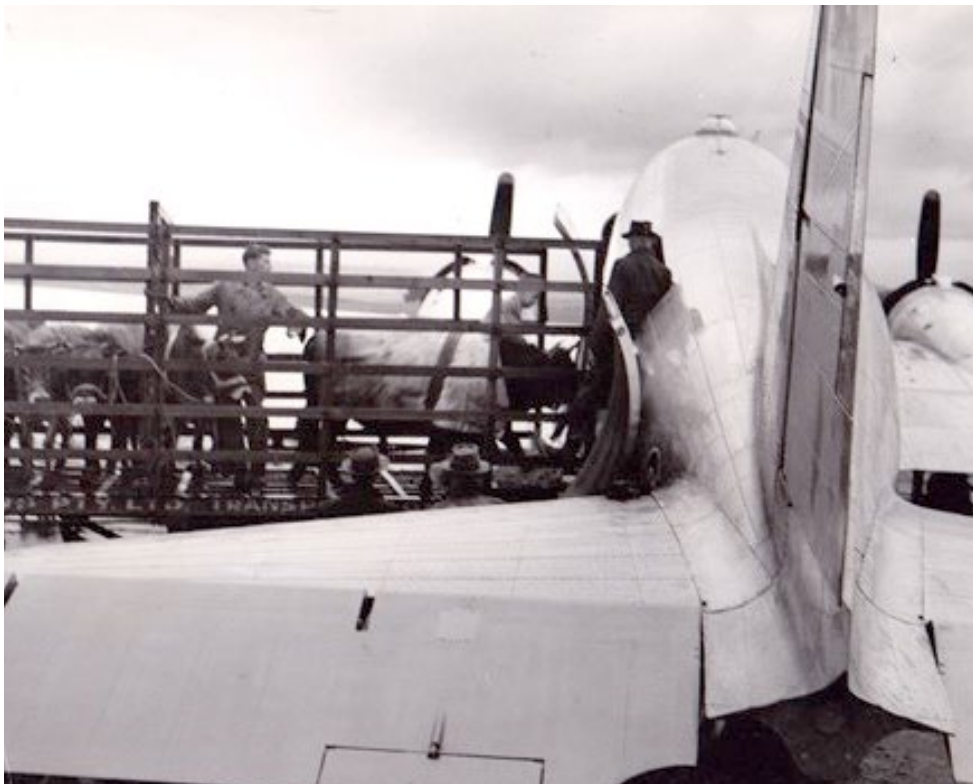
Esther on the horse and her sister Margaret on the cart.

The Nevinson children had to receive correspondence papers twice weekly from the local post office. These papers (The Outpost) were sent from Blackfriars Correspondence School in Sydney. Esther was not eligible to begin her schooling until she was 7 years of age as stipulated by the government. There were times that schooling was interrupted due to farming responsibilities like shearing and mustering. Large down-pours of rain also limited their access to the post office as the dirt roads were unable to be travelled for at least 8 to 10 days.



Esther, centre, with her sister and brothers.

Esther married on the 28th of May 1966 at the age of 24. John Waters met his future wife, Esther, at a Lone Young Famers meeting when Esther was a teenager. John and his parents flew their dairy cattle from Tasmania on the plane DC3 in 1947. This was the first time any dairy cattle had been flown from Tasmania to the mainland. John milked on his parent's farm, Willowdell at Blighty until his father died in 1980. After this, Esther and John continued on the farm.



The cows getting ready to be transported from Tasmania to mainland Australia.

Esther and John raised four children Owen, Carolyn, Colin and Stephen whilst balancing a working dairy farm. After her father-in-laws death, Esther began to milk on the farm. John and Esther's children also began to work on the farm with small jobs such as feeding calves, helping bringing in the cows and occasionally milking. Their son Stephen began to milk full-time on the farm and in 2008 Stephen, his wife Fiona and their four children, took over the management of the farm.



Esther and John, far right, with their children.

Esther's love for Jersey cows developed into a passion. Their cattle became successful in many rural and large national shows. Their Jersey stud, Willowdell, became well known for their top stud bulls and in later year's use of artificial insemination technology. Whilst Esther and John's milking herd was not as large as some, their cows' beauty and production made up for their small herd.



Esther showing her love and passion for Jersey cows.

Esther and John's cattle became well known due to their many successes in the show ring. The production of these cows topped the NSW Jersey herd production for many years. They also participated in 'On Farm' challenges which led to many victories in the Jersey cattle world. The Willow Dell cattle won International Dairy Week a total of four times:

- Willow Dell Girlie 175 (1997)
- Willow Dell Fancy 332 (1998)
- Willow Dell Chevy 57 (2003)
- Willow Dell Fancy 512 (2012) - under the ownership of Ian Griffiths from Blighty.

Willow Dell Fancy 512 was also the inter-breed and Australian Champion Dairy Cow. She was the first Jersey, or in fact dairy breed other than a Holstein, to claim this title.



Willow Dell Fancy 512.

Ross Easterbrook

After Esther retired from the dairy farm, she pursued her other love, art. She uses water paints and sketches to create beautiful artworks of landscapes and cattle. Her paintings are well known around the area and she has won awards at the Deniliquin Easter Art Show and the Deniliquin Show on numerous occasions. Esther first learnt to sketch from her great uncle who was an artist.



A sketch of Esther's.

Some of Esther and John's cattle still remain on Fiona and Stephen's farm after the sale during the drought. However those that remain are shown by Anthony Michael and the Deniliquin High School Dairy Cattle Show Team. The Willow Dell cattle are still held in high regard in the Jersey cattle industry. Esther's love of cattle continues with her backyard constantly becoming a retirement centre for elderly cows and a maternity hospital for young calves.



Esther and two of her artworks.



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