

# TALLONG NEWS



### Farewell to Fran Watling

Tallong bids a final farewell to one of its long-time inhabitants, known to one and all as Fran Watling, who passed away at Waminda Aged Care, Goulburn on 9 July 2021. Born in 1935, Francis Narelle Skinner spent her early years on her parents' dairy farm in the Ben Lomond Mountain area in the Northern Tablelands of NSW. Fran came to Tallong when she married Jim Watling in 1959. They met at a dance in Sydney after her parents moved to Wentworthville and Jim spent time there, carting fruit to that area. Together they operated the last commercial apple orchard in Tallong, selling fruit from their centrally located apple shed in the village and raising their two children Kathleen and John (Jack) who were schooled at Tallong Public School. Fran was a much loved local personality and part of a duo - Jim was commonly referred to as "The Apple Man" - that carried Tallong's reputation for growing apples into the 21st century.

When Fran first came to Tallong the district had many flourishing apple orchards including "Homely" in Kettles Lane (now "The Orchard"), then owned by Jim's father James Herbert Watling. Upon their marriage, Jim's father bought the former Davenport orchard and the house on the corner of Bum-

balls St. and Cacura Rd for them. They called this orchard "Glenrowan". At first Fran's life was taken up with the family and supporting Jim with the various tasks necessary for maintaining the orchard and transporting fruit from the district to the Sydney markets. At this time apples from Tallong orchards were stored in the packing shed near the Davenport Store. On Sundays in the fruit season Jim, his brother Foster and Bill Charles loaded their two trucks with fruit from the shed and would then proceed to pick up fruit from Wingello and Penrose before delivering their load to Haymarket early on Monday morning.

After the Chatsbury Fire in 1965 burnt out the orchards in Tallong, causing most of the orchardists to leave the district, Jim sought and found local employment that would give him the time needed to replant with mixed fruits, install irrigation and cold storage facilities to enable him to sell his fruit directly from his apple shed. Happily, this arrangement suited everyone, and visitors travelled from afar to stock up on quality fruit. Customers were greeted by Fran and Jim and engaged in the ensuing chat. In this way the Watlings became well known identities in Tallong and their apple shed with the Carl Zeschke's Big Apple out front became a village icon. The loud sound of Jim's scare gun discouraging birds from the crop, indicated that fruit was available and was an invitation to come to the apple shed. In 1985 Fran and Jim built a new home on the orchard site.

As well as having a hands-on approach to growing and selling fruit, Fran also actively participated in village social life. They were involved as

parents with the local school and with the Tallong RFS brigade - Jim as senior captain and Fran as catering officer. Fran's account of her evacuation during the 1965 fire while Jim was fighting the fire as it came towards Tallong contributed to the social history published in "Tallong: a heritage" in 2010. The family enjoyed dances, balls and bingo events in the Memorial Hall and Fran talked about the variety of clubs and sporting activities that made Tallong a very busy place. The Tennis club was most popular, with competition and social tennis played on the courts in Bumballa Street. Fran taught Sunday school at Saint Stephens Church and her lifelong interest in sewing, saw her teaching needlework at Wingello Hall.

When Jim passed away in 2014, Fran's own health was deteriorating so she moved to Wollondilly Gardens in Goulburn and latterly to Waminda Aged Care. Orchard lands were sold to facilitate her move and to provide a legacy for her children. Although Jack retained the shed and house, at this point Fran handed the Big Apple sculpture over to the TCFG to restore and place in a central location along the Jim Watling Walkway in the Memorial Park. Fran had a strong sense of Tallong history especially the part played by apple orchards that annually brought Tallong to state prominence at the Royal Easter Show. The Big Apple was bequeathed to the people of Tallong and she felt it would be a gesture towards preserving the history of the district. Fran's years of experience living and mixing with people in the village gave her stories an authenticity which in recent times newcomers to the district gratefully received "over a cuppa" as she used to say.



