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# Ileen Macpherson: Life and tragedy of a pioneer of biodynamic farming at Demeter Farm and a benefactor of Anthroposophy in Australia

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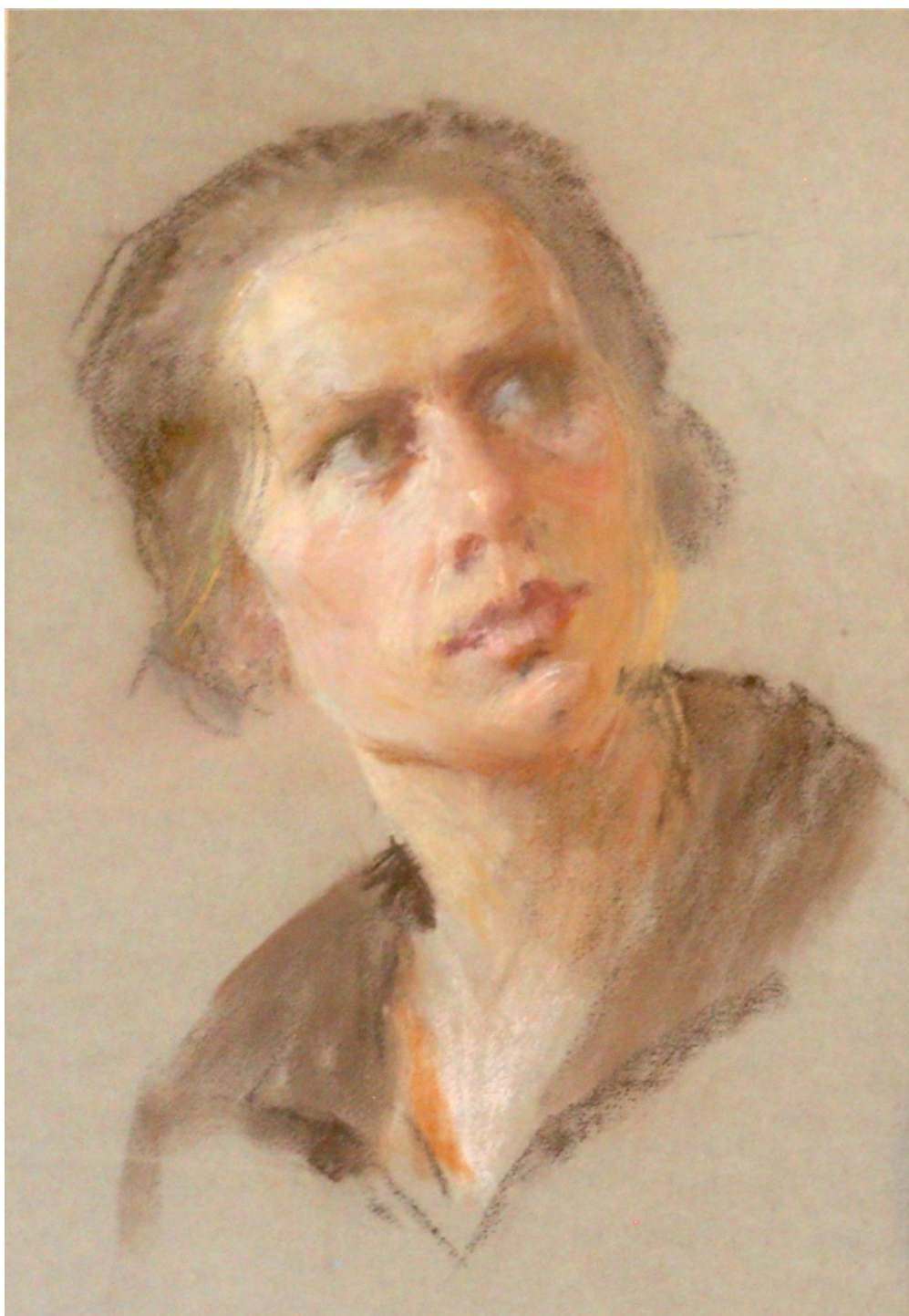
*“Ileen Macpherson accepted the impulse to assist in a venture for applying Bio-Dynamic methods and resolved with Ernesto Genoni to attempt a practical activity. A small farm was purchased on Princes Highway near Dandenong, approximately 18 miles from Melbourne, and a serious effort which lasted 18 years was attempted. It was worked as a small dairy farm, and the manure built into the compost in the Bio-Dynamic way. They made their own preparations and sprays and produced very good vegetables which were sold in the wholesale market in the city and also from a truck on the side of the road. Constant hard work and many grievous trials were endured by the pioneers who undertook the first Bio-Dynamic venture in Victoria” (Edith Magill, 1975, p.7).*

## Abstract

Edith Ileen Macpherson (1898-1984) was a co-founder of Australia's original Demeter Farm (c.1934-1954) along with her partner Ernesto Genoni (1885-1974). Ileen was a member of Rudolf Steiner's Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners (from 1936). Ernesto was the first Australian member (from 1928). At their Demeter Farm in Dandenong, Victoria, they practiced biodynamic agriculture on over 40 acres (16 ha) through the years of the Great Depression, through World War II, and for the first decade of the post-war years, producing milk, fruit, and vegetables. Ileen was an early Australian Anthroposophist and follower of Rudolf Steiner. It was a blow to their Demeter Farm enterprise when she fell ill. Eventually she was no longer able to manage physical work at all and this fell to Ernesto. Although she is remembered as 'the woman in the wheelchair' this paper reveals that she was previously an active, fit and keen sportswoman, participating in basketball, tennis, running, hockey, and dancing. At school she was known as 'Ikey', she was a prefect, she was a member of the school sports committee, and she won the prize for "best all-round sport". Ileen was confined to a wheelchair for the last four decades of her life. The cause has generally been misunderstood and misattributed, and is revealed here to be pernicious anaemia (lack of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>). This condition is now easily and successfully treatable, but it was then generally fatal. Ileen was a financial supporter of the Anthroposophical movement in Australia during her lifetime. Her benefaction has continued since her death via the Ileen Macpherson Trust which reports having dispensed over \$600,000 for Anthroposophic causes in Australia. A portrait of Ileen by Italian/Australian artist Ernesto Genoni and photographs of Ileen are presented.

**Keywords:** Anthroposophist, organic agriculture, Michael Group, Melbourne, Victoria, Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners, Rudolf Steiner, Ernesto Genoni, pernicious anaemia, anemia, woman, disability, Ileen Macpherson Trust.





**Image 1. Portrait of Ileen Macpherson, c.late 1930s (or early 1940s)<sup>1</sup> by Ernesto Genoni (private collection). Dark circles under the eyes and thinning hair are signs of the onset of pernicious anaemia.**

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<sup>1</sup> Face analytics puts the age of the subject at 45 years which would be 1943 (How-old.net, 2016c).

## Introduction

A search at the archives of the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland revealed 'Ileen Macpherson' as one of just a dozen Australian members of the Rudolf Steiner's Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners (ECAFG) (I. Macpherson, 1936; Paull, 2013).

The Experimental Circle was founded in 1924 by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) during his Agriculture Course at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland). The Experimental Circle was tasked by Steiner with testing the ideas he put forward in that course of eight lectures. Steiner had presented his vision of farming as one eschewing the (then) new practice of chemical agriculture. His view was to regard the farm as an organism and not as a factory, to regard it as a biological enterprise rather than an industrial one (Paull, 2011a; Steiner, 1924a).

The Experimental Circle was the world's first organic farming research organisation. The terms 'biodynamic farming' and 'organic farming' grew out of the efforts of the Experimental Circle and came into the public discourse in 1938 and 1940 respectively (Northbourne, 1940; Paull, 2011b, 2011d; Pfeiffer, 1938).

Who was Ileen Macpherson and what was her interest in biodynamics, Anthroposophy and the Austrian New Age philosopher, Rudolf Steiner? This paper sets out to answer these questions.

## Methodology

This account draws on primary sources including archival materials (held in Switzerland and Australia), some handwritten unpublished autobiographical accounts by her partner Ernesto Genoni, interviews with some who knew Ileen, supplemented by published material. Sources drawn on for the present account include the Secretariat of the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, the Archives of the Goetheanum (Dokumentation am Goetheanum Bibliothek Kunstsammlung Archiv), the Rudolf Steiner Archive at the Goetheanum, the Archives of the State of Victoria, Trove (the database of Australian newspapers), the archives of Clyde School, the archives of the Anthroposophical Society in Australia Victorian Branch, and the library and archives of the Michael Group, Melbourne, Australia.

## Results

A timeline of Ileen's life is presented in Table 1.

### Childhood

*"Between 60 and 70 years ago, when Paika Station, Balranald, comprised a quarter of a million acres, a huge irrigation project was carried on by the owner, Walter McPherson" (Pastoral Review, 1961).*

Edith Ileen Macpherson (5 August 1898 - 3 June 1984) was born in St Kilda, a beachside suburb of Melbourne. She was the second of six children of Walter Macpherson (1864-1926) and Mabel (nee Brown) (1872-1953) (Death Notice, 1984; Fiedler, c.2000). There were four brothers and two sisters. Ileen outlived them all except for her younger sister Ethel (1907-1991) (Death Notice, 1984; Fiedler, c.2000).

**Table 1. Ileen Macpherson timeline. (P. Macpherson, 1992, c.1990)**

Date	Event
5 August 1898	Edith Ileen Macpherson born to Walter Alexander Macpherson & Mabel Rutherford Macpherson (nee Brown) (Births, Deaths & Marriages, 1898).
1911-1916	Attends Clyde School, Alma Rd, St Kilda (Melbourne) (Mackinnon, 2015).
31 May 1926	Ernesto Genoni arrives in Fremantle, Australia, from Italy.
December 1926	Ileen's father dies.
1928	Ernesto and Mrs Anne Macky begin regular Anthroposophy meetings in Melbourne
1932	The Anthroposophical Society Victoria Michael Group is founded with Ernesto Genoni and Anne Macky et al.as founding members (P. Macpherson, 1990).
c.1933	Ilene is introduced to Anthroposophy in Melbourne.
c.1933	Ileen meets Ernesto at an Anthroposophy meeting.
1934	Ileen and Ernesto begin "Demeter Farm, Princes Highway, Dandenong" (P. Macpherson, 1992).
1935	Registered as 'Demeter Biological Farm' (P. Macpherson, c.1990, p.1).
14 March 1935	"Ileen came to live at the farm" (Genoni, c.1955, p.23).
22 January 1936	Joined the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners (ECAFG) (I. Macpherson, 1936).
c.1936	Prominent Anthroposophist, "Mr [Alfred] Meebold comes to stay for a fortnight at the farm" (Genoni, c.1955, p.24).
c.1937	"I am planning to go to Europe but Ileen gets sick and is sent to hospital" (Genoni, c.1955, p.24).
1938	"Again in 1938 I am planning to go to Europe with the understanding that Ileen should follow ... Ileen got as far as N.Z. but couldn't come as far as Europe" (Genoni, c.1955, pp. 24-25).
1939	"At the farm I found things with Ileen not too good" (Genoni, c.1955, p.25).
March 1940	"The last month Ileen carried on the milking by herself. But her legs begin to give way" (Genoni, c.1955, p.25).
c.1943 - September 1946	"But gradually her legs are getting worse. She has to be taken to hospital but it was too late, she could not walk any more ... Ileen is at Epworth [Hospital] till September 1946" (Genoni, c.1955, p.26) (I. Macpherson, 2015).
September 1946	"Ileen returns to the farm where we live together" (Genoni, c.1955, p.26).
1952	"In 1952 we decide to build the new house at Namur St" (Genoni, c.1955, p.26).
September 1953	"Ileen comes to the new house" at Namur St, Noble Park (Genoni, c.1955, p.26).
March 1954	"the [Demeter] Farm is sold" (Genoni, c.1955, p.26).
11 February 1975	Ernesto Genoni, dies (Births, Deaths & Marriages, 1975).
3 June 1984	Ileen Macpherson dies (Births, Deaths & Marriages, 1984).
1 January 1987 to present	Ileen Macpherson Trust is founded (ACNC, 2015)



**Image 2. Studio photograph of Ileen Macpherson as a school girl (embossed Tesla Studios, Prahran, inscribed “Ileen Macpherson July 20th 1913”; private collection).**

It seems that she was always known as ‘Ileen’. She was certainly ‘Ileen’ from a young age (e.g. Image 2; I. Macpherson, 1913) Other than in legal documents (for example, in her will), she did not use the name ‘Edith’. This was perhaps to distinguish her initials from those of her sister Ethel. At school she was always ‘Ileen’, as well as by the nicknames, ‘Ike’ and ‘Ikey’ (Clyde School, 1911, 1914; The Cluthan, 1915a). ‘Ikey’ was a family nickname. According to a niece “I didn’t know her name was Edith ... my mother, her older sister, called her Ikey” (Hamilton, 2016).

The family were pastoralists, running cattle and sheep on a massive tranche of Australian farmland in New South Wales. The obituary of her father, Walter, records that: “Shortly after leaving school<sup>2</sup> he went to Paika Station<sup>3</sup> and worked there with his father. On the death of the latter about 1893 he took over the management of the property, which was worked on behalf of the family ... he then purchased Goonambil Station, Urana, which he held until the time of his death” (Pastoral Review, 1926).

Paika Station was near Balranald (NSW), which is in the Murrumbidgee Valley, about 160 km east of Mildura (Vic) and 100 km north of Swan Hill (Vic). Although it is in NSW, Balranald is closer to Melbourne (430 km) than to Sydney (860 km). So, looking to Melbourne for schools for the Macpherson siblings was a logical choice.

Ileen’s father attended Geelong College, in Victoria. His obituary remembered, that he “made quite a name for himself as an athlete. He was good at running, cricket and football” (Pastoral Review, 1926). Ileen’s brother, Walter Ronald Macpherson (1900-1952), was also remembered as an athlete: “During his education at Geelong College he proved himself an outstanding athlete, being a member of every team ... and achieving the still unique distinction of being the only son in the school’s history to follow in his father’s footsteps by winning the College Cup for athletics. Fondness for sport continued throughout his life” (Pastoral Review, 1952). After her father’s death, Ileen’s mother moved from NSW to South Yarra (an inner Melbourne suburb), Victoria (Pastoral Review, 1952).

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<sup>2</sup> Geelong College, Victoria.

<sup>3</sup> Near Balranald, NSW.

### Sport and School

*“Clyde was stylish, expensive ... and had an incredibly high standard compared with what was available in many schools of the day” (Hay, 1967 cited in Guile, 2006, p.30).*



**Image 3. Ileen Macpherson, Clyde basketball team, 1914, photo (detail) (Clyde School Archive).**

Ileen was a student at Clyde School from 1911 to 1916 (Mackinnon, 2015). Clyde was an independent non-denominational school for girls in St Kilda (a beachside suburb of Melbourne, Victoria). It was located at 132-134 Alma Road. The main two-storey Edwardian-style building (at 134 Alma Road) still exists.

Clyde was founded in 1910 by Miss Isabel Henderson (1862-1940) and named after the Scottish river which flows through Glasgow (Guile, 2006; Hay, 1966). Ileen's family and the school principal Isabel Henderson's family shared a common Scottish heritage.

The initial enrolment of Clyde was 110 students, half were boarders like Ileen, and half were day girls. The school grew steadily during Ileen's time. Then in 1918 a rural property was purchased in Mount Macedon and the school moved. Clyde had flourished at St Kilda, with enrolments increasing each year, but it floundered at Mount Macedon. The principal, Isabel Henderson, and the vice principal, Mabel 'Dan' Daniell, departed in 1922, for a 'holiday' in Europe, they settled down in a London hotel, and never returned (Guile, 2006; Hay, 1966). The fatal blow for Clyde finally fell in 1975 when Clyde School 'amalgamated' with Geelong Church of England Grammar School and Geelong Church of England Girls' Grammar School to become, from 1976, Geelong Grammar School. At this point Clyde School lost its individual identity and Geelong Grammar became the co-educational school it remains today (Guile, 2006; Hay, 1966; Old Geelong Grammarians, 1994).

Ileen's time at Clyde was the glory days of Clyde, a period when the school was expanding and, despite the outbreak of World War 1 (WW1) it was going from strength to strength.

At Clyde classes finished at 3pm with the next two hours available for "sport, reading and letter writing" (Old Geelong Grammarians, 1994, p.5). One student recalled that: "Between breakfast and tea-time, day-girls and boarders were all mixed up together but

by late afternoon the boarders had begun to settle into their own lives ... we were kept too busy to be restless" (Shaw, 1960).

The principal, Isabel Henderson, reflected on the earliest years of Clyde, writing in the first Editorial for the new school magazine, *The Cluthan*, that: "Classes were held in every available corner ... even on the landing upstairs" (Henderson, 1914, p.4). The school librarians reported that: "The most popular books are easily seen by the rather tattered appearance. Alas! Shakespeare's works are still in excellent repair" (Beggs & Weigall, 1914, p.10). "Only on Fridays when the boarders have a wild, disorderly scramble to catch their train, does Time bring his pressure to bear on us" (Cook, 1914, p.14).

It seems that academic records of Clyde School have not survived (Mackinnon, 2016). Ileen was one of just nineteen Clyde students who passed Junior Public examinations for her year, and one of the six Clyde students who passed "in four or more subjects" (Webb-Ware & Currie, 1916, p.2). Ileen was a prefect in her final two years at Clyde (Hay, 1966; *The Cluthan*, 1916b). She was elected to the Clyde School sport's committee and served two years in that capacity (Aitken, 1916; *The Cluthan*, 1915b, 1916a).

Ileen's schooldays at Clyde coincided with World War 1 (WW1) (1914-1918). "In common with other schools, we have joined in movements organised to assist the war funds, and both by the work of our hands and by entertainment we have made some contribution" (*The Cluthan*, 1914a, p.3). In a concert for the Belgian Relief Fund<sup>4</sup> held in the December after the outbreak of war, Ileen was one of six dancers presenting the "Union Jack Dance" (*Concert Programme*, 1914, p.3).

Ileen was also a dancer representing Clyde School in a 1915 benefit concert for the war effort held in the ballroom of Logan House: "the juvenile fancy dress entertainment in aid of Lady Stanley's appeal and which took place at Mrs Fred Fairborn's residence, 'Logan House', Toorak, on Saturday evening, was a brilliant success ... The pupils of Clyde Girls' Grammar School presented 'The Spirit of the Gums' ... They wore white and silver dresses, with touches of green, and on their heads was a scarlet and green gum berry". There were eight school girls in the dance troupe, including Ileen (Punch, 1915, p.30).



**Image 4. Ileen Macpherson, Clyde hockey team, c.1915, photo (detail) (Clyde School Archive).**

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<sup>4</sup> Germany invaded neutral Belgium on 4 August 1914. This action brought Britain and thereby Australia into World War 1. Belgium's neutrality was violated by Germany, as a pathway to invading France (while avoiding French defences protecting the French/German border).



The dance master, Monsieur Paul Bibron, held an annual ball at the St Kilda Town Hall for his pupils from the various private schools. Gold and silver medals were awarded for the best dancers (Guile, 2006). Ileen won the silver medal for dance (Bell & Webb-Ware, 1916).

As well as benefit concerts, the Clyde girls were knitting for victory. "Since the outbreak of war every girl in the School above the age of seven has learnt to knit and has produced articles useful to soldiers at the front. After war was declared the staff and girls were never seen without wool and needles" (The Cluthan, 1914b, p.19). By early the following year the report was that: "Knitting still progresses favourably. Most people have attained the level of socks now" (Armstrong & Bell, 1915, p.5).



**Image 5 Clyde School basketball team wins the pennant in inter school sports competition, 1915, Ileen Macpherson on right holding the basketball (The Cluthan).**

When a first aid course was offered at Clyde, Ileen volunteered. She was one of nine students who passed; Ileen passed with honours. "The war inspired all the members with determination" (Bell, 1915, p.18).

Like her father and brother, Ileen was a keen and talented sportsperson. She represented Clyde in multitude of sports, including running, hockey, basketball and tennis. She experienced many successes in both inter-school games and intra-school games. She won the prize for "best all-round sport" (Browne, 1917, p.22; Hay, 1966, p.212).

Ileen was in the Clyde School running team. In 1914, the Clyde team came second to Toorak College in the inter-school sports competition (The Cluthan, 1914c). Writing for the school magazine, the reporter asked: "Could anything surpass the grim determination writ upon every feature of Ikey Macpherson, as she patters up the field" (The Cluthan, 1915a, p.10). In a 1916 photograph, Ileen appears happy and confident in the Clyde running team of eight (Image 6).

Ileen was also in the Clyde School hockey team (Image 4). The team played matches against other schools, including Lauriston, Ruyton, Toorak, and University. Ileen was singled out for praise: "Throughout the whole year the play of the two wings - I. Macpherson and K. Taylor - has been splendid, conspicuously good in every match" (Wanliss, 1914, p.9). She was in the winning form hockey team (The Cluthan, 1915c).

Ileen was also in the Clyde School basket ball team. The Clyde team participated in Basketball Association matches against other schools, including Milverton, Fintona, and Ruyton, (Wanliss, 1914) (Image 3). The following year, she was again a member of the Clyde basketball team playing against Toorak, Milverton, Korowa, Stratherne, and Fintona schools. Clyde won the inter school competition scoring the 1915 premiership pennant (Aitken, 1915). In the trophy photograph it is Ileen holding the basketball (Image 5). Ileen was in the boarders basket ball team beating the day girls team (The Cluthan, 1914c).

Ileen represented Clyde School in the Tennis School Girls' Championship (Aitken, 1916). She "was known to be very determined!" (Mackinnon, 2015).

As a young woman, Ileen attended at least several annual Old Girls' Reunions (e.g. Schools & Colleges, 1922; The Cluthan, 1917).

A newspaper account reports Ileen as a bridesmaid to Kathleen Taylor, a contemporary of Ileen's from Clyde (Clyde School, 1911). "At Scots Church, Collins Street ... Kathleen ... Taylor was married to Maberly ... Scott ... the only bridesmaid was Miss Ileen Macpherson, who wore a dainty frock of eau-de-nil green georgette, handsomely beaded in crystal, the skirt having a scalloped hem embroidered in crystal. She wore a bandeau in her hair in the same tone as the frock, and carried a bouquet of pink cream, pale yellow and red roses" (Riverine Herald, 1925).

### Love

*"With Ileen and Ernesto, in the very beginning ... She was searching ... for something, she had lived in the country for all of her life and she was down here, had moved to Melbourne to live and spent her time going to lectures and everything that was on, and one day she was at a lecture ... at the Anthroposophical Society and Aunt Ruby who lived out in the country too, was searching and I can't remember the book, but there was a little book and I know love was in the title. It was not an Anthroposophical book because she knew nothing about it, but Aunt Ruby said to her, knowing she was running around libraries and various things, 'If ever you come across this little book will you buy it for me?' So Ileen went into the Anthroposophical library after this lecture and there was a lady who started talking to her and Ileen asked her if she knew if this book was in the library, or where she could get it.*



**Image 6. Ileen Macpherson, Clyde running team photo, 1916, photo (detail) (Clyde School Archive).**

*And this happened to be Mrs Growcott<sup>5</sup> who was leader of this little group ... and she said when she talked with Ileen for a while, 'Look, I think you'll find what you are looking for if you go to the small group<sup>6</sup> and it was in Collins Street' ... and then she went and of course she found exactly what she was looking for ... a lot can be said about Mr Genoni ... he was there and the leader and the only man we had to sort of lean on for his knowledge (transcript of Peggy Macpherson, 1992).*

Ileen's niece, Peggy Macpherson<sup>7</sup> (1910-2015), probably knew Ileen better than any other woman. It was Peggy who cared for Ileen in the final decade of her life. In the transcript quoted above, she tells the story of Ileen seeking a book on 'love' and finding what she was seeking in both Anthroposophy and Ernesto Genoni - although perhaps not finding the book.

### **Ernesto**

*"He was dark, with flashing eyes, hair swept back off his forehead, and an exotic look ... Ernesto was slender, serious, aesthetic and elegant. His voice was clipped, his sentences crisp and his manner refined" (Triaca, 1985, p.116).*



**Image 7. Self portrait of Ernesto Genoni, c. late 1930s (or early 1940s)<sup>8</sup> (private collection).**

Ileen was apparently in good health when she met Ernesto Genoni in Melbourne (circa 1933). Ernesto was an Italian artist who had trained at Milan's Brera for five years (portraits by Ernesto appear as Images 1 & 7). He first met Rudolf Steiner at the Goetheanum (in Dornach, Switzerland) in 1920 and he spent the year 1924 at Dornach. In his Goetheanum year Ernesto was painting in the "Anthroposophic style", attending Steiner's First Class and learning German. Ernesto migrated to Australia in 1926. His brothers had migrated decades earlier and were by this time well established and farming their own large properties in the wheat belt of south-east Western Australia (Paull, 2014).

The Anthroposophy group that Ileen was directed to was founded by Ernesto Genoni and Anne Macky with regular meetings beginning in 1928 (Genoni, c.1955). These two had met in

<sup>5</sup> Jean Growcott was the inaugural group leader of the Anthroposophical Society Victoria Michael Group. She served from 1932 to 1951.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Genoni's Anthroposophy group meetings.

<sup>7</sup> Constance Mary Macpherson was known to all as 'Peggy Macpherson'.

<sup>8</sup> Face analytics puts the age of the subject at 56 years which would be 1941 (How-old.net, 2016a).

Melbourne and they began the meetings that grew into the Michael Group, Melbourne's original Anthroposophy group. Anne ('Mrs Macky') had attended a conference by Rudolf Steiner at Oxford in 1922 (Paull, 2014) and that is where she met Steiner. Macky was most probably the only Australian at that conference (which was to promote Steiner's Waldorf education)

Travelling from Milan, Italy, Ernesto visited his brothers in Australia in 1912 and again in 1914. On that second visit he volunteered in 1916 into the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a non-combatant. He served on the Somme as a stretcher bearer before being conscripted off the battlefield into the Italian Army. In Italy he refused the oath of allegiance, and spent various times in Italian military prisons as well as serving as a medical orderly in the Military Hospital in Verona, before being finally court-martialled and released from an Italian military prison in 1919. Ernesto joined an Anthroposophy group in Milan in 1920. He was at the inauguration of the first Goetheanum in 1920, and he spent 1924 at Dornach, Switzerland studying with Rudolf Steiner (Genoni, 1920, c.1955, c. 1970). He returned to Australia in 1926 (Genoni, 1932; Paull, 2014).

Ernesto spent time in Western Australia with his brothers: "They called him 'il filosofo' the philosopher, but he was really an artist ... anthroposophy was like a religion with its own shrine - the Goetheanum in Switzerland - and its own holy books - the teachings of Rudolf Steiner. Ernesto became the master's disciple, his brothers the willing students" (Triaca, 1985, p.116).

As a niece of Ileen's, Peggy Macpherson, tells it, Ileen was "infatuated" with Ernesto. In these early days Ernesto was unsettled and spending time in both Melbourne and Western Australia. Ruby Macpherson (1881-1961), Ileen's aunt and the matriarch of the family, phoned Ernesto in Western Australia at his brother's rural property in Broome Hill (now Broomehill) in the south eastern wheat belt of Western Australia. Ruby "begged him to return to Melbourne for Ileen" (P. Macpherson, 2014). Another Michael Group member reported the conversation of Ruby to Ernesto as: "Please come back, Ileen is pining for you" (Martin, 2014). Ernesto returned<sup>9</sup>.

Peggy Macpherson recalled: "a visit from Ernesto Genoni, a member from the land, he was visiting his three older brothers, farmers, in Western Australia. This was the beginning of many visits until his decision to settle in Melbourne and become a partner with Ileen Macpherson in an experimental farm in Dandenong which was registered in 1935 as Demeter Biological Farm<sup>10</sup>" (P. Macpherson, 1992).

Another niece of Ileen's recalls that: "There was the story that she was engaged ... she had embroidered the sheets" (Hamilton, 2016). Another niece of Ileen's stated: "She would've married him. He went overseas to get a divorce" but without any success (P. Macpherson, 2014).

There was an impediment to a marriage between Ileen and Ernesto. He was married to

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<sup>9</sup> c.1933.

<sup>10</sup> I did not find a registration in the Business Names registration cards held in the Victorian Archives (in 2016). The cards are stacked loose and alphabetically in trays. A lost, mislaid or out of order card would not be readily detected. Peggy is a reliable informant but now deceased. Demeter was at the time being developed as the biodynamic brand in Europe. A registration using the Demeter name may have been secured perhaps with the Demeter organisation based in Europe.

an Austrian woman<sup>11</sup> in Milan in February 1923 (Bettini, 2016). It was a brief marriage that appears to have not survived the year. Ernesto described it as “the sad marriage ... Then Lydia left at the beginning of 1924. Soon after I went to Dornach” (Genoni, c.1955, p.19).

On a visit to London in 1930, Ernesto writes rather cryptically: “I saw Lydia and her child<sup>12</sup>. Her attempt at reproach and my unconscious refusal” (Genoni, c.1955, p.22). On a visit to London in 1939, by now he had met Ileen, Ernesto states: “Met again Lydia ... a further attempt get a divorce, but unsuccessful” (Genoni, c.1955, p.25). The account held in the Genoni family is that Lydia always refused a divorce (Podreider, 2015). The account from Lydia’s niece is that “it was Genoni who denied her the divorce. When he later wished to remarry in Australia, she revenged by refusing the divorce to him” (Havenith, 2016).

On Ernesto’s visits to Italy, he always referred to Ileen as ‘Miss Ileen’. This was heard by his Italian listeners as ‘Missileen’, and her name was taken to be ‘Missileen’ (Podreider, 2015).

A niece of Ileen’s recalls that: “They were very quiet about their relationship” (Fiedler, 2015). It was a time of significant social stigma for a couple cohabiting while unmarried. No divorce ever eventuated. No wedding ever happened.

### **Demeter Farm**

*“Started to go again to the Anthro meetings in Collins Str. There is where I met first Ileen and Mrs R Macpherson<sup>13</sup>. The letter from Ileen and our first meeting in Dandenong and up to the corner of Heatherton Rd and Chandler Rd<sup>14</sup>. Our meetings became more frequent. The flood destroyed everything at the farm<sup>15</sup>. Then the idea arose of starting a B.D farm with Ileen in Dandenong. My meetings with the Macpherson family in Punt Rd. Then the farm on the highway was bought. I started working there living in a tent and boarding with Mrs Armor ... On the 14 March 1935 Ileen came to live on the farm. Clearing the wilderness paddock... The next 10 acres near the creek were bought and later ... 19 acres ... the cottage ... Mr Meebold<sup>16</sup> comes to stay for a fortnight at the farm ... The crop of peas and rye grown for green manure in the wilderness ... The unhappy struggling for making a B.D. farm. The sales of vegetables on the road” (Genoni, c.1955, pp.23-24).*

When, in January 1936, Ileen joined the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners (ECAFG), she gave her address (to the Dornach headquarters) as “Demeter, Box 49, Dandenong PO, Victoria, Australia” (I. Macpherson, 1936, p.2). Members received a numbered typescript copy of Rudolf Steiner’s *Agricultural Course* with their name on the title-page.

Ileen’s book of the *Agricultural Course* was Number E52 (‘E’ for English language edition). The signed agreement stated, of the book, that: “I accept it on loan from the

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<sup>11</sup> Lydia Hillbrand (1898-1966).

<sup>12</sup> A son (Peter) born to Lydia in 1929.

<sup>13</sup> Ruby Macpherson, Ileen’s aunt.

<sup>14</sup> At this intersection there is currently a small suburban shopping centre along with a petrol station.

<sup>15</sup> At Dalmore in Victoria, about 70 km south-east of Melbourne. This was Australia’s first biodynamic farm. It was farmed by Ernesto with his brother Fred from c.1928.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Meebold, Anthroposophist and author of *Introductory Course to Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy* (1940). Ernesto knew Meebold from their time together at the Goetheanum.

Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum Dornach only for my own personal use carrying out the experiments undertaken by *Miss Ileen Macpherson* within the General Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners, at the experimental station at *Dandenong Victoria Australia*" (I. Macpherson, 1936).

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) founded the Experimental Circle at his Agriculture Course at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland) in the summer of 1924 (Paull, 2011d; Steiner, 1924a). Steiner delivered "A course of lectures containing what is to be said about agriculture from an anthroposophical point of view" (Steiner, 1924b, p.9). Steiner stated that: "the lectures should be primarily considered as hints, which for the present should not be spoken of outside the circle, but looked upon as the foundation for experiments and this gradually brought into a form suitable for publication" (1924b, p.10). Ileen's partner, Ernesto Genoni, was the first Australian to join the Experimental Circle (in 1928) (Paull, 2013). Steiner's injunction to publish was fulfilled by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer with his *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* published in 1938. The term 'biodynamic' to characterise Steiner's agriculture does not appear in the *Agricultural Course*, it was coined after Steiner's death, and Pfeiffer's book brought it into the public domain (Paull, 2011c; Pfeiffer, 1938).

The two page agreement Ileen signed when joining the Experimental Circle included the final clause: "In the event of my death I hereby lay upon my relatives, executors and heirs ... to return the aforesaid copy No. E52 of the Agricultural Course immediately and free of charge to the National Science Section at the Goetheanum, Dornach near Basle, Switzerland" (I. Macpherson, 1936). Peggy Macpherson, Ileen's executor, recalled that she packaged up and mailed some items to the Goetheanum - but three decades after that event, and as a centenarian, she could no longer remember just what items (P. Macpherson, 2014). In any event, copies of the Agriculture Course returned to the Goetheanum were destroyed (Braithwaite, 2015) - there is no cache of them in the Natural Science Section nor in the Archives of the Goetheanum.

Ernesto writes somewhat cryptically:

*"I am planning to go to Europe, but Ileen gets sick and is sent to the hospital in Brighton. Eventually she is returning home. Again in 1938 I am planning to go to Europe with the understanding that Ileen should follow ... I went to stay with the Mackys in Wembly<sup>17</sup>. Met with Lydia<sup>18</sup> ... further attempt to get a divorce, but unsuccessful. Gone to Dornach and then to Milan<sup>19</sup>... The dark clouds of War are gathering over Europe ... Ileen got as far as N.Z. but couldn't come as far as Europe. I went again to London with Mrs Macky ... I left for Australia in June or July 1939 ... At the farm I found things with Ileen not too good. World War II. We carried on the milk contract ... to March 1940. The last month Ileen carried on the milking by herself. But her legs began to give away ... Mrs Macpherson brought for me the block in Namur St ... Ileen is sent to hospital again but for a short time. Then she comes home and lives at the farm by herself. But gradually her legs are getting worse. She has to be taken to hospital but it was too late, she couldn't walk anymore. I return to live by myself at the farm, while letting the block in Namur St to the Williams.*

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<sup>17</sup> UK.

<sup>18</sup> Lydia Hillbrand.

<sup>19</sup> Ernesto's eldest sister, Rosa, lived in Milan. The other surviving siblings migrated to Australia.

*Ileen at Epworth<sup>20</sup> till September 1946. End of the War. Ileen returns to the farm where we live together. In 1952 we decide to build the new home in Namur St. In September 1953 Ileen came to the new house and in March 1954 the Farm is sold” (Genoni, c.1955).*

Ernesto writes that “I came to Melbourne where eventually I met Mrs Macky<sup>21</sup> of the ‘New Conservatorium’<sup>22</sup> and together we started a little [Anthroposophical] group in Hope Street, South Yarra. After two or three years it culminated into forming the Michael Group ... I started to work a farm<sup>23</sup> on Dr Steiner’s bio-dynamic methods in association with Fred Genoni<sup>24</sup>. Owing to two successive severe floods the attempt had to be abandoned. At the same time Miss Ileen Macpherson asked me if I would make another attempt at biodynamic farming on a block of land not far from Melbourne” (Genoni, c.1970, pp.8-9).

Ileen and Ernesto’s farm was called ‘Demeter Farm’. It was located on Princes Highway, Dandenong. Ann Fiedler states that “It is Springvale Cemetery now, it was her old farm” (Fiedler, 2015). The ashes of Ernesto and Ileen were scattered at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery (Springvale Botanical Cemetery, 1975, 1984).

Demeter Farm operated from approximately 1934 to 1954 (Genoni, c.1970). “My time was so taken up with the cares of the farm ... The next 21 years was almost like a spiritual prolaya<sup>25</sup> for me ... When I was 70 years of age I felt guilty that I was not carrying on the spiritual work of Anthroposophy as I should and I said [to Ileen] ... ‘I am not going on anymore with the farm, you will have to sell it’ which she did” (Genoni, c.1970, p.9)

### Anthroposophy

*“The Committee requested the Secretary to send a letter of thanks to Miss I Macpherson for her generous gift to the Michael Group” (Sargood, 1965).*

In Anthroposophy, Ileen found her spiritual home, and having once found it, it was a lifelong embrace. She treasured her collection of books by Rudolf Steiner which were housed in a fine bookcase behind glass.

Ileen’s Anthroposophy books included: *Evolution in the Aspect of Realities* (Steiner, 1953); *The Apocalypse* (Steiner, 1923a); *The Gospel of St Mark with a Supplement* (Steiner, 1923b); *Christ and the Spiritual World or The Search for the Holy Grail* (Steiner, nd); and *The Gem Book: An Art in Jewellery, and Hints and Sketches* (Steiner, 1932). She inscribed her books “Ileen Macpherson” and “Demeter, Dandenong” or “Demeter Farm, Dandenong”.

In her will, Ileen left her Anthroposophy books to the Michael Group, the Melbourne Anthroposophy group of which she was a long-time member, and they are preserved and integrated into the Michael Group library. There was also her typescript copy of *The Agriculture Course* (Steiner, 1924a) issued to her in 1936 from the Goetheanum and numbered E52. This does not appear to have survived.

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<sup>20</sup> Epworth Hospital.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs Anne Macky; on a visit to London she saw a notice for Rudolf Steiner’s Oxford Conference in 1922, she attended and it was her introduction to Anthroposophy.

<sup>22</sup> A conservatorium (academy) of music.

<sup>23</sup> At Dalmore, Victoria.

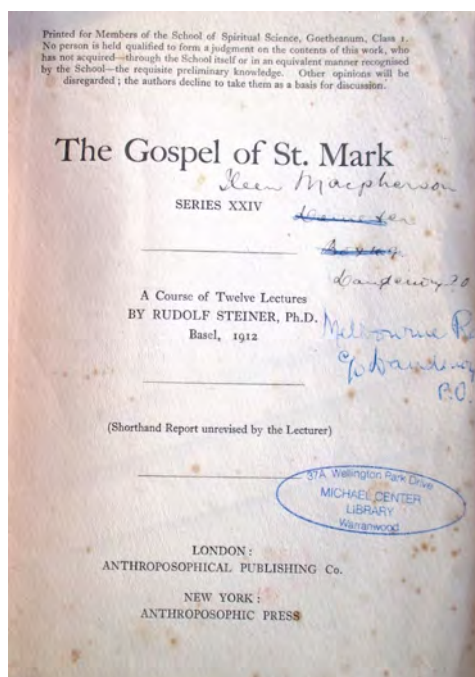
<sup>24</sup> A brother of Ernesto.

<sup>25</sup> Sanskrit term, a period of non-activity.

The earliest list located of members of the Michael Group is a 1951 listing of 35 members. Ileen appears in this list, along with her aunt, Ruby Macpherson, and her partner, Ernesto Genoni (Michael Group, 1951).

Ileen was a member of the Michael Group from its early days in the 1930s. The Michael Group records that have survived (dating from 1949) reveal her as a committed member and supporter, although she was neither an office bearer nor was she recorded as an attendee at any Committee, Special or Annual General Meetings.

When the first group leader, Jean Growcott, resigned after nearly two decades at the helm of the group, Ileen wrote a letter “of appreciation in gratitude for Mrs Growcott’s staunch and sincere service to Dr Steiner’s work and welcoming Mrs Macpherson as the new leader” (Etheridge, 1951, p.10). The new group leader, Ruby Macpherson held the post from 1951 to 1953 but she soon flagged her upcoming resignation due to “advancing years and failing eyesight” (R. Macpherson, 1952, p.4).



**Image 8. One of Ileen’s treasured Anthroposophy books, inscribed: “Ileen Macpherson, Demeter, Box 49, Dandenong”, now in the Michael Group library.**

Ileen was by then confined to a wheelchair due to illness and this precluded her active engagement in the Michael Group (Image 9). Ileen never did get to visit the Goetheanum. Ernesto made further visits to the Goetheanum, including trips in 1960 as an “appointed official delegate of the Michael Group” (Etheridge, 1960), again in 1962 (Etheridge, 1963), and as group leader of the Michael Group in 1966 (Steele, 1966). So, Ileen would have been able to receive first hand accounts and news of the Goetheanum and Anthroposophy and perhaps thereby some vicarious satisfaction. Most likely, Ileen acted as an enabler and financially supported these visits.

Although the opportunity for active involvement was lost to Ileen, she nevertheless financially supported the Michael Group generously. When the fate of the Michael Group’s rented “Book Room” in the Melbourne CBD was in the balance, Ileen stepped in to pay a year’s rent (£150) in advance (Etheridge, 1961). She continued this financial support the following year (Genoni, 1962).

When the Michael Group finally purchased its first real estate, at 525 Little Lonsdale Street in the Melbourne CBD, Ileen sent a gift of £200<sup>26</sup> to support this new venture and £178-6-0 for the legal expenses incurred in the purchase (Etheridge, 1964a, 1964b).

Ernesto was always actively engaged with the Michael Group, attending meetings and heading up study groups. Requests to be the group leader were always declined until he

<sup>26</sup> £ = Australian pound; Australia changed to decimal currency in 1966 with the conversion rate of £1 = \$2.



finally relented and accepted the role of group leader in 1962. "He was wonderful how he could explain things to people" (P. Macpherson, 1992).

Ernesto relinquished the post of group leader of the Michael Group, six years later. "Ileen didn't want him to nominate anyone, the leader has to you know, he didn't have to. Ernesto usually took notice of her, but anyway, he did nominate, did suggest him<sup>27</sup>, and so of course there was a bit of a turmoil at that meeting... there was a lot of the German people there who ... were not wanting him<sup>31</sup> to be a leader and ... had gone to quite a lot of trouble to be in touch overseas to see if he<sup>31</sup> was really a member ... and there was nothing could be found" (P. Macpherson, 1992).

Near the end of her life, when writing her will, the furtherance of Anthroposophy was still uppermost in Ileen's mind. After specifying that her Anthroposophy books should go to the Michael Group, her land to the local council as a park, a variety of lesser legacies to individuals and organisations, the considerable residual was to go to support Anthroposophy (I. Macpherson, 1981).

### **Illness**

*"I propose to say a little about pernicious anaemia. As the name tells us, it was a fateful disease, which, previous to the labours of our prize-winners, almost invariably, with only very few exceptions, ended fatally in the course of a few years, or in a still shorter time, in a few months. Its cause is not known. It customarily makes its appearance in middle-aged persons, who lose colour, feel tired, and ultimately consult a doctor, who establishes the fact that their red blood corpuscles have become reduced in number from the normal figure of about five million per mm to considerably lower values, e.g one million per mm, or still less ... Moreover on examining the blood microscopically, the investigator finds that the red corpuscles in it are very different to normal red blood corpuscles. The latter are all alike in size and in form, whereas in pernicious anaemia there are to be noticed blood corpuscles of a great variety of sizes, some considerably larger than normal and some small ones; and their shapes vary too"* (Nobel Prize Presentation Speech, Israel Holmgren, 1934, pp.1-4).

The initial enquiries for this paper revealed various conceptions as to why Ileen was wheelchair bound and how she had lost the capacity to walk. I was told she had fallen from a horse, that she had polio, that she had something like multiple sclerosis, and one informant proposed that it was just a feint, perhaps psychosomatic, "to trap Ernesto".

These theories turn out to be all wide of the mark. Ileen's condition was real, it was serious, and by rights, it ought to have been deadly. Ileen's malady was pernicious anaemia; it was was a killer. If Ileen had been born a little earlier she would have died young from this condition. If she had been born a little later her condition would have been simply and successfully treated. As fate would have it, she was on the cusp of a medical breakthrough.

The Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1934 was awarded for the successful treatment of pernicious anaemia:

*"The circumstance that the disease itself is subject to variations, showing now improvement, now relapses, renders it of course much more difficult to determine the actual*

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<sup>27</sup> Alex Podolinsky. There is no record in the Goetheanum Archives that Podolinsky (or variant spellings) was ever a financial member (2015).

*effect by any treatment administered to the patient. Previous to the results of Minot's and Murphy's experiments the principal mode of treatment adopted, and one that was practised all over the world, was the giving of large doses of arsenic ...*

*Hence it was quite a strange conception, and one lying remote from the customary beat, that came into the minds of Minot and Murphy, when they bethought themselves, that it might be possible to treat a patient suffering from this disease by administering food to him.*

*It was an idea, in fact, that had never been conceived of, up to that time... .. to be able to achieve any palpable results from a liver diet, it is requisite for the patient to have liver administered in very considerable quantities every day ... upwards of half a kilogram of liver, either in a raw state or in some cooked form ... such quantities of liver seemed quite outrageous ... they were enabled to succeed in inducing the patients to submit to such a regimen notwithstanding its disagreeableness .. results that were actually obtained from the treatment were astonishing ... by administering liver one could actually secure the disappearance of the symptoms of pernicious anaemia ... the cause of the disease, it being seemingly due rather to the absence of a substance that was requisite for the satisfactory production of red corpuscles, a substance that must be present in liver ... thanks to it, a sufferer from pernicious anaemia can with tolerable certainty be rescued from a premature death" (Nobel Prize Presentation Speech, Israel Holmgren, 1934, pp.1-4).*

Historically, pernicious anaemia was a fatal disease, hence the qualifier 'pernicious' meaning 'deadly'. Whipple, Minot and Murphy won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1934 for discovering a cure. At that time the cure proposed was injections of raw liver juice. The condition is now managed with injections of Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> but that was a development that arose several decades later. Now, early diagnosis will give the patient a healthy life. After diagnosis, the patient will receive a loading dose of multiple injections and then be put on a maintenance regimen of injections of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> every one to three months (PAS, 2015).

The most common symptom of anaemia is fatigue. Left untreated, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency will lead to nerve damage and on to muscle weakness and loss of reflexes. This may lead to unsteadiness and difficulty walking and, if untreated, will lead to neurological problems (NHLBI, 2015). Common mental symptoms for those with pernicious anaemia are "irritability, impatience and mood swings" with physical symptoms including "Tiredness, lethargy, exhaustion, fatigue, weariness" (PAS, 2015).

Ernesto, "he was looking after Ileen almost like a nurse, when she ... became ill he was there" (P. Macpherson, 1992). Ileen's niece, Ann Fiedler, as a child, only knew Ileen as a wheelchair bound older woman "in her fifties or sixties". Ann remembers her as "A bit Scottish, stoic, not very approachable". "We were always a bit scared of Ileen because she was very definite, she wasn't used to children, she was very nice but I never visited her on my own, always went with Mum" (Fiedler, 2015).

As a teenager and living nearby, Walter Jefimenko visited the house: "I saw his paintings on the wall and I wanted to paint". Ernesto encouraged this interest in art and gave him art lessons. Through the eyes of youth, Walter was somewhat perplexed at the asymmetry of the household personalities of Ernesto and Ileen. "He was a beautiful man, gentle, quiet, unassuming, he was all of those things... she was a very grumpy woman ... he was always sweet to her, that was so one sided". "I did ask him why he put up with Ileen". Ernesto confided to Walter, "He said he'd had a vision of Ileen and he, in a

previous life, and she was a soldier and he was a soldier on horseback and he had chopped off her head and he had not shown her any mercy". In life, "he served her like a servant and he was beautiful to her all the time". "He put a lot of energy into her all the time, cooking, cleaning". "I felt that he loved her, it was loving care, like a mother to a child, I felt the perplexity of it as a youth, he gave an enormous amount of his life". On those visits, Walter took his paintings. "She was very warm and welcoming to me ... I was not drawn to her at all". Separate from the house, Ernesto had a meditation room "it had to be separate from the house ... he was very grateful to have it" (Jefimenko, 2015).

A niece of Ileen's recalls: "She was sick woman ... He was very Italian and he was kind to her ... He did everything for her" (Hamilton, 2016).

### **Living with disability**

*"I was employed by the City of Dandenong between 1970 & 1975 as a housekeeper and attended Ileen's home twice weekly in that capacity. Her home was very very austere. She was in a wheelchair constantly - I understand paralysed in a sitting position.*

*Her room was set up like a hospital ward & she stayed there most of the time during the day - emerging at night. Ernesto went to Melbourne City regularly each week in connection with the Steiner movement. He also worked tirelessly on their very large vegetable garden" (Daphne Briscoe, 2016a).*

A niece of Ileen's remembers: "The house was set up for a wheelchair ... Ernesto built everything up so she could get her wheelchair there ... there were kitchen shelves, not drawers or cupboards ... The house, I remember it being very dusty". Of Ernesto, "he didn't smile a lot but he had that aura about him" (Fiedler, 2015).

Daphne Briscoe has fond memories of Ileen and Ernesto. She is in a unique position to provide a first hand and insightful account of living with disability:

*"I always knew them as 'Miss Macpherson and Mr Genoni'. They were a wonderful couple, she was so ladylike and he was so gentlemanlike. I have never forgotten them ... Miss Macpherson was in a wheelchair permanently ... A nurse called daily — she was not exactly a recluse, she was a perfect lady. She wore the oddest clothes. She may have had no hair, she always wore a funny little hat. There was bare lino on the floor. There was a bare table and a bare chair, I would scrub these.*

*The house was built to accommodate her wheelchair. There were no cupboards around the kitchen sink, so she had access in her wheel chair. I don't think she ever went out. Mr Genoni went off to his meetings in Melbourne. He'd talk to me about his meetings, it was a bit above me.*

*I don't remember any relatives around at all. I don't think they celebrated at Christmas or Easter at all. I don't think they had relatives.*

*She spent most of her time in her bedroom. She had a single iron bed. She could get in and out of her bed with a contraption like a hoist. I was never allowed in her bedroom, I just saw inside. I never had to do anything in her bedroom.*

*There were no armchairs or settees. In the hall there was a very large bookcase, glass fronted at the top and cupboards underneath. There were beautiful books in a beautiful piece of furniture. The rest of the furniture of the house was utilitarian.*

*They lived on the highest point of Noble Park, it was a little like being in the country with nice gardens. She wore odd clothes. She was always covered with a blanket from the waist down. The chair contained a commode ... She wore very old old wooly clothes, very old fashioned, and an odd cape at times, she wore a cap with a brim.*

*She was very very well spoken, exceedingly. Mr Genoni wore strange old clothes, he spoke very good English, with an accent ... Mr Genoni lived in the house, there was a single iron bed with army blankets - he always made the bed himself.*

*I never had to wash anything for Ileen. I made fairy cakes for Mr Genoni - he loved a cake with his coffee. It was very austere in the home. In winter he always had a fire going, he was not particular about the fireplace ... I'd clean the hearth and polish the fender. At night she'd be cooking their evening meal - sometimes she'd ask me to mince their meat - meat patties. Mr Genoni didn't cook, she cooked. I believe she stayed up most of the night.*

*I was there at 8 am, she'd wheel herself away to the kitchen. I never saw her read, never saw her write letters ... I was there 8 am to 11 am, three hours. She'd wait for the nurse to come. I believe she went to sleep in the day.*

*She was a lady, very nicely spoken. I think she had rather a sense of humour. She would laugh over some little things ... I'd have to wash all floors twice a week ... I'd have a tea or coffee with Mr Genoni in the remains of beautiful china that he used, oddments left over from good dinner sets. She didn't have one.*

*They got on excellently. He spoke very highly of her always. Never anything derogatory. I think he called her Ileen, but to me he'd always say 'Miss Macpherson' and that's how it was in those days, and he was 'Mr Genoni'. A couple of times I heard she'd call 'Ernesto would you come please.'*

*She was quite strong in the upper body. ... like a mountain monkey, she whizzed herself around the house in her wheelchair ... I don't remember any photographs, none. She had about half a dozen different wheelchairs - all lined up against one of the walls, all old fashioned, very very old.*

*There was a painting near the fireplace. Mr Genoni had done it - almost like a sunrise, rays emanating from the sun, pastel colours, in pastel paints. I don't know if he said a prayer to it, but he certainly stood in front of it and whispered.*

*The only modern thing in the house was a beautiful new washing machine, everything else was 1920s or 1930s, nothing modern at all" (Briscoe, 2016b).*

Ileen lived in the house with Ernesto until his death in 1975, and then alone until immediately before her death in 1984. Illness had thwarted many dreams. The doctors advised her that she could not have children. As a school girl she displayed great prowess as well as determination on the sporting fields. As well she was an accomplished dancer. The evolution of these interests and skills were extinguished by illness.

Although trips were planned with Ernesto, she never achieved a pilgrimage to the Goetheanum in Switzerland, nor a visit to Ernesto's sister Rosa Genoni and family in Milan. Opportunities for travel were not completely lost. A niece remembers: "Aunt Ileen, Ernesto brought her up in his car to Boganville Farm near Uralla, in NSW ... she was in a wheel chair ... it was a long way to visit ... probably about 1948" (Hamilton, 2016). Uralla is near Armidale, NSW, it would have been about a 2,600km round trip.



**Image 9. Ileen Macpherson, c.1950s<sup>28</sup> (photographer probably Ernesto Genoni; private collection).**

An active involvement and engagement with Anthroposophy was largely denied Ileen. Some practices where we can imagine a natural affinity for Ileen, such as Eurythmy, were precluded from consideration. Although Ernesto ran Anthroposophy group meetings, including the First Class, the Leading Thoughts, and Karma Lectures, these were held in the Michael Group rooms in the Melbourne CBD, at Ruby Macpherson's home, and other Anthroposophist homes, apparently never at Namur Street.

The Namur Street house was purpose built to cope with Ileen's incapacities. It was home for over three decades. A niece remembers it as "a nice cottage" (Hamilton, 2016). The house tailored to her special needs enabled her to live her life ageing-in-place. This was possible because of two devoted carers, firstly, her partner Ernesto, and after his death in 1975, her niece, Peggy Macpherson, and with the support of home care services from the local

council and nurse visits.

The Ileen that inhabited Namur Street was a far cry from the happy, capable, popular, and engaged young woman that we see in the Clyde School photos (Images 3, 4, 5, 6). For Ileen the house must have represented her terrible loss of independence and dignity - in her will she specified that the house was to be promptly demolished after her death and the land turned over to parkland. And that is what happened.

### **Legacy**

*"... my trustees shall stand possessed of the net moneys to arise from the sale calling in and conversion of my residuary real and personal estate including any lapsed legacies for the Anthroposophical Society whose headquarters are at 'The Goetheanum' Dornach Switzerland as to one moiety thereof for the general purposes of the headquarters of the Society and to the other moiety thereof for the general purposes of the Society in Australia" (Ileen Macpherson, 1981).*

Ileen died a wealthy woman at the age of 85 years after a brief stay at Gracedale Private Nursing Home, Camberwell. Ileen's death certificate puts her "Cause of death and duration of last illness" as "Atherosclerotic coronary artery disease - years; Pernicious anemia - years; Subacute combined degeneration of cord - years".

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<sup>28</sup> Face analytics puts the age of the subject at 60 years which would be 1958 (How-old.net, 2016b).

Ileen left a will (I. Macpherson, 1981) with the following provisions:

1. Anthroposophy books: "I give my Anthroposophical books to the Michael Group" (p.1).
2. Real estate: "I ... bequeath my freehold property at Noble Park known as 17 Namur Street ... to the City of Dandenong for use as a public park it being my wish that the house on the said property and all outbuildings should be demolished as soon as possible after my death" (p.2);
3. Bequests to individuals: Specific bequests to 13 named individuals (ranging from \$400 to \$40,000 each) and to the "each of the grandchildren" of her sisters Ethel and Marjorie and of "Jean and Murray Withers" (\$500 each) (p.3). The named individuals: two Genoni family members; four Macpherson family members (with Peggy Macpherson as the chief individual beneficiary at \$40,000); two neighbours, one Mackie family member (Anthroposophy family); "Jane King care of Robert Williams<sup>29</sup>, Boundary Rd, Roseville, Sydney" (\$2,000); and "Edgar Schmalfluss of Millicent in South Australia" (\$2,000) (pp.2-3).
4. Bequests to organisations: Specific bequests to 8 organisations comprising 4 hospitals (Balranald (\$200), Urana, (\$200), Epworth (\$700), Dandenong and District Hospital (\$200), the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (\$1,000); the Royal Victorian District Nursing Service (\$1,000), the Dandenong and District Homes for the Aged (\$5,000), and the City Newsboys Club (\$1,000) (pp.3-4).
5. Anthroposophy: The residual to "the Anthroposophical Society whose headquarters are at 'The Goetheanum' Dornach Switzerland as to one moiety thereof for the general purposes of the headquarters of the Society and to the other moiety thereof for the general purposes of the Society in Australia" (p.4). (The will is silent on the percentage split between the Dornach and local dispersment).

The will is a thoughtful and considered document with multiple strands of consideration. Both her family and that of Ernesto are remembered. At the institutional level, it reveals her gratitude to various hospitals. Significant bequests to the Newsboys Club may indicate her gratefulness for newspaper deliveries keeping her informed with news and enabling her to keep track of the fortunes of her share portfolio. Perhaps her gratitude to the Institute for the Blind was for the supply of audio books?

The application for probate (Aitken Walker & Strachan, 1984) stated that under the provisions of the will of her father (Walter Alexander Macpherson) Ileen "was entitled to the income for her life from a fund forming part of the residuary estate". Ileen's estate was valued at \$242,453.61. There was the unencumbered property at Namur St, Noble Park valued at \$90,000, there was over \$12,050 in two accounts (a bank and a building society), there were "debentures or bonds" of \$33,400, mortgages owed to Ileen of \$45,500, there was a share portfolio valued at \$142,994, and there was a small cache of gold and diamond jewellery valued at \$3,956. The value of "Furniture and Household Effects" were put at "Nil" and this presumably includes the art of Ernesto Genoni (if any) that remained in her possession (no art is mentioned).

To put an estate of \$242,000 in 1984 in perspective, the average wage at that time was \$365 per week (\$18,990 per annum) (ABS, 1984) and the median house price in

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<sup>29</sup> Biodynamic farmer in NSW.

Melbourne was \$65,000 (Abelson & Chung, 2004). Ileen's statement of assets which included real estate, shares, cash, bonds and debentures, and money loaned as mortgages, indicate that Ileen was a sophisticated investor with a spread of investments, along with a not inconsiderable collection of gold jewellery.

The Michael Group library in Melbourne holds some of Ileen's Anthroposophy books as per the wishes expressed in her will. Her real estate of 17-19 Namur Street (through to Marna Court, which is effectively four blocks of land) is now a public park of the City of Dandenong. The house and the outbuildings were demolished as per the terms of the will. The park at the time of inspection by the author (in 2015) was well maintained with amenities of some public seating available and a well maintained playground on approximately the site of the demolished house of which there is no remnant (Image 10). According to several neighbours there was once a sign on the park which they remembered as "Edith Macpherson Park" but which had been gone for a number of years. The opportunity is now for the Council to instate some adequate naming signage for 'Ileen Macpherson Park' and perhaps with some interpretive material at the site and on the Council website.



**Image 10. Ileen Macpherson Park, Noble Park, Victoria (photograph: J. Paull, 2015).**

It is unclear that any funds were ever sent to the Goetheanum, it appears not. Ileen's legacy lives on in Australia as the Ileen Macpherson Trust which was established from the proceeds of her estate on 1 January 1987 (ACNC, 2016). There are currently four trustees (IMT, 2016). "The Trustees shall apply the Trust fund in or towards the promotion, study and dissemination of Anthroposophy in Australia in accordance with the principles defined and taught by the Austrian educationalist, Rudolf Steiner" (IMT, 2016).

The Ileen Macpherson Trust was established by Peggy Macpherson and it appears to represent the residual value of Ileen's estate . It seems that the specific terms of Ileen's

will were not fulfilled to the letter in funding the Anthroposophy Society headquarters, Dornach, but were rather honoured in spirit by the establishment of the Ileen Macpherson Trust with the objective of supporting Anthroposophic ventures in Australia.

The Trust states that: "Ileen's work for Anthroposophy continues through the work of the trust. From the interest on an investment capital of under \$300,000, the trust has distributed \$600,000 to expanding the work of Anthroposophy in Australia since its inception in 1987 ... The Trustees shall apply the Trust fund in or towards the promotion, study and dissemination of Anthroposophy in Australia in accordance with the principles defined and taught by the Austrian educationalist, Rudolf Steiner.

The income of the trust shall be distributed only in Australia" (IMT, 2016). The Trust is always open to receive applications for support of Anthroposophy-related projects (Iezzi, 2016). There appears to be no available public declarations or listings of supported projects. The Trust supported the exhibition of Ernesto Genoni's paintings: *Angels of the First Class: The Anthroposophic Art of Ernesto Genoni, Goetheanum, 1924* (Paull, 2016b) which has been exhibited in Tasmania, Victoria and NSW.

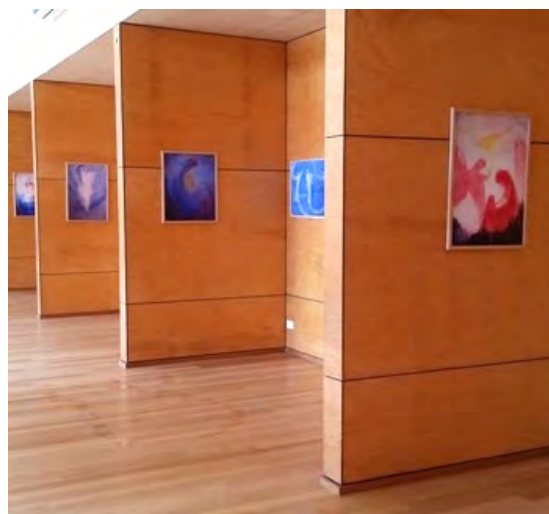
By its activities in support of Anthroposophy activities, Ileen has managed to vicariously enable activities that were denied to her in life, including eurythmy, art, travel, education, and attendance at regular meetings and conferences.

## Conclusion

There was a brief window in Ileen Macpherson's life in which she 'discovered' Anthroposophy, she met Ernesto Genoni, she enjoyed good health, she established a loving relationship with Ernesto, together they founded the biodynamic Demeter Farm, and she could look forward to a happy life (in the late 1920s & early 1930s).

In Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, Ileen's world was about as far away from Steiner's headquarters, Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland as is geographically possible. She never met Steiner, and was only introduced to Anthroposophy shortly after his death. Nevertheless, Ileen embraced Anthroposophy with passion and treasured his writings in English translation. She set forth to put Rudolf Steiner's ideas into motion in the Antipodes, by establishing Demeter Farm, in the early days by attending meetings and study groups, and later by financially supporting the Michael Group.

By the time Ileen was ready to visit the Goetheanum her health was already faltering. The planned visits with Ernesto in the late 1930s never happened.



**Image 11. The Exhibition, *Angels of the First Class: The Anthroposophic Art of Ernesto Genoni* at Tarremah Steiner School, Tasmania, 2016, supported by the Ileen Macpherson Trust..**



By any measure, Ileen had a difficult life. It seems that the “grim determination” that she exhibited as a schoolgirl sports champion stood her in good stead in facing life with her physical capacities severely diminished. She stewarded her finances thoughtfully, she lived an abstemious life and she apparently indulged in no luxuries.

Confined to a wheelchair for four decades, Ileen Macpherson might be expected to have written some diary or memoir accounts. If any were written, none were found. Several informants who could reasonably be expected to know, were unaware of any such records (e.g. Briscoe, 2016b; P. Macpherson, 2014). Peggy Macpherson, Ileen's niece, looked after her for the last decade of her life (after the death of Ernesto Genoni) and was the executor of her estate. Peggy said that there were none, and stated confidently that “Ileen didn't keep a diary” nor write any memoirs (2014).

Ileen's will of 1981 indicates that, towards the end of her life, she was still well capable of composing a sophisticated will and signing it with an able hand. From the fact that Ileen's will benefits family members, Ernesto's family members, and others who were geographically distributed across at least three states (Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia) we can surmise that there was correspondence between Ileen and others - perhaps, but none were found. Informants were unaware of any personal letters (e.g. Ann Fiedler, 2015).

Ileen Macpherson was a seeker, a dreamer, a lover, and a sufferer. She was a woman who endured the great misfortune of a debilitating disability which confined her to a wheelchair for much of her life. She attracted the love of a good man who by all accounts served her selflessly. She maintained her keen interest in Rudolf Steiner, biodynamic agriculture, and Anthroposophy, across six decades.

In life, Ileen was denied a lifetime of active participation in Anthroposophy endeavours, travel, eurythmy, conferences, biodynamics, and study groups. In death, via the Ileen Macpherson Trust, she has enabled many others over the past three decades, to develop and explore their own passion for Anthroposophy, and to engage with the many and varied aspects of life that were touched upon by her remarkable philosopher of the New Age, Rudolf Steiner.

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Margaret Garner was keen that the stories of Ernesto Genoni, Ileen Macpherson, and of the Anthroposophy Association in Australia were told. The genesis of this account is largely due to her, and this account is dedicated to her as she now faces her own health challenges. Thank you to the many individuals and organisations that have assisted the development of this research, including Pam Martin for her infectious enthusiasm, the Michael Centre, Kay Galletly for her mastery of Trove (the National Library's database of Australian newspapers), David Morgan, Anthroposophical Society in Australia, the Anthroposophy Society in Australia Victorian Branch, the Secretariat of the Anthroposophy Society, Dornach, Peter Braithwaite, the Archivist of the Goetheanum (Dokumentation am Goetheanum Bibliothek Kunstsammlung Archiv), the Archives of the State of Victoria, Raffaella & Norbeto Podreider, Peggy Macpherson, Dr Robert Negri, Helen Negri, Anita Sharpe, Walter Jefimenko, Helen Hamilton, Daphne Briscoe, Len & Margaret Genoni, Ann Fiedler, Dr Angelo Iezzi, and Jackie Mackinnon, Clyde Old Girls Archive and Geelong Grammar School Library . The Ileen Macpherson Trust financially

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