

Author Profile

VANCE PALMER



ON THE MARGINS

Vance Palmer 1885 - 1959

Bundaberg has a proud sporting history. Many locals have played representative sport at state, national and international levels. As well, singers such as Donald Smith, Gladys Moncrieff and Molly de Gunst have achieved international renown. However, Bundaberg's literary heritage has been overlooked and this oversight needs to be rectified.

Novelist, critic, historian and nationalist, Vance Palmer was born in Bundaberg on 28th August 1885, where his father was headmaster at Gooburrum State School. Vance and wife Nettie Palmer were significant 20th century literary figures. Both played key roles in the development and promotion of an Australian literary ethos.

Palmer travelled widely and associated with writers such as Katherine Mansfield, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Herbert Read. In Australia, he wrote for *The Bulletin*, *Meanjin*, and various other publications. Although he wrote plays, short stories, biography, history and journalism, very little of his work remains in print.

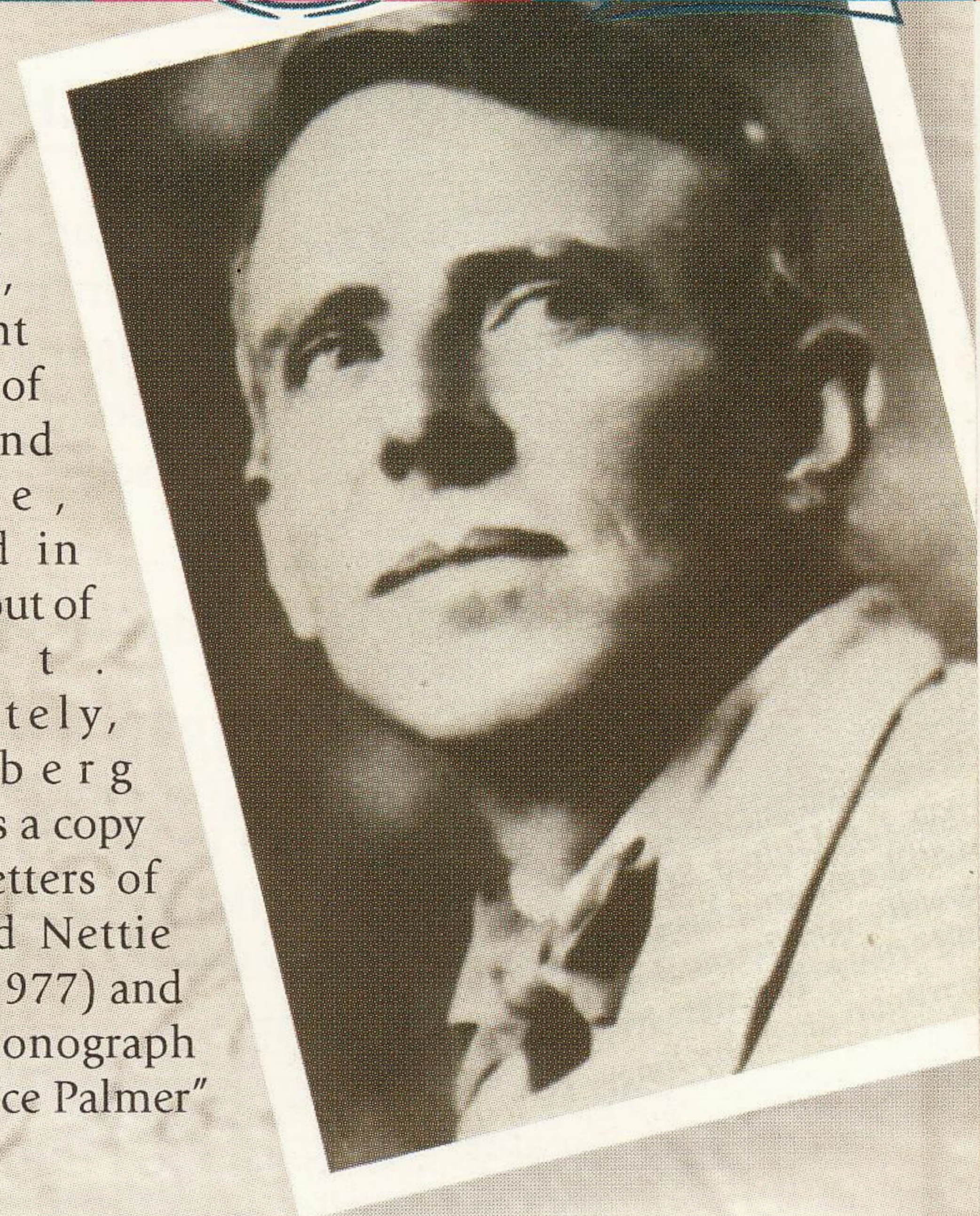
Vance Palmer's best-remembered works are the novels that formed the Golconda trilogy.

"Golconda", "Seedtime" and "The Big Fella" were based loosely on the life of controversial Queensland politician, E.G. Theodore. One other novel, "The Passage" is set in Queensland. "The Legend of the Nineties" and "National Portraits" are his best-known historical works.

The Palmers were keen advocates for Australian literature and arts in a time when few were interested. They combined a sound knowledge of international literature with an appreciation of what was required to promote the local product. The dedication of these largely self-educated, modest partisans helped to foster the growth, and the study, of Australian literature over the last fifty years.

It is sad to reflect that the standard biography

of Vance Palmer, published in 1970, and a joint biography of Vance and Nettie, published in 1975, are out of print. Fortunately, Bundaberg Library has a copy of "The letters of Vance and Nettie Palmer" (1977) and a small monograph titled "Vance Palmer" (1971).



Next year is the 120th anniversary of the birth of Vance Palmer.

Another who remains uncelebrated is Mary Hannay Foott. She is best known for her poem 'Where the pelican builds its nest'. Although regarded as a minor poet, Mary Hannay Foott is considered to be "probably the first woman in Queensland to make a mark in Australian literature". Mary Hannay Foott moved to Bundaberg in 1912 and died here from pneumonia on 12th October 1918. Her grave is located in Bundaberg cemetery.

Others who were born, lived or died in Bundaberg, made significant contributions to our literary heritage. We need to be aware of their contributions and to celebrate these appropriately.

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