

## Olley's early years in the Northern Rivers

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Monday, 10 March 2014

*This is the first in a series of feature articles about the Margaret Olley Art Centre and the celebrated artist it honours.*

*So who was Margaret Olley and what was her connection to the Tweed and Northern Rivers?*

**Margaret Hannah Olley was one of Australia's most loved artists, a highly respected painter and patron who spent many of her childhood years in the Northern Rivers.**

She was born in Lismore on 24 June 1923, the eldest daughter of Joseph Olley and Grace (nee Temperley), whose families both had long connections with the region. The Olleys were a pioneering family in the Lismore district, while the Temperley family had lived for a time in Ballina and owned the local newspaper, The Richmond River Times, during the 1880s.

Margaret spent the first two years of her life on the family's property at Horseshoe Creek, near Kyogle, before Joseph moved his young family to Tully, hoping to be involved in a proliferation of sugar cane farms in Far North Queensland.

Joseph brought that experience and his family back to the Northern Rivers in 1931, purchasing a sugar cane farm on the banks of the Tweed River at Tyalgah, near Murwillumbah.

The farm was situated across the river from the Condong Sugar Mill, where Margaret's uncle Tom Temperley was working as an Inspector of Cane Fields.

Margaret and her siblings Elaine and Ken, who were born in Tully, attended Murwillumbah Primary School and rowed a boat across the river to meet the bus to town.

Margaret's favourite subject at school was art and her independent Aunt Mary, who often visited the family, was a great mentor.

The farm was sold to Thomas Edwin Grant in 1935 and the family moved briefly to Brisbane before returning to Tully.

Margaret remained in Brisbane to attend the boarding school Somerville House, where her talent for painting and drawing was noticed by art teacher Caroline Barker. Ms Barker was so impressed she persuaded Margaret's parents to send their daughter to art school to further her studies.

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The Gallery and Café is open from Wednesday to Sunday 10am – 5pm.