

LEO JOHN MURPHY: ARTS AND CRAFTS TEACHER, 1956-1960



Leo John Murphy was born in Brunswick, Victoria, in 1916 to Peter Joseph Murphy and Honora 'Nora' Mary Lyons. The Murphy heritage goes back to 1800 in Thomastown, Ireland. John Murphy emigrated to Victoria in 1864, settling in Corop, which was a farming district directly north of Melbourne towards the Murray River. He married Ann Tehan in 1871 and their son Peter Joseph Murphy was Leo's father.

The Lyons heritage goes back to 1800 in Crusheen, County Clare, Ireland. Patrick Joseph Lyons emigrated to Victoria in 1857. He married Ellen Clifford in 1859 and their daughter Honora was Leo's mother.

Peter Joseph Murphy and Honora Mary Lyons married in Bendigo in 1911 and had three children: Patrick Joseph (1914-1914), Leo John (1915-2016), and Francis Gerard (1917-1972).



Leo John Murphy was born in Brunswick, but later the family was living in North Essendon. He became a civil servant working as an administrative officer in the Lands Department. The family tragedy was that his father died in 1937, when Leo was only 22 and his younger brother Francis was only 20. Leo had obtained a Bachelor of Commerce qualification and was working as a clerk with the public service, as an Administrative Officer with the Lands Department.

In 1939 at age 23 years he volunteered for military duties and served as Corporal in the Citizens Military Force in the Training Battalion. He was discharged in 1941 in consequence of "reduction of establishment". He reenlisted in 1942 and ended up as Lieutenant with 24 Australian Infantry Battalion and served at various locations including the Northern Territory, at one stage being part of the bomb disposal unit. He was discharged in late 1945. Unfortunatley, he missed out on receiving the 1939/45 Star as he had not completed the required aggregate six months in the

Northern Territory during the time of the bombing between February 1942 and November 1943.



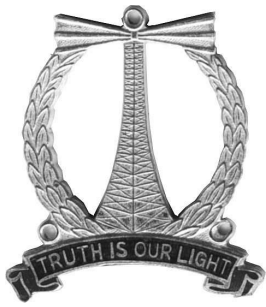
Leo John Murphy married Margaret Mary Ellis in 1942 at St Teresa's Catholic Church in Essendon, and they settled in Brewster Street, Essendon. Their children included Ann, Peter, Kevin, and Jane.

Margaret's family heritage goes back to 1598 in Sancreed, Cornwall, England, and the family migrated to Victoria in 1857. James Henry Ellis of Bendigo married Catherine Teresa Malone of Bungaree in 1907 in St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, so it was an auspicious occasion. They

raised four daughters and three sons between 1908 and 1925.

Leo must have decided on a change of career after the war as he went back to studies at Melbourne University and in 1950 obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree with Honors. He started

teaching in the primary schools division and in 1952 was appointed to Hartwell Primary School which was established in Camberwell in 1922.



Leo Murphy started at St Albans High School in its inaugural year of 1956 when it was located in temporary accommodation in Sunshine. There were 126 students with two classes of boys and two classes of girls. The small staff team included James Barker as headmaster, Mrs Bernice Barker, Tom Walsh, Bruce Alcorn, Harry Lahy, Mrs O'Hallaran, and Mrs W Johnson as the office secretary. Leo was appointed as the Art and Craft teacher, and he's the one who designed the "Truth Is Our Light" badge that was later featured on blazers and caps and documents for the school.

Bruce Alcorn would later recall: "The school started in 1956, which was the year that the Olympic Games were held in Melbourne. There was a lot of significance in that because the school crest, which was designed by one of the original teachers, Leo Murphy, featured the Olympic wreath that was given to the winners of the ancient Olympic games and the water tower, which was a local landmark. Leo worked both these icons into the crest. He also included a beam of light radiating from the top of the tower, which fitted in with the school motto of 'Truth Is Our Light'. It was very beautifully designed, and credit for that must go to Leo Murphy."

Vanda Viti was a student who started in 1956: "The year at the Hall was wonderful. There were 120 of us divided into four forms. We had great teachers. They were so nice and calm and they treated us like we were special. Mr James Barker was the Principal and his wife Mrs Bernice Barker was the Headmistress. I remember Mr Alcorn, always smiling with his twinkling eyes, Mr Murphy, gentle and kind, Mr Walsh, with his dramatic way of bringing History to life, and Mr Lahy, young and very funny."

Bob Boorer remembers that the woodwork classes required extra walking: "Mr Murphy tried to teach us woodwork. The first year we had to walk to Sunshine Tech to use their facilities. When we did it at St Albans we had benches in a normal classroom with the big windows. We had some long pieces of timber and either Jeff Heaviside or Douglas McCubbin moved the wood along the bench into the vice when there was a big crash as the wood went right through the window. We got into a bit of detention because of that."



The Staff of St Albans High School 1959.

Leo Murphy left St Albans High School at the end of 1960, so he had contributed a good five years of experience to his St Albans students. When he started in 1956 there were eight staff and 126 students. In 1960, when he'd left, there 31 staff and nearly 900 students, so the growth had been substantial. Unfortunately Murphy's later teaching career has not been traced.

The family had moved to Campbell (Canberra) in the Australian Capital Territory by 1963 and Leo was once again working as a public servant.

Margaret Mary Murphy nee Ellis died at Campbell in 1973 at age 53 years, very young.

In 1977 Leo married Noreen Denise Metcalfe, who was a widow - he was 62 and she was 57 - and they became apt companions for over 30 years. Noreen died in 2013 at age 92.

Leo John Murphy died in Canberra in 2016 at age 101 years, having outlived a number of his former young students of St Albans. Hopefully he had received a message from The Queen in celebration of his centenary.



Leo John Murphy in 2016 at age 101.

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Article written by Joseph Ribarow.
School photos from Nick Szwed archives.
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