

SPONSORED BY
ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



LH 34/319/1

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

Registered by Aust Post.
NBH 0335

7 Lynwood St
Blakehurst

SEPTEMBER 1990

NEXT MEETING

DATE: 8pm Friday 17 September

LOCATION: Council Chambers, 1st Flr. Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Hwy
Rockdale.

BUSINESS: General

GUEST SPEAKER:

Dr. Peter Orlovich and recently appointed Local Studies
Librarian for Rockdale Municipality, Sandra Mowbray, will present:-

"THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES FOR LOCAL HISTORY"

SUPPER ROSTER: Volunteers please. Members please bring a plate.

SOME FURTHER SNIPPETS ON "THE TOWERS"

Well fellow members, what a pleasant start in my first weeks as Publicity Officer to receive a call from Miss Gwen Cuthbert, a member of much longer standing. Miss Cuthbert's memory had been inspired by the reference to "The Towers" in our last bulletin and she rang me to pass on some of her recollections.

During the years 1927 and 1928, Miss Cuthbert attended a school based at "The Towers". She still has the school brooch in the shape of a shield, navy with blue and gold and the initials, T.P.S.

Towers school residence had a kitchen, sitting room and bedroom. Her first teacher was a Mrs Sampson and she has memories of a child who was always there, perhaps Mrs Sampson's. Her next teacher was a Miss Roberts who had a relative who had served in the Boer War.

Two Esdaile girls (Ed. the house was the property of the Esdaile family for most of its existence) were pupils at this time, one very pretty with blonde hair. They lived in a house behind the school building.

Later, Miss Cuthbert attended St David's School at Arncliffe where the Rev. R.H.Pitt-Owen was in charge. Her aunt (now 90) was a kindergarten teacher there for some time.

Another memory was the water trough outside the hotel at Arncliffe. This hotel was rebuilt twice while she lived there.

Thank you, Miss Cuthbert, for taking the trouble to phone me with some of your memories. I believe that these are only scratching the surface but they caused a lot of interest and awoke the memories of others at our last meeting. I am really looking forward to meeting you to hear some other stories from the past.

I hope that the other members will start recalling some of their past experiences for I would hope to get a little personal history of the district for each journal.

My son, Wesley, and I will be in Queensland at the time of the next meeting but we look forward to seeing you all at the October meeting - so start polishing up those memories.

(MRS) JOAN FAIRHALL
PUBLICITY OFFICER

GET WELL SOON!

Our Vice-President and Research Officer (and former President of many years) Arthur Ellis is hospital recovering from an operation. We send him our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Editor's Note: the following article was written by Mr. George Aitcheson (deceased) of Narwee and was originally published in a Kogarah Historical Society Newsletter 1983. 2.

MILES FRANKLIN - HER STORY

When I was asked to write about Miles Franklin I started to sift through all the information I had about her. I was most surprised to find how episodic it all was. All the writers seemed to jump about from one phase or another of her life. It was galling to find that what I had strung together myself was more of the same. So, I decided to prepare a simple chronology as a sort of preface to what I hope is a fairly detailed study of the fascinating life of this noted authoress.

Her life was not chaotic. She did spend much time chasing a lot of chimeras and dreams - but don't we all?

There are many "ifs" in her story: If her first book had not been such a success; if her friends and relations had not reacted so unfavourably to it ... would she have left Australia? It is also probable that her writings would have gradually risen in standard. Time has shown that her work varied from mediocre to a sparkling brilliance.

As a staunch feminist, Miles would not allow the use of the word "craftsmanship" but the effect of writing is essentially practising and polishing. At the risk of offending her spirit, I would say that most of what she wrote overseas was scribble, worthy of note only because it carried her name. Even what she wrote here was uneven in quality. To me, her major work is "All That Swagger", a splendid story of four generations of an Australian pioneer family for a hundred years from 1830.

It is only when she comes to modern times that her style falters. She seems unable to come to terms with a new world of different social attitudes - a world of travel by car and plane.

The belief is that it was not very long after writing "All That Swagger" that she first started to think about what became the Miles Franklin Award, the aspiration of our present-day writers. Perhaps she felt this was a way of keeping her memory green, but it is much more probable that she wanted to be sure that Australian literature would not die from a lack of encouragement on her part.

It is said that after her mother died, Miles decided to save her money to endow an award for "the best Australian novel of the year". While her friends thought she was quite poor and "didn't have 2 bob to bless herself with" they were astonished to learn after her death that she had left more than 16,000 pounds (\$32,000) to establish an annual award as mentioned.

She became a very active member of the Fellowship of Australian writers and often invited the writers and literary folk of her day to lunch. She knew them all - Norman Lindsay, Nancy Keesing, Ruth Park, Pixie O'Harris and many of the lesser lights. It was enough for her that they were Australian writers, and immaterial whether they were famous or unknown.

Special significance attaches to a piece of Doulton chine that she owned. This was a cup, fine and hexagonal with a waratah on each panel, given to her by an unknown person (probably a relative) on condition that it never

3
left Australia. It was the custom for years for visiting writers to have a cup of tea from this Waratah Cup (and saucer), then to write their name in "the book of the Waratah Cup". This was merely a large autograph album somebody had given to Miles as a child. Having used some of the front pages, she sensibly asked her guests to sign on the back pages. The cup and the book are held by the Mitchell Library along with other memorabilia.

PERSONAL HISTORY

Miles Franklin - an unusual name, an unusual person! What was she like? Physically she was tiny, once described as being "as big as a match". Only 5 ft. 1 inch high, she had splendid long hair and a good figure. Personally, she considered herself ugly but she had no real reason to do so. Admittedly she had a very snub nose which actually added to the character of her face. Possibly the fact that her younger sister, Linda, was a conventional beauty influenced her to think badly of her own physical assets. She obviously underrated these attributes which found favour with artist-writer Norman Lindsay. He met her for the first time in 1901 after publication of her first controversial book, "My Brilliant Career".

Writing about this meeting in "Bohemians of the Bulletin" (Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1965) he made these observations: "She was very short, but pleasantly plump, and she wore a large flowered hat, and summery ankle-length frock and a superb mass of black hair in a cascade that reached her pert rump, to match a pert nose with fine eyes and arched black eyebrows, and an alluring pair of lips" .

For a while Miles Franklin stayed with the Lindsays at Springwood after her return to Australia from abroad. Norman Lindsay told her how the Bulletin editor, A.G. Stephens, forbade him to follow her.

Doubtless with her tongue in her cheek (for she had an avowed dislike for the opposite sex) she is supposed to have replied, "The wretch! We might have had a love affair!"

Lindsay concluded his article "DIS ALITER VISUM. The best love affairs are those we never have!"

It is quite likely that these disgruntled feelings about herself caused her to write the story of Sybilla Milvin, a thinly disguised copy of her ownself. The title "My Brilliant Career" as she intended it should have been followed by a question-mark to give the self-mocking spirit of her writing greater point. To her chagrin that question-mark never appeared at any time in the published work.

The first of seven children, she was born of 14th October, 1879 at Talbingo near Tumut, NSW. Her father was Maurice Franklin, born at Yass in 1847, and her mother, nee Margaret Susannah Eleanor Lampe, was born near Cooma in 1850. Later, her mother preferred to be known as Susannah Margaret.

Given the names of Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, for reasons explained later, it was the fourth of these that she chose to use in her literary career.

When she was about ten, the family moved to Thornford, near Goulburn, to a property her mother named "Stillwater". Here, she did not enjoy the happiness she had had at their former home. The area The Talbingo homestead was known as Brindabella and formed part of the Tumut Valley. In later

34131913 4

Miles was to recall her younger days there in the book "Childhood at Indabella".

Although it has never been said, the move to Thornford could have been a downward step for the family. Although never of the squatocracy, they were established comfortably. No reason was ever given for the change to an area that was much less pretentious.

Miles attended the public school at Thornford, but her memories remained evergreen of her previous school at Talbingo and her affections for her birthplace stayed with her throughout her life. Today, her birthplace, the home of her maternal grandparents, and the creek whereon she asked in her will that her ashes should be scattered are far below the waters of the Blowering Dam. The name of the creek, Jounama, is an Aboriginal word with the meaning "Singing Waters", suggesting the kind of lovely waterway it must have been.

At the township of Talbingo she is remembered by the Miles Franklin Memorial Park, where there is a handsome fieldstone monument upon which is inscribed a summary of her life and achievements. Also outside the public school, The Miles Franklin Memorial Committee has erected a plaque dedicating the Australian section to Miles Franklin. Inside is a pictorial record of her early life.

She is said to have been a superb horsewoman - riding bareback, astride or on side-saddle. Her immense love of her country and its typically Australian bush showed through all her writings.

Advancing years sapped her vitality but not her dauntless spirit. She is described by a fellow writer present with her at a meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers on Sunday 27th January, 1952 as being "dressed in mittens and a hat, a shawl affair in her hands and covering the umbrella she leant on so pugnaciously....". Not long before her death, about 1953, a companion on one of her visits to the City recalls: "We walked to St. James Station where Miles left us, saying 'Don't cross over with me, children..' So small a figure, shapeless coat hanging, back straight, a tilt in her walk... She was very tired and very unwell..."

The age into which Miles Franklin was born was notable for its stuffy conservatism against which her strong spirit rebelled. Women's status was then little higher than that of children and it was unthinkable that they should contemplate making a career for themselves other than domesticity or set themselves to serious tasks.

She became very incensed by these views of her sex and showed it. Perhaps her most daring break with the conventions was to use the name of her convict ancestor (Miles) in times when any hint of convictism in a family was covered up - the offending name was even removed from family Bibles and written records!

HER LITERARY CAREER BEGINS

Miles Franklin was just on twenty when she began writing "My Brilliant Career" which she said later in life she "tossed off in a matter of weeks" but which, according to her close friend, Marjorie Barnard, occupied her from September, 1898 until the following March.

The manuscript was rejected by Angus & Robertson, the first publishers to whom she sent it. She sought the opinion of Henry Lawson, who thought the writer was a man. However, he was impressed with it and took it to his literary agent in England, Mr. Pinker. He took it to Blackwoods in Edinburgh who published it in 1901.

The release of the book in Australia brought cries of outrage from many of her friends and relatives who felt they had been misrepresented and would suffer loss of face by her characterisation of them. In no uncertain terms they told her so. So much local unpleasantness resulted that she fled where their tongues would not disturb her. For a year or so she lived precariously in Sydney and Melbourne depending on the meagre wages then paid to domestic servants.

The source of her trouble, "My Brilliant Career", went on to sell 4,000 copies, although she is said to have earned only 25 pounds from it.

In 1903 her family moved to Penrith where Miles seems to have been more of a visitor than one sharing the home with them. It is probable that she was working on a sequel to her first book - "My Career Goes Bung". Many believe that it is much the better book of the two. It was not published until 1946, eight years after her mother had died. Her mother, so it was said, had jealously guarded the only copy of the manuscript, and so well had she hidden it that its existence was not discovered until after her death.

After publication of "My Brilliant Career" and while she was in Sydney, Miles hovered on the fringes of the feminist set, led by the wealthy Rose Scott and Bertha Lawson, Henry's wife. She had already begun to develop feminist leanings which were strengthened by these and other contacts. In Melbourne she was to meet Alice Henry, another convert to the feminist cause, and together they travelled to America in late 1905, arriving in 1906. For a time she lived in Chicago, working hard for the feminist cause in the founding of women's trade unions.

When World War 1 broke out her sense of loyalty took her to England. In June, 1917 she joined the Scottish Women's Hospitals for foreign service and saw service in Macedonia as a cook. At the war's end she worked in England as a secretary for the National Housing and Town Planning Association.

Through all those years she was writing and having her work published. She produced nothing of note until 1928 when a book by Brent of Bin Bin appeared. It was the first of a series of 6 novels on the same theme. Her pseudonym continued to hide her identity which was a closely guarded secret. In time, this habit of secrecy was to grow to ridiculous proportions, in all probability originating from the furore over her first book and used as a screen to protect her from further unpleasant reactions from people.

One of the assumed names she used illustrates her impish sense of humour. It was "Mr and Mrs Ogniblat L'Artsau". Examined closely it is perceived to be Talbingo reversed and part of Australia, artfully rearranged. This subterfuge has been quoted as evidence of her deep-seated psychological troubled guilt that she had failed to meet the conventions of the day by marrying, and her dislike of men, which she openly professed.

Her time in Macedonia left her with periodic bouts of malaria which affected her health for some years thereafter.

He made 2 short visits to Australia in 1924 and 1930, and had a long stay in between. Colin Roderick states in his book about her that she was working on "Back to Bool Bool" in 1929, typing the manuscript at the "old Council House at Hurstville". He also states that this book was published in 1931 while she was on her way back to London " via the United States.

On 8th September, 1932 she voyaged back to Australia to settle for good arriving on 27th November. The reason for her decision to return was that her father's health was failing and her mother had written asking her to come home. By then her parents had been settled at 26 Grey St, Carlton for some years, having sold their previous property in July, 1914 for 510 pounds (\$120). They also owned other property at North Sydney but preferred to live on the southern side of the Harbour. To their Carlton home they gave the name "Wambrook" after Wambrook Station and Creek near Cooma.

Her father passed on in 1931 to be followed 3 years later by his wife. After the death of her parents Miles Franklin lived alone in the cottage. She died in Sydney on 19th September 1954 in her 75th year from the effects of seizure suffered some days before when she lay helpless in her house until found and taken to a private hospital - too late to save her.

(to be concluded next month)

BERNARD SHARAH
PRESIDENT
599 1971

MRS VALDA BEEHAG
SECRETARY
546 2819

MRS JOAN FAIRHALL
PUBLICITY OFFICER
546 5555

MISS C WILDING
TREASURER
597 3215

MR A ELLIS
RESEARCH OFFICER
587 1159

BERNARD SHARAH
BULLETIN EDITOR
599 1971

YOU'RE NOT A MEMBER OF OUR SOCIETY?

WELL JUST COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION AND SEND TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE OR MONEY ORDER (\$7 INDIVIDUAL, \$10 FAMILY) TO 4/73 FREDERICK ST ROCKDALE 2216

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE NO:
