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# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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7 Lynwood St  
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OCTOBER 1990

## NEXT MEETING

DATE: 8pm Friday 19 October.

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

BUSINESS: General

GUEST SPEAKER:

## "LOOKING FOR HISTORY"

All around us there are tell tale signs of what has happened in in the past. The evidence is in the buildings, streets and every day things we take for granted. It is a matter of looking for the clues and interpreting the information.

James Kane (MA Dip Ed Studies) will show us how we can look at our surroundings through new eyes.

Mr. Kane conducts history walks in the St George District for the Workers Education Association (W.E.A.) so his talk should prove particularly relevant for our members.

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

### LAST MEETING

At last month's meeting we met Sandra Mowbray, the new Local Studies Librarian for Rockdale Municipal Library. Susan explained the type of material available to users of the facility.

There is a comprehensive range of local histories and a large collection of historic photographs (donated in the main by Ald Ron Rathbone O.A.M. ) which are available for viewing.

Sandra also showed us an interesting collection of memorabilia that aroused a good deal of comment. We are grateful to her for sharing this with us and encourage our members use the facility as much use as possible.

Accompanying Sandra Mowbray was Dr Peter Orlovich who spoke to us about the importance of local Council records. He explained that council rate books, minute books and correspondence are an invaluable source of historical information.

However, some councils (not Rockdale) that Dr Orlovich has dealt with in the past have tended to overlook their importance. Precious documents have been stored in all sorts of odd places such as roof cavities and bell towers.

We resolved to write to Rockdale Council highlighting the value of these records and suggesting that some thought be given as to how these documents could be accessible by the public for historical research.

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### COACH TOUR TO CARCOAR

Joan Fairhall is arranging a coach tour to the historic Central West town of Carcoar for March next year.

The town itself is very attractive and has much to interest our members. There are also things to see along the way such as the Japanese Gardens at Cowra.

Cost is very reasonable - \$80. Tour would leave Rockdale Town Hall 8am on the Saturday and return 5-6pm Sunday evening.

We will give you more details in next month's bulletin but if you're interested ring Joan on 546 5555.

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## MILES FRANKLIN - HER STORY

(Part 2 of an article by the late George Aitcheson of Narwee.)

"I Name this child .....  
STELLA MARIA SARAH MILES FRANKLIN..."

To say the least Miles is not a name ordinarily bestowed on a child - and it has such a masculine ring that one would not visualise the bearer of it to be of the feminine gender. It was for this very reason that Miss Franklin chose to use it during her literary career.

Her intriguing use of the name "Miles" deserves an explanation. Like Henry Handel Richardson she felt it was useless for a female to write under her own name. As an ardent feminist, she was sure that in a man's world no woman had a chance of being successful in having her writings published, simply because she was a woman and men knew that women could write nothing but poetry!

She was the only one of her family to bear the name Miles and there is a strange story in the background of this, going back to the First Fleet.

Edward Miles (or Moyle alias Myers) came on "Scarborough" to serve 7 years for robbery. In his book "Miles Franklin: Her Brilliant Career" Colin Roderick says that convict Miles was to be sent out on the "Alexander" but for some reason not known he was transferred to the "Scarborough".

Variations in the way persons spelled their name were not uncommon in those years of transportation. The convicts were usually illiterate and could not recognise their name if they saw it; therefore they were written down as they were pronounced or seemed to be said.

Colin Roderick goes on to inform us that Miles was an emancipated land holder, 42 years old, when he married a convict girl named Susanna Smith or Staines in 1803. She was twenty seven. They moved from the area of Bunbury Curan Creek to the Monaro. For many years, they lived in and around the Tumut Valley, Talbingo and Brindabella district. They were the great-grand parents on the maternal side of Miles Franklin.

On the paternal side, her great-grandfather was Oltmann Lampe, whose family went back to at least the early 16th century in Germany. He came to the High Country in 1841 and in 1850 married Sarah Bridle at Gundagai.

Joseph Franklin and his wife migrated from Ireland in the "Orient" in 1839. He was born in County Clare in 1815 and could read and write. She was born Mary Hogan in County Cork, possibly about 2 years later as when they were married in 1838 she was 21 and he was 23.

She was always known as Maria. Her father was John Maurice Franklin born at Yass on 27th January, 1847. The family pioneered Brindabella Station on the Goodradigbee River. It was bequeathed to her father and brother and a nearby peak, 5,400 feet high, is named Mount Franklin.

Thus it will be seen how the first-born child of a new generation came to be given so many Christian names - almost as many as royalty!

### The Carlton Cottage

Number 26 Grey Street, Carlton is a pleasant but unremarkable weatherboard building, at present used as a men's boarding house.

My real interest started from the moment I found it was still existing. As I dug deeper, a few more interesting items came to hand.

It was probably built about 1900. I have not been past the front door but it is reputed to have some cedar walling or partitions. In 1972 it was up for sale. The advertisement described it as a guest house with 7 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, a large kitchen and dining room, priced at \$26,000.

Perhaps here is as good a place as any to start the saga of the attempt to save the cottage from the threat of the bulldozer.

In August, 1982 The Fellowship of Australian Writers wrote to The National Trust about the cottage's significance. In reply, they wanted colour transparencies or slides of it. No one in the Fellowship seemed able to provide these after we were informed by The Trust that the first lot we sent were under-exposed. The Trust also requested more information.

Surely somebody dared!

So we wrote to the Heritage Council of NSW on 6th September, 1982. They replied on the 28th, saying the matter would receive attention. Then ... nothing: lots of it!

After asking if any progress had been made, they sent a form asking for the fullest information. I filled it in myself and sent it on behalf of The Fellowship as the executive was unavailable and I was authorised to do so. Again ... nothing!

When we heard that the owner was proposing to alter inside the cottage to comply with new fire laws, it appeared that the Council regarded it as "under threat". They were much more interested - at least Jean Rice was.

And here, with almost half the year gone, the matter stands.

Other than an abortive attempt to interest the Australian Bicentennial Authority (N.S.W. Bicentennial Council) nothing much else has happened.

Miles Franklin wrote her outstanding book "All That Swagger" at Carlton, and quite a lot of other work too. She should have lived in a rose-bowered sandstone cottage, sufficiently rural and photogenic to make a worthy shrine for one of Australia's most talented daughters. At the moment, there is not even a tin sign to show that she lived and worked there. If the present owner is allowed to proceed with "remodelling" some of the historical value of the house is sure to be lost.

As I researched her history I became more and more interested in this remarkable woman. So many things she did in her lifetime were unique. When I found that the Carlton cottage was still intact there were some vague stirrings in my mind that something should be done to preserve it from the developer who is ever willing to sacrifice the old for the new.



Alas, the way of the conservationist is hard. Comments about my nebulous idea were many and varied.

"A suburban weatherboard!" ... "Miles who?" ... "A grand idea. Who'll do the work?" were some.

At last I managed to get the St. George-Sutherland Branch of the F.A.W. interested. After all, she was a writer, and we agreed on 2 points: one, that she had lived in our area for 21 years; two, that where she lived and wrote should be better known, even in a suburban context. It was resolved to ask permission of Rockdale Council to put a plaque on the back of a seat at Stell Park, Carlton as a memorial to Miles Franklin. This is a matter that is still preceding as, midway through the proposal, there was a change of plan - and here I must digress.

I give talks or lessons on Australian History to 2 Adult Leisure Learning classes at Hurstville and Mortdale. Why not involve them I thought? I must admit that I used a heavy line of propaganda to get them interested in Miles Franklin and, more importantly, some form of recognition that she lived and worked in the area. This, plus almost driving my friends and relatives insane by constant talk about the subject, brought a result a few weeks ago when one of the class, Beryl Robb, revealed that she and her husband, Ian, ran an engraving business. Her first idea was to donate a sort of house number plate at 26 Grey Street, worded "Miles Franklin lived here" or something like that. Then her husband took a hand. They had a look at the proposed site in the park and he came up with the simply brilliant (or brilliantly simple) idea of a small concrete plinth with a sloping top and an engraved plate on the top. He was prepared to do this for nothing!

At the moment the proposed date for a dedication or what-have-you is this September.

A further suggestion from Gwen Coxhead of The Kogarah Historical Society is to plant a commemorative tree at the same time.

Now why can't I think of suggestions like these?

### Conclusion

The Miles Franklin Award will keep this remarkable woman's name ever before the eyes of those in literary circles. Administered by the Permanent Trustee Company, Sydney, its receipt is a coveted honour. The first award was made in 1957.

She had a happy childhood, evoking fondest recollections in her later and writings. Her education was that of a normal Australian country child, except that for a while she and other school-age members of her family had an elderly Edinburgh graduate as a tutor. Writing came as naturally to her as walking and talking but the publication of her first book was to sour her relationship with many. While it could not suppress her creative urge the experience was to burden her with the necessity to hide her true identity and she resorted to noms-de-plume.

By choice she remained a spinster and when someone once had the temerity to ask her why she had never married she snapped "Because I'm no charwoman". Her dislike of or aversion to men was expressed in this definition of them as "the uselessest, good-for-nothingest, clumsiest animals in the whole

world". With such a poor opinion of the opposite sex is it any wonder she was such a fighter for women's rights!

She kept almost everything she wrote, some earlier works being published many years afterwards. This is so with the "Brent of Bin Bin" books, apparently in manuscript form long before their Publication. The order of their publication and respective dates are:

UP THE COUNTRY, 1928; TEN CREEKS RUN, 1930; BACK TO BOOL BOOL. 1931 (all published by Blackwoods. Edinburgh); PRELUDE TO WAKING, 1950; COCKATOOS, 1954; GENTLEMEN AT GYANG GYANG, 1956 (these three published by Angus & Robertson).

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