

St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JUNE - AUGUST EDITION

Annual General Meeting

A.G.M. Held on Sunday, July 17th, 2005 at Lydham Hall. 18 Lydham Avenue, Bexley



Photo Courtesy of
The Good Weekend Magazine
Sydney Morning Herald
Date Unknown

Christina Stead's Birthday

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Meetings are held 2:00 PM the third Saturday of the month (except January) in the Meeting Room 1st Floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale. Members, please bring a plate. Visitors are welcome.

JUNE - AUGUST EVENTS AGENDA

July 17 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & CHRISTINA STEAD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

We are having the St. George Historical Societies Annual General Meeting at Lydham Hall, 18 Lydham Avenue, Bexley. 12:00 pm. – 1:00 pm.

We are also having an open day for Christina Stead's Birthday which will be held after the meeting between 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm.

Would all those attending, please bring a plate of food. Members and Guests welcome.

For all visitors there will be a set price/charge of \$6.00 on this day as refreshments are included.

Aug 12-13 KINGSGROVE UNITING CHURCH FETE

This event opens on Friday 12th, August, 2005 with a concert at 8:00 pm in the Church Building which will finish approx. 9:00 pm.

The Fete will then open for display and sales till approx. 10:30 pm.

It will re-open on Saturday 13th, August, 2005 at 9:00 am and finish at approx. 4:00 pm

St. George Historical Society Inc. & Lydham Hall Committee will have a book stall at this event.

Sep 3 BEXLEY SPRING FAIR

Held in Forest Road, Bexley in front of the shops between 8:30 am and 2:00 pm.

St. George Historical Society Inc. & Lydham Hall Committee will have a book stall at this event.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Friends,

It's time once again to give a summary of the past year's events, achievements and challenges.

One our most notable change was the fact that our meeting day and time was moved from Tuesday evening to the third Saturday of the month. This seems to be working well and have met with the approval of the majority. In addition, regular speakers and notices in the St George Leader have created more awareness of and interest in our Society, that is, if the increased numbers of visitors to our meetings is any indication. This was especially true of the June meeting. Laurel Horton's talk on St Peter's Church (at St Peters) aroused the interest of many people with family connections to this historic church and graveyard, where many pioneers of the St George District were buried.

The year's other activities included a Banksia History Walk which was conducted in conjunction with the National Trust. Although attendance was smaller than anticipated it was compensated for by the interest and enthusiasm it created.

We will be conducting another history walk on 18 September. This time it will be Bexley's turn and the walk will be run under the auspices of the National Trust. It will start at Dunmore St and end at Lydham Hall covering many buildings of historic interest along the way. More details will be included in the next bulletin.

As far as challenges are concerned our most immediate ones are financial. Our Society has been very fortunate in that we have been shielded to a substantial degree from the financial burdens which other historical organisations have to bear. In this regard we are very much indebted to Rockdale City Council and in particular to Ron Rathbone who initiated Council's patronage so many years ago. However, the rising cost of insurance is taking its inevitable toll on the Society's funds. We had to make a decision. Devote more energy to fund raising or go without insurance altogether. The latter option was so limiting to our activities that we would be virtually restricted to having meetings only. History walks, tours and participation in activities such as the fairs (Bexley Spring Fair being the main one) would be out of the question because of exposure to third party litigation. Hence, fund raising will become a major priority. Our main fund raisers over the next few months will be the Society's stalls at the Bexley and Kingsgrove Fairs and on 6 November we will be holding a Barbeque at Bunning's Hardware, Rockdale.

I trust you will support us in these endeavours as we will be asking for volunteers for these two events.

Thank you to our hard working committee members, to the Lydham Hall management committee and to everyone who has contributed in some way, however large or small, to the Society throughout the year.

Kind regards to all,

Bernard Sharah

President

MARY GILMORE AND MILES FRANKLIN

(IS THERE A PECKING ORDER IN HEAVEN ?)

“Sometimes the question arises as to whether it is better to write poems or to cause poems to live in the world around us”, from this introduction by Captain C.H. Peters to “*The Disinherited*” by Mary Gilmore, 1941, it is interesting to trace the lives of two Australian writers, Mary Gilmore (born Cameron) in 1865 at Merryvale near Goulburn and fourteen years later, Stella Miles Franklin at Talbingo near Tumut in 1879. In Miles Franklin’s diaries, recently presented to us by Paul Brunton one of the few complaints she failed to include was, being named Miles in deference to Edward Miles Franklin, an illiterate maternal ancestor who, as a convict, arrived on the first fleet in 1788.

In the 1870’s Sydney was politically alive and fired with literary activity, finding voice in the newly published “*Bulletin*” and “*Worker*”. Avant garde writers and politicians met in a large room over the top of McNamara’s Bookshop in Castlereagh Street to debate politics, republicanism, religion, or whatever was current.

It was probably around that melting-pot that Mary Cameron, a country schoolteacher, would have met William Lane, John Farrell and A.G. Stephens whom she constantly named as “*the three people who most shaped my mind and life*”.

The Scene was set for reform and trade unionism in its infancy, came the maritime strike and not long after the shearers’ strike which was to affect more than ten thousand men. These, from all over Australia, Victorian shearer William Gilmore among them, were the first to be swayed by William Lane’s eloquence, eagerly seeking membership of the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association. Initiated with a capital of twenty thousand pounds, each member was required to convert all his assets into a common pool “*for building a communal paradise, purged of want, hate, greed or vice, all within the bounds of Christianity*”. This was Mary’s introduction to communism and in later life was to become the rock on which she almost perished when she became a regular contributor to the Communist Tribune newspaper. As a result the Sydney Morning Herald banned her letters from its columns – a severe reversal for one known to have an opinion about everything and no qualms about expressing it.

She sailed for Paraguay in 1895 on the Royal Tar’s third voyage, a spinster of thirty who was, according to Ann Whitehead’s “*Blue Stocking in Patagonia*”, overwhelmingly smitten for the first time in her life by one of the organisers and Lane’s favoured lieutenant, David Russell Stevenson, a cousin to the writer Robert Louis Stevenson.

Meanwhile Miles Franklin had been enjoying a happy childhood in Talbingo and Brindabella, fondly referring to her growing up as “*the golden years*”. This little ten year old girl was devastated when the family moved to Thornwood, south-west of Goulburn. Here she successfully finished her education and began work as tutor to her younger cousins. Goulburn, unaccountably, she disliked for the rest of her life, convinced that the feeling of the townspeople was unfriendly towards her, most likely a figment of her brilliant imagination or morose nature.

Recently, Paul Brunton in his splendid publication “*the Diaries of Miles Franklin*” quotes an early confession, “*I was afflicted with scribbling at 13*” and in later years described the habit as “*worse than TB for TB can be cured*”. At the same time she wanted passionately to be a writer and longed for the success and recognition which would follow. With that goal in mind she set about writing “*My Brilliant Career*” on 20th September 1898, a few weeks short of her 19th birthday and submitted the manuscript to Angus & Robertson six months later. It was rejected by them and later by The Bulletin. Much has been written about Mary Gilmore’s friendship-cum-romance with Henry Lawson and the claims made of helping him, Miles Franklin, however, only knew him through his poetry, nevertheless approached him for an opinion of the book. He was at once enthusiastic and sought permission to show it to his publisher, “*I’ve been through the life you write of.*”

In May 1900 he sent the manuscript to George Robertson who had been overseas when the initial submission was made, but Robertson did not take time to read it and returned it to Henry Lawson who

had left for Britain armed with the author's permission to place the book with a British publisher. It was accepted by the Scottish firm William Blackwood & Sons and published in April 1901. The reviews were quite positive in both Britain and Australia; here she earned high praise from fellow writers, including Mary Gilmore who had only just returned to Australia from the disappointing New Australia Experiment.

"My Brilliant Career" did not bring much financial reward so she sought inspiration and sustenance by working as a domestic in Sydney and Melbourne, finally disheartened by lack of further success left for the USA in 1906.

In 1882 Miles Franklin was only three years old when Mary, not quite eighteen years of age, became a pupil teacher at Wagga Wagga school, only resigning from teaching to join William Lane's New Australia Settlement. Although Ann Whitehead was able to talk with some of the descendants remaining, the venture was a failure, Mary found that South America was not ready for communism nor the emerging feminist she had become. Her romance with Stevenson turned out to be a non-event but his replacement, William Gilmore, was a handsome, good man, they were both devoted to their son Billy. Difficult years followed, travelling wherever work was available, the Gilmore's were often separated for long periods, he shearing, she teaching. From the life-threatening cold of Argentina and with help from family at home, they were eventually able to return, via England, to Australia in 1901.

My grandfather, John Farrell, housed and fed them in the Farrell home (still standing in Denison Road, Dulwich Hill), until they were able to move to Will's parents' farm in Victoria, Strathdownie. Here they shared a meagre existence, Mary failing to get back into the Education Department because of her association with the New Australia Experiment, she was frustrated by the lack of mental stimulus. Miles Franklin was to experience similar frustration in different circumstances. A.G. Stephens in 1903 was virtually instrumental in *"saving Mary's sanity"* by publishing her first poem in The Bulletin's Red Page and with John Farrell's support saw her establish a women's page in the Labour Party's new newspaper, The Worker, all her writing being mailed from Victoria. In 1911 a dream came true when on the death of Will's father, his mother moved out and as a temporary arrangement Mary moved to Sydney with Billy while Will went to Queensland to secure some sort of future for them.

Miles Franklin arrived in San Francisco a few days after the tragic earthquake of April 18th, 1906 and was quick to send a graphic account of the scene to the Sydney Morning Herald where it was published. Among a group of talented women she met a fellow Australian, Alice Henry, who introduced her to the Women's Trade Union League with whose activities she was to be involved over the following years. *"The fortunes of Miles Franklin and her close friend Alice Henry in the women's trade union movement in America had always been closely followed by Mary"*. Miles could not break into literary or journalistic circles there but enjoyed the social life, only interrupted by the death of her father and subsequent trips to Sydney of which she wrote *"mother is killing me by inches"*.

She left New York for England in 1931, having spent nine years working for the women's labour movement and editing a magazine but a year later felt obliged to return to Australia and care for aged mother of whom she entered in her diary, *"December 1932 - Mother has me in a constant stew of disharmony"* and February 1933 - *"Pottered, no peace in house, no money, hope receding"*. The lack of self esteem plagued her always, so none of the new friends in the USA knew her as an author, her books being published in London and Edinburgh under the pseudonym *"Brent of Bin Bin"*. Even at the time of her great triumph in 1936 the G.H. Prior prize winning novel *"All That Swagger"*, in her diary she confided *"I have a great dislike of being in a lighted room where anyone can look in at me"*. Probably this was a reference to the *"fuss"* being made of her at the July meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, which had been formed by Mary Gilmore and Roderick Quinn and others in 1928 while Miles was in USA and Mary became a front runner. Of Miles Paul Brunton writes *"August 1936 - I was stealing into the back of the F.A.W. meeting when Frank Dalby Davison the President pounced on me and tried to make me come and sit beside Mary Gilmore "I am not so far gone in senility as that!"*" And of Mary, *"she dominated literary Sydney at this time, much to the chagrin of Miles Franklin who detested her though it seems that this was not reciprocated"*.

Miles targeted Mary quite publicly, her contemporaries and friends she scorned secretly in her diaries, there was in her life a great emptiness, few people were allowed to get close and she believed that only as a successful author, could she be happy, needing not only the financial benefit but the adulation to fill that void. Mary also wrote for a living to supplement a small literary pension, at the same time pleading the cause of the aboriginals, women's rights and all things Australian. Miles too was fiercely Australian, she wanted foremost to be a part of its literature and was completely rebuffed when Mary was awarded the D.B.E. ahead of her, subsequently refusing a lesser award. She admired William Dobell the person, the artist and was secretly pleased when he proposed to paint her portrait, but nothing came of it. Instead the F.A.W. commissioned him to paint a portrait of Mary Gilmore which was to startle the art world, cause to generously retract her initial dismay at first glance of it and pay the balance owing by the F.A.W. to Mr Dobell. This last fact was told to my mother and me in confidence by Mary Gilmore at the time.

What a pity that ego and envy separated these two, Mary somewhat "*mannish*", self opinionated and prone to exaggerate, Miles though shy was known to be a witty and sought after speaker when encouraged. Unfortunately her health was not robust and she died young, her ashes being scattered at Talbingo as she wished. At least she was spared the spectacle of Mary's state funeral, having pre-deceased her by eight years.

Hardship was common to both as was loneliness and obscurity in their last years, both "*were there*" for the up and coming writer though Mary was more approachable. Mary had gatherings of aspiring poets and journalists in her Kings Cross flat, Miles Franklin devoted much time to the Propeller Young Writers' League, of which she was a patron. Will Carter founded the league, he was a retired school teacher, bush poet and editor of the four page weekly local rag which at twopence per copy was good value.

As a sixteen year old secretary to the group I met Miles Franklin at the monthly meetings and benefited from her advice in the brief talks she gave, never one to promote herself. Some time on Pixie O'Harris was delighting the younger readers of "*Sunbeams*" in the Sunday papers, the "*Propeller*" was swallowed up by Cumberland Press away went Miles Franklin, Stella Rudd, Will Carter and many friendships and lost opportunities. I feel only regret that I lost touch with Miles Franklin when all my life since I have lived not ten minutes walk to her front door and lasting sorrow that she was deprived of the friendship our family enjoyed with Mary Gilmore over thirty years. Sadly she never knew the real person behind the face on our blue ten dollar banknote.

Paul Brunton has revealed poignant extracts in *The Diaries of Miles Franklin*. July 1950 – "*I've struggled so long for nothing – long enough to prove over and over again that I have no talent for writing*" and later "*So fatigued I find my stuff's full of repetition and disjointed, I ache so I can't straighten my shoulders, too tired to go for bread so took some Mrs A threw over for the chooks*". "*No human contact all day. Totally alone all day, not even a wrong number on the phone*".

Since reading the book, I find myself haunted by the realisation that I could so easily have made a phone call to break the silence or knocked upon the door, but most likely this dear but vexatious character would not have opened it.

Anastasia Cuddy

Source: *Anastasia Cuddy*

Added Note: Anastasia Cuddy, nee Annie Macinante knew both Dame Mary Gilmore and Miles Franklin as friend of her family. The Mr. John Farrell mentioned in this article was Anastasia Cuddy's Grandfather. Her association with Miles Franklin was due to her being a member of "*The Propeller*" newspaper's "*Young Writers Guild*".

Mrs. Gloria Henke



MILES FRANKLIN, 1898 (AGED 18)

TANKEN AT THE TIME SHE WROTE “*MY BRILIANT CARREER*”



NEEDED



We the Editors of the St. George Historical Society Inc. are always interested in receiving Articles and Photographs of historic value to put in this Bulletin.

Please either mail them to

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Or email them to

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IN MEMORY OF THE LATE BETTY WILLIAMS.



REMEMBERING SUBURBAN SHOPS

One of the busiest shopping sessions when I was a young fellow was on Friday night, when it seemed that almost-everybody strolled up and down the main street in our suburb. It was a time to exchange greetings with friends and nod to acquaintances.

Because the shops were strung out for a long distance on both sides of the main road, one could stroll the full length on one side, cross over and return on the other side. Two bands played bright music, the Municipal Band towards one end of the town, and the Salvation Army the other, usually not far from the hotel, where they hoped their message would do the most good.

Mini-golf became a craze in the thirties and small novelty golf courses suddenly appeared on vacant lots, and even upstairs above the larger shops. They proved to be a pleasant diversion.

One feature of the larger shops was the overhead wire system which conveyed all purchase money to a cashier in a raised central position. The money and docket were placed by the shop assistant in a small container, then a tug on the rope to release the spring, and away went the container up the wire to the cashier. It was returned by gravity in due course with the docket and any change.

In some shops a system of tubes replaced the overhead wires, and here the cylinder containing the customer's money and docket were drawn into the tube with a fierce sucking sound, and later returned with a loud 'plop'.

The grocer's shop gave the customer individual service with a flourish. Packaging was at a minimum and many items were weighed and wrapped by the grocer, one item at a time. There were no credit cards and all purchases were paid in cash.

The grocer seemed to relish his task of tearing up and down behind the long counter, apron flying, sliding on the polished, sawdust-covered floor, and scaling up the tall ladder to reach the higher shelves. Biscuits came in large tins, bulk lines such as flour and sugar in bags, and kerosene and other liquids in drums or large tins. All purchases were carefully weighed and wrapped, brown paper bags being prominent. And by way of reward for a large order, the customer received a gift of a small bag of boiled lollies !

Housewives in general did not go out to work in those days, and not many had a car or a telephone. Consequently, many shop-keepers made home deliveries; the grocer and the butcher would call for the order one day and deliver the next. The baker and milkman also called, the latter bringing as little as half a pint, twice a day, poured into your jug, there being no milk bottles in those days.

In the summer, the ice man would deliver a block of ice to your ice-chest. Two others whose calls rang around the street were the clothes-prop vendor and the 'rabbito.' With the march of time, these characters have disappeared from the suburban scene.

Source: Betty Williams

We have re-printed this article, which was one of many, this quiet and lovely lady supplied to us, The Editors of the St. George Historical Society, which we were very grateful for. She may not be with us any longer but her memory will live on.