Entries for the Croker Prize for Biography in 2019

Theme: A woman of influence

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CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1901

A Pioneering Woman
A Pioneering Woman

Elizabeth stood on the dock at Sydney Cove (only 38 years after the first fleet) in bewilderment, people and noise everywhere, what a racket it was. Passenger and cargo ships, coastal traders and whalers all crowded for a place on the waterfront that buzzed with activity. Nearby the Rocks were the haunt of shipping industries, flop houses and pubs.

Elizabeth had married John when she was just sixteen\(^1,2\) and it had been over four years since she had seen her horse thief of a husband standing in the dock at Wexford Ireland, sentenced to seven years transportation\(^2\). She knew that meant he would never be able to come back to Ireland and had cried bitter tears of anger and shame, but she was not going to do that now.

Elizabeth Donovan (nee Mahoney) aged thirty five\(^1\) and her daughter Mary Ann\(^1\) aged eleven arrived at Port Jackson on 14th May 1826 disembarking from the *Lady Rowena*\(^1,5\). I don’t know how Elizabeth came to be aboard the ship, maybe she worked for her passage. It seems unlikely she saved enough to pay for it herself, alone in Ireland with a small child. The ship had carried 100 women convicts sailing from Ireland, three of them Mahoneys also from Cork that might have been related to Elizabeth. Elizabeth headed straight to the seat of day to day power in Sydney at the time, the office of the Colonial Secretary.

Somehow Elizabeth must have organised her daughter and luggage and found the office. It would have been a hive of people submitting petitions, obtaining land grants and generally getting anything in the colony done. It was probably here she found out where her husband, the convict and shoemaker John Donovan was assigned and set out to find him.

And what a shock it must have been for John to see Elizabeth and his daughter walk through the doors of Maurice Ryall’s shop in Kent Street! Especially when he had married Miss Mary McKelever only 2 years earlier\(^3,4\). I know nothing of poor Mary, a convict from the *Mermaid* except Elizabeth made sure she was very quickly out of John’s life. I imagine Elizabeth was a feisty Irish woman and a force to be reckoned with, she had travelled all this way to get her husband back and that was what she did. Mary was out and Elizabeth took over.

Within two months Elizabeth petitioned\(^5\) the Governor stating she and her husband had lived together since her arrival and she needed him assigned to herself. This was approved on the condition he attended church. It was noted John was a bigamist, his excuse being he thought his Irish wife was dead. Elizabeth and John had their second child the next year, also named John\(^7\). The family spent at least the next two years living (and presumably farming) at Castle Hill\(^8\).

I know Elizabeth and the family moved to the Hawkesbury River because John Donovan had convicts assigned to him as workers there as early as 1832\(^8\). In 1834 John was finally given his certificate of freedom\(^9\), then there is a record of a land grant in 1835\(^10\) with Mangrove Creek one side of the boundary.

What a lonely and tough life Elizabeth must have led with little time for anything other than working the land and raising children. The area the family cleared and farmed was aboriginal land and the settlers naturally had opposition to their farms. There were few
white people, by 1841\textsuperscript{11,12} there were only 280 living there, mostly farmers, loggers or boatmen.

Initially Elizabeth probably lived in a makeshift hut made from timber and bark, then in a wooden hut with possibly a tin roof and wood stove made from sandstone, but no running water or electricity. The waterway was an important link to Sydney with merchant boats bringing supplies to the area occasionally. The river also supplied fish and water to be heated on a fire or the stove, but the misty views across the river early in the morning are breathtaking.

Elizabeth continued to have children, eight\textsuperscript{1} I know of, and I can only imagine the women of the area assisted each other with births as there were no hospitals or doctors. Fortunately, Elizabeth and the children were strong as she did not suffer the fate of so many pioneer women of the time who died from child birth, and her children lived on.

In 1855\textsuperscript{14,17} John Donovan drowned in Mangrove Creek. The inquest\textsuperscript{15} found he had been intoxicated and his death was an accident. There were many similar drownings as most people could not swim. John was aged 69 and their eldest son had just married, farming nearby. Elizabeth inherited the farm where John was buried\textsuperscript{16} and must have continued to work it with her children.

Then in 1881 her son John died\textsuperscript{17,18} aged 54, leaving a wife and three children, six years later her daughter Mary Ann died. Mary Ann\textsuperscript{19} was 72 and married to William Woodbury\textsuperscript{1} from another pioneering family, she had 13 children. It is in Marry Ann’s obituary\textsuperscript{20} I found mention of the family’s devotion to the catholic church. This may have come from her parents and the old order John had been given to attend church. Church was so important as a meeting place and served not only for worship, but it helped keep the community together.

Elizabeth lived to be 100 years old on her farm at Mangrove Creek, she died on 30\textsuperscript{th} January 1891\textsuperscript{21} and suffered the same fate as her husband, accidental drowning. Elizabeth and some of her children are buried at the Holy Trinity Churchyard at Spencer\textsuperscript{22}, presumably where the family worshiped on land donated by Mary Ann’s husband’s family.

Today at Donovans Forest, along the banks of the Mangrove River opposite the farm where her husband is buried is Elizabeth Donovan Park a fitting memorial to a tough Irish woman who helped build the colony of New South Wales and the Gosford area.
References


4. New South Wales Australia, Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1855, Copies of Letters Sent Within the Colony, 1814-1827, p690 Ancestry.com [Online] [Accessed 8 Oct 2016] Note: This is the primary document with Mary McKelver’s name, however her surname is indistinct and therefore the transcription is questionable.


Submitted by Barbara Kernos
Croker Prize for Biography 2019 - Society of Australian Genealogists
CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY
2019

1902
An Answered Call
An Answered Call

Australian history has a remarkable list of influential pioneer women. Many have been remembered and honoured throughout the country, but there is one woman who is surprisingly absent. On our shores for only twelve years, this woman epitomised the word ‘pioneer’, becoming our first non-indigenous female teacher, librarian and foster mother. She was also amongst the first European females to nurse and engage in the ‘earliest recorded female cross-cultural relationship in Australian history’.1

Mary Johnson nee Burton, was wife to the Rev. Richard Johnson, Chaplain of the First Fleet and appointed first Chaplain to the colony of New South Wales.2 Much of what is known of her life is told through the writings of her husband, Richard, and while Richard wrote many letters back home to friends and patrons, he seldom mentioned Mary. I believe this was because of the professional nature of the letters rather than any indifference towards his wife. It is unclear how long the two knew each other before they were married, but their courtship and marriage may have been in great haste, due to Richard’s decision to take on the role of Chaplain. The couple married in December 1786,3 two months after Richard had accepted the appointment of Chaplain to the convicts of Botany Bay, and only five months before the First Fleet set sail from Portsmouth. The Chaplaincy had been born out of discussions between slavery abolisher William Wilberforce and reformed slave trader, now Vicar, John Newton.4 Newton wrote:

“A minister who should go to Botany Bay without a call from the Lord and without receiving from Him...the spirit of a missionary, enabling him to forsake all, to give up all, to put himself into the Lord’s hands, to sink or swim, had better run his head against a stone wall”5

If such was the requirement of the man, then what of his wife? Not only would she need the passion to ‘forsake all’ to further the Christian message, she would be putting her life into the hands of a man she barely knew, travelling to the other side of the world, enduring the same hardships, with the added burden of being a woman, a minority in the new settlement.

The couple set sail for the new south land in May 1787. Mary was to be the only officer’s wife onboard the fleet of 11 ships.6 With them they brought a collection of 4200 books7, including Bibles and prayer books. These books would become the first lending library in

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7 David Hill, 1788 The Brutal Truth of the First Fleet The biggest single overseas migration the world has ever seen, North Sydney, Random House, 2008, p. 56.
the colony. Included were a number of pamphlets with titles such as ‘Dissuasions from Stealing’, ‘Caution to Swearers’, and ‘Exhortations to Chastity’. No doubt for the benefit of convict and solider alike!

Arriving safely in Botany Bay, although “rough and tempestuous was the eight and a half months’ voyage out; Mary became so ill that her life was despaired of.” Their first home was a cabbage palm hut, “no small curiosity it is, I assure you”. Here Mary would birth a still-born son, an experience she nearly didn’t survive and birth a daughter Milbah Maria. “Milbah a name amongst the natives” is the first recorded case of a European giving their child an Eora name. Mary chose the name personally, which I believe was a sign of affection and reconciliation towards the people she had come to love. In fact, by the time Milbah was born, Mary had been nurse and foster mother to a young Aboriginal girl named Boorong. Boorong had been brought to the Johnson’s home after surviving small pox, and “...was received as an inmate, with great kindness, in the family of Mrs Johnson, the clergyman’s wife” Boorong stayed with the Johnson’s for 18 months where Mary encouraged her to wear clothes, assist with home duties and tutored her to read and speak English. While Boorong remained with the Johnson’s of her own free will, she eventually chose to return to her people. In the only remaining letter in existence known to be written by Mary, she writes of Boorong: “She pays us a visit now and then quite naked.”

The letter, dated the 21 Dec 1795, was to family friend Henry Fricker. Mary laments of her disappointment that the gospel wasn’t flourishing “In this Distant part of the world” and she writes briefly, but fondly of her two children. Of three-year-old Henry, she writes; “harry Bid fair to Be as fat as your self he is Determined to Be a Butcher” and five year old daughter Milbah; “she has made pritty good progress in her Book she can read a chapter in the Bible pritty well”.

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15 Haskins, ‘The Chaplain’s wife and the native girl re-envisaging a cross-cultural female relationship in the contact zone’ p262.
18 Lake, ‘Why we should remember Boorong, Bennelong’s third wife, who is buried beside him’.
19 Rev. Johnson to Fricker, letter, 9 April 1790.
20 Mary Johnson to Henry Fricker, 21 December 1795, State Library of New South Wales Collection, Sydney, MLMSS 6722.
21 Rev. Johnson to Fricker, letter, 21 December 1795.
Not only was Mary teaching Boorong and her own children to read, but concerned with the lack of education for the colonies children, the Johnson’s pioneered the first school. Classes were held in the Church building during the week, and both Richard and Mary taught between 150-200 children.

It is a great loss to Australian history that we have no account of Mary’s life in her own words. The expectations, restraints and experiences of a British woman in her position would have been extraordinary, and how fascinating to have read it from Mary’s viewpoint. The accounts of Mary from others in the colony were mixed and probably influenced by her role as Reverend’s wife. She was no doubt acquainted with loneliness. Elizabeth Macarthur, wife of the Australian Wool industries John Macarthur, writing home about her lack of female friendship in the colony, described Mary as “a person in whose society I could reap neither profit or pleasure”. In 1794 some welcome friendship came to Mary in the form of Mrs Eliza Marsden. The Rev Samuel Marsden had come to the colony to assist Richard, and his wife gives glowing references of Mary, who welcomed them and others to the colony with ‘kindness and hospitality’. Mary returned to England in 1800, but such a remarkable woman, there at the birth of our nation, is surely worthy of our honour and remembrance.

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23 Fellowship of First Fleeters, ‘Reverend Richard Johnson’s Appointment to NSW’.
26 Heney, *Australia’s Founding Mothers*, p.18.
Bibliography


Hill David, 1788 The Brutal Truth of the First Fleet The biggest single overseas migration the world has ever seen, North Sydney, Random House, 2008.


Mary Johnson, State Library of New South Wales Collection, Sydney.


CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1903

Newtown’s Noble Woman
“Newtown’s Noble Woman”

According to the *Labor Daily* dated Tuesday 1 April 1930\(^1\), “Newtown should be proud of Nurse Angermunde of the Chelmsford Private Hospital, Erskineville Rd, for she is one of the most humane and self-sacrificing of women, writes L. Steel, Newtown ... Nurse Angermunde’s door is never closed to the poor and distressed surrounding her...”

Figure 1: Matron Olive Angermunde, c 1932
(With permission, Angermunde Family Archive)

Olive Delilah Angermunde (1884-1960)\(^2\), was a woman of influence in Sydney’s inner suburbs during the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s. In these years she elevated herself from an earlier life of deprivation, hardship, tragedy and sadness\(^3\) to become a much respected midwife\(^4\), private hospital matron\(^5\). She became an outstanding organiser of charitable fund-raising events in support of hospitals, mothers and babies and other public concerns\(^6\). At the same time she had leadership roles in the Labor movement\(^7\), other socialist causes\(^8\), women’s activism\(^9\), access to justice\(^10\), and anti-war pacifism\(^11\). In the Great Depression years she earned the respect of her community by delivering babies, caring for the injured and unwell and those who were destitute and disadvantaged\(^12\).

Some 225 press citations were generated by Olive in the space of a decade\(^13\). They appeared in a wide range of newspapers, as shown in Table 1, and they reflect her influential and intense mid-life.

Submitted by Terry Beed
Croker Prize for Biography 2019 - Society of Australian Genealogists
Table 1: Olive Angermunde press citations 1924-1943 Sourced from the NLA Trove Digitised Newspaper collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Citations</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor Daily</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syd Morn Herald</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Pictorial</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening News</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>225</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Labor Daily tops the list but Sydney’s mainstream dailies, including the Sydney Morning Herald, the Sun and the Daily Telegraph gave her a fair share of recognition. News about Olive spread to newspapers in country areas, some other capitals and even Tasmania. The citations speak volumes about Olive’s communication skills and in the early days of radio she even developed on-air presence through her 7:00 pm 10 minute programs on Radio 2KY.

Content analysis of a sample of citations provides a perspective of Olive’s growing influence. Her high esteem in the community, her state of health and news about her family dominate the sample with just over one third of the citations (Table 2). Nearly a quarter acknowledged her prodigious fund raising activities. Her roles in Labor and left wing politics, women’s activism and the Women’s Justices Association brought her into contact with power brokers and established her as a contributor to social and political change. Her work and concerns about mothers and babies and the disadvantaged also attracted many press reports.

Table 2: Content analysis of a sample of 90 citations of Olive Angermunde in Newspapers covered by NLA Trove 1924-1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation type</th>
<th>Percent of citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stories about Olive, including tributes about her work, her state of health, her family and travels, including photographs, radio programs, talks and presentations given by her.</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organisational activities, including fund raising events such as balls, dances, garden parties, and competitions.</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Political activity, including roles in the ALP, international relief associations and women’s activism.</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activities in the Women’s Justices Association, including lobbying for representation of women in juries.</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Concern for the welfare of mothers and babies.</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Campaigning on behalf of the disadvantaged and destitute and other special appeals.</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Olive’s transition from relative obscurity to community prominence is clearly reflected in these citations but a profound change of this order begs the question, how could such a transformation take place?

In the early 1920s she gave up working as a humble dressmaker, reduced her demanding mothering burdens and trained to become a nurse at Sydney’s Royal Hospital for Women (RHW). She was in her early forties and only just overcoming the death of her second husband. She commenced training in 1925, still rearing the three very young daughters of that marriage while living with her two older children from her tragic and short-lived first marriage.

Olive graduated as a Nurse and Midwife in 1926 and achieved formal registration in 1927. She continued nursing at RHW until 1928 making time to become the hospital’s indefatigable honorary organiser of events, when hospitals had to rely heavily on private fund-raising. At the same time she continued her involvement in left wing politics and women’s justice issues, often assuming formal leadership roles xvii. In 1929 she was part of a delegation to the NSW Minister for Justice demanding rights for women to serve on juries (footnote x). In 1930 a paper she presented at the 1930 NSW Labor Women’s Conference led to a series of resolutions about hospital maternity issues being submitted to the Federal Minister for Health xviii.

Earlier personal hardships re-surfaced in the form of painful health conditions that were often reported in the press. The deformities of her feet at birth were to haunt her as she grew older. The newspapers xix carried reports about Olive undergoing and recovering from complex surgery. In 1928 she quit RHW to undergo an operation in which the surgeon proceeded “by breaking all the toes of each foot, opening the arches and stretching the sinews”!xx

In one reference xxi to her painful recovery from this operation we catch a glimpse of her recognition in some elite circles of the era. Towards the end of 1928 she is cheered up by her many hospital visitors, including Esther Theodore whose husband, “Red” Ted Theodore was an imposing figure in the ALP xxii. This and many other friendships among the elite persisted across the next few years. At a civic farewell in Newtown in October 1935 it was reported Olive’s daughter, Ella Angermunde, would be accompanied by Mr and Mrs Theodore on a voyage to Fiji xxiii where she was to marry an Australian minerals assayer. In February 1936 another civic reception was held to honour Olive and bid her bon voyage also to Fiji. It was attended by the Mayor of Erskineville, Alderman Henry, who praised her community work xxiv.

These festivities were to mark the end of Olive’s notoriety in inner Sydney and the beginning of a new chapter in her life. She had stepped out of her matronship in the inner suburbs and was about to leave Australia to spend a few months with her daughter in Fiji and draw her breath after an exhausting decade. This was to be a far cry from the desperate times of the Great Depression, her caring for the socially and economically disadvantaged and her agendas for political and social change xxv.

Matron Olive Angermunde returned to Australia from Fiji seven years later in the middle of World War 2 to live briefly with her eldest daughter and family in Tumut NSW xxvi. She was later appointed Matron of Strathmore Private Hospital in Stanmore, married for a third time.
in 1947, retired from public life, pursued a passion for painting and died in Sydney aged 76 in 1960.

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1 Labor Daily, 1 April, 1930, p.7
2 Olive Delilah Speer/Angermunde/Mc Miles nee Thomas: NSW Birth Registration No.24984/1884; NSW Marriage Registration #1, 1904/2282; Marriage Registration #2, 10060/1914; Marriage Registration #3 12514/1947; Death Registration No. 3836/1960
3 Olive was born with Talipes of both feet in a remote valley deep in the Snowy Mountains, Lobs Hole, far from medical attention: “… her toes were pointing upwards and her feet lay along her shin bones. Her father, long accustomed to relying on his own ingenuity, improvised splints from the stiff covers of a book and bound up his daughter’s feet. They grew to be quite normal and it was only much later when Olive was training to be a nurse that she had any further trouble”. (Margaret Hudson, “The House on Sheep Station Hill 1884-1956”, Cooma Monaro Express, 30 August 1956). Olive’s father, John Thomas, was a grazier and carrier but also a convicted livestock rustler in the mountains. He was put away for a total of eight years (Prison Records, NSW Government State Records, Photo No.302, Page 85 Series NRS 2021, Item 3/6016 Reel 5093; Goulburn Evening Penny Post, 8 August, 1886). Olive’s mother, Mary Jane Thomas/Mackey nee Belcher (Birth Registration No. 7194/1862; Marriage Registration No. 2799/1878; Death Registration No. 20620/1928) betrayed her family of four young children around this time (Documentary Records of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Matrimonial Causes Jurisdiction: Item No. and Title 13/12592, No. 4803/1903). When Olive grew up and married she suffered the loss of one child at birth (but had five others-- 2 in her first marriage and 3 in the second) and her first and second marriages came to an early end with the untimely deaths of her first husband after 7 years of marriage (William Speer, NSW Death Registration 1911/011667) and her second after only 8 years (Theodore Angermunde, NSW Death Registration 7277/1923). Another sad event was the loss of her first grandchild born prematurely in February 1926, surviving for only 25 hours, (Margaret Mary Beed NSW Death Registration 12514/1947). Olive did not marry again until 1947 NSW Marriage Registration 12514/1947).
4 Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales, Weds 2 November 1927 (Issue No. 157 (Supplement)). p. 5180: Register of Mid Wives, for 1926. Also, two further items courtesy Angermunde Family Archive: (1) New South Wales Nurses’ Registration Act 1924, Certificate of Registration as a Midwifery Nurse, Olive Delilah Angermunde, dated 15 March 1927; (2) Royal Hospital for Women Certificate dated 29 October, 1926 states that Olive Delilah Angermunde trained between 1 July 1925 and 29 October 1926, attended a course of Lectures in Midwifery and satisfied all requirements of the examinations in Midwifery having “been present at 101 cases of labour and 40 of these cases have been personally conducted by her”.
6 Labor Daily, 12 June, 1928, p.7. The article notes Olive was appointed Organising Secretary of the Royal Hospital for Women Building Fund “barely three months ago”, placing her appointment about March 1928. According to The Sun, 13 March 1928, p.3, the hospital board makes an urgent appeal for funds in the order of 100,000 Pounds (with the promise of 30,000 Pounds from the NSW Government) to finance construction of a new maternity block to house 107 new beds, “a landmark to the cause and devotion of Australian Women”. In this article, Olive is the newly appointed Organising Secretary, is forming a special committee to help her raise the funds and is appealing to members of the community to step forward to “further the splendid work” of the Royal Hospital for Women. Olive’s responsibilities were daunting. At that time she had been a Registered Midwife for about 2 years, working on the nursing staff of the hospital where she had trained and was known as Nurse Angermunde. In an era that saw hospital care of citizens become a government priority (1929), public hospitals’ dependence on charitable support remained of critical importance.

(See https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/hospitals for an on-line article by Helen Godden, “Hospitals”).

The following 19 citations are drawn from the sample (i.e. 21% of the sample) taken for this essay and each of them mentions a specific role played by Olive in organising the dances, balls, garden parties, cabarets and other fund- raising events mostly in aid of the Royal Hospital for Women: Labor Daily 14 Dec 1927 p.21; Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) 1 Aug 1928 p.20; SMH 6 Aug 1928 p.4; Sunday Times 2 Sep 1928 p.18; The Sun 9 Dec 1928 p.30; SMH 15 Sep 1928 p.14; SMH 19 July 1929 p.5; Labor Daily 21 Jul 1929 p.7; Daily Pictorial 9 Sep 1930 p.6; Daily Pictorial 18 Sep 1930 p.18; SMH 11 Apr 1934 p.9; The Sun 17 Apr 1934 p.13; SMH 30 May 1934 p.4;

In the 7 June 1924 edition of the Labor Daily (p.5), Olive is reported to have given eye-witness evidence at a magistrates hearing about a scuffle that broke out at a meeting of the Camperdown branch of the ALP in which Robert James Stuart-Robertson MLA was allegedly punched by another person at the conclusion of the meeting. Stuart-Robertson went on to become the Minister for Public Health in 1927 in Jack Lang’s Labor Party. In the Labor Daily of 22 April, 1926, Olive is referred to as the former hon Treasurer of the Newtown-Erskineville branch of the ALP. Labor Daily 31 October 1924, p.7, in an article headed “Painful accident to Mrs Angermunde” Olive is referred to as “a well-known Labor and charitable worker”. In the Labor Daily, 24 September 1930, p.7, Olive is referred to as a “member of the Women’s Central Organising Committee of the ALP.”

In 1924 and following years, there are several reports of Olive acting in an organising role for the Workers International Relief (WIR) organisation. It had been founded in Germany in 1921 at the urging of Lenin in Russia. In the ensuing decade WIR had built an international following with many national chapters, including in England, other European countries and the USA. A front for the advancement of Communism, its role was largely to raise money for needy persons in Russia and neighbouring European countries affected by droughts and famine and to counter the influence of President Herbert Hoover’s international aid from the USA that might have embarrassed the Russian Communists.

See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_International_Relief#National_sections

Olive, then known as Mrs Angermunde before her transition to nursing training, is identified as honorary secretary of the Women’s Committee of the WIR in 1924 (Labor Daily, 30 September, 1924 p.7) and she is at the WIR “plain and fancy dress ball” at the Communist Hall in Sussex Street Sydney raising funds for WIR and handing out prizes she had donated.

The afternoon session was practically taken up by discussion on Nurse Angermunde’s paper on ‘Maternal and Child Welfare’. A number of resolutions carried related to the matter are to be forwarded to the Federal Minister for Health”. A lengthy paper written by Olive in 1928 (Sunday Times 11 November 1928, p.20) may well have been a precursor to her efforts later at the Labor Women’s Conference. In this article she wrote: “Australia lost in 1927, seven hundred and ninety-three mothers in childbirth – more than two mothers died every day. This loss is a mark to aim at – saving every year so many mothers. The means of saving them are: Better home conditions, domestic help in the house, greater pre-natal care, and more encouragement to mother, and calling professional aid sooner. If babies can be born in the atmosphere of cleanliness, care and calm associated with the hospital, instead of homes where want, worry and germs are rampant, the death rate amongst mothers and babies will be decreased.”

Olive was a Justice of the Peace (JP) and a visible figure in the early history of the Women Justices Association (WJA). She swore the Oath of Allegiance to become a Justice of the Peace on 16 September, 1927, (Commissions of Justices of the Peace, Oath of Allegiance No. 1907, State Records NSW). This was a relatively early appointment as it was not until 1921 that the first Women Justices were appointed, following the passing of the Women’s Legal Status Act 1918 (No.50). In those days, such appointments were for a lifetime and no doubt newsworthy. See https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/justices-the-peace-guide. In the period 1928 – 1930, she features in a number of press reports, including news about her election to the Council of the WJA (Evening News 30 November 1929, p.8). In 1930, Olive and a colleague had been appointed honorary organisers for the WJA to run a dance at the Waldorf Café in aid of the Royal Hospital for Women, Olive’s alma mater (Sydney Morning Herald 29 September 1930, p.4).

According to the press reports (e.g. The Sun, 26 November 1930, p.16) the WJA had a women’s activist agenda which included energetic lobbying for the appointment of women magistrates and jurors. It was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald, 26 November 1930, p.8, that a deputation of the WJA that included Nurse Angermunde had interviewed the NSW Minister of Justice, Joseph Lamaro, who was reported to have said: “he could see no reason why women should not be empanelled on juries, so that it was to be hoped that the ensuing year would see this necessary reform brought about”.

Olive’s involvement as a campaigner against war is reflected in press reports of the mid-1930s. In the Workers Weekly 11 May 1934, p.6 Matron Angermunde is listed among other representatives of organisations such as the Christian Women’s Temperance Union and the Miscellaneous Workers Union supporting the decision of the Anti-War Women’s Conference in Sydney to send a delegate to Paris to attend the International Women’s Congress against War and Fascism, 28-29 July, 1934. The report headed “Australia
must be Represented: Four Weeks to get 150 Pounds to send Mrs Moroney to Paris Anti-War Congress” said the Congress had “very great significance for the Australian working class, and all the women who are opposed to war and fascism”. Some 1200 women from around the world are reported to have attended the Congress. See: http://www.documentingdissent.org.uk/womens-world-committee-against-war-and-fascism-1934-2/

On another key occasion, ANZAC Day, 1935, Matron Angermunde is reported to be a speaker at the Movement against War and Fascism at a “mass rally in Adyar Hall, Bligh Street Sydney”. She shares the podium with other luminaries of the day, including the enigmatic Lloyd Ross, member of both the ALP and the Communist Party who in that year became NSW State Secretary of the powerful Australian Railways Union (Workers Weekly 19 April 1935, p.6) See: ‘Ross, Lloyd Robert Maxwell (1901-1987)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 18, (MUP), 2012.

xi Labor Daily 1 April 1930, p.7 “Newtown’s Noble Woman”; Labor Daily 20 September 1930, p.8 “Newtown Council’s Tribute to Matron Angermunde”; Labor Daily 16 January 1931, p.10 “No Clothes for Baby – Young Mother’s Plight”; Sydney Morning Herald 5 September 1933 “Coming Events, Eastern Suburbs Baby Show ... to assist the local unemployed distress relief fund ... Matron Angermunde, Matron Wildford and Mrs Albert Hain ...to act as judges”; Labor Daily 3 April 1933, p.5 “Wide Search for Callous Hit-Runner, Two little boys are badly injured by car, one may die”... “The impact was so terrible that Constable Harrison, half a mile away thought that two cars had collided. He ran to the scene and took the children to Nurse Angermunde’s private hospital where they were given first aid treatment.”

xii A search of the National Library of Australia’s Trove Digitised Newspapers data base was entered with the search term, “Angermunde”. This yielded some 225 citations relating to Olive Angermunde. As the citations also captured references to the town of Angermunde in Germany these were deducted from the total list of citations to yield the 225 relating specifically to Olive Angermunde. The number of citations appearing in each newspaper is shown in the composite table below.

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The Labor Daily (Sydney... (197)          Goulburn Evening Post... (2)
    (24)                                      (2)
The Sun (Sydney,... (71)                           The Herald (Melbourne... (2)
Australian Town and Co. (1)... (1)            The Timul and Adelion (2)... (2)
Clarence and Richmond (1)... (1)                 Australian Telephone (2)... (1)
Darling Downs Gazette (1)... (1)          Examiner (Launceston... (1)
Freeman’s Journal (Syd)... (1)               Jewish Herald (Vic)... (1)
Manilla Express (NSW... (1)                  The Richmond River... (1)
Minister of War (1)... (1)                      The Advertiser (South Aust)... (1)
National Advocate (Sat... (1)                  Newcastle Morning Herald... (1)
Advocate (New South... (1)                      News (Adelaide... (1)
Recording Post (Melb... (1)                     Warwick Daily News... (1)
Rivetina Recorder (Melb... (1)                 Weekly Times (Melb... (1)
Singleton Argus (1)... (1)                     The Border Dispatch... (1)
The Courier-Mail (Bris... (1)                   The Havelock Standard... (1)
The Commonwealth (1)... (1)                     The Land (Sydney... (1)
The Muswellbrook Chronicle... (1)               The Northern Miner... (1)
The Northern Miner... (1)                       The Sydney Morning... (1)
The Sydney Morning... (1)                        The Australian... (1)
The Sydney Morning... (1)                        The West Australian... (1)
Tru... (1)                                      The Australasian... (1)
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xiv The spread of stories to country newspaper titles was often due to syndication of articles appearing in the metropolitan dailies.

xv Sydney Morning Herald, 14 May 1928 p.8. A program guide for Radio 2KY under heading Trades Hall, 7 to 7.10pm Nurse Angermunde; a similar reference in the Newcastle Herald 23 April 1928 p.7.

xvi For the purpose of this paper a judgemental sample of 91 citations was chosen from the 225 yielded by the initial Trove search. The sampling process involved copying, cutting and pasting the actual citations from Trove to a master document. Each citation was then reviewed and its main theme(s) decided. It was now cut away from the master and pasted to what emerged as several distinct “bins” labelled for each category of interest (themes), as shown in Table 2. When a citation covered more than one theme, a judgement was made in favour of what appeared to be the most prominent of the themes, suggested perhaps by a headline. A more time consuming approach -- beyond the resources of the present paper -- would have been to extend this effort across all citations and start with many more themes to be progressively consolidated as the classification process continued.

xvii This flurry of extra-curricular activity thrust Olive into the limelight of Sydney’s well-to-do citizenry. She served on committees including many drawn from their ranks such as the Fairfax family especially Mrs Hubert Fairfax, and the Mark Foy’s family. She appealed for their help in patronising and supporting dances and balls, musical programs, garden parties and other events designed to benefit the RHW building fund-- amongst

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others. It also projected her into the left wing political elites of the day where she served as an organiser of women’s committees and played leading roles in the denunciation of war and Fascism. The wives of Ted Theodore, Jack Lang and Ben Chifley were often included in these gatherings as were the wives of Senators Arthur Rae and John Dooley. The Speaker of the NSW Parliament, Sir Daniel Levy, paid tribute to Matron Angermunde as a person he had known for 20 years and who had made a strong contribution to the RHW

See citation details at footnote ix.

The Sun, 7 November 1928, p.9, “Painful Operation”; Singleton Argus, 3 November 1928, p.5 “Extraordinary Operation: Toes broken by surgeon”; The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser, 6 November 1928, p.2, “Extraordinary Hospital Case”.

Four months later (March 1929) after a long and painful recovery at Chelmsford Private Hospital, Newtown, and Olive was reported to have taken over the running of that hospital: “Although suffering considerable pain Nurse Angermunde has supervised at the birth of thirty-five babies during her first few weeks of matronship.” Not long afterwards she had to face a second round of operations on her troublesome feet

Ted Theodore was the former Premier of Queensland and later, Federal Treasurer in the Scullin Labor Government in the early 1930s. See: Ross Fitzgerald (1994) “Red Ted” The Life of E.G. Theodore, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia

Sydney Morning Herald, 16 October, 1935, p.7

Labor Daily, 4 February 1936, p.9 “Farewell Party: Matron’s Charity Work Praised”

Olive wrote a 98 page (handwritten) memoir of her seven years in Fiji and the sea voyages she undertook travelling between Australia, Fiji and New Zealand under navy escort amid the threat of enemy submarines and floating mines in World War 2 years. This document formed a basis for a public “travelogue” lecture she gave at Nock and Kirby’s Pompadour Rooms on 16 November 1943. True to form, the event was organized by one of Olive’s close friends of the 1920s and 1930s, Mrs F.W. Mijch, wife of Frederick Mijch, an Alderman on Darlington Council 1935-1937. The memoir is held in the Angermunde Family Archive where it is being restored.

Riverine Grazier, 11 August 1942, p.5.
CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1904

The Digger’s Daughter
The Digger’s Daughter

“You think I’m handsome? Do you really? I suppose I am tidier and stronger than most women: I’d need to be for what I’ve gone through. And why shouldn’t a woman be tall and strong?”

When Louisa Lawson was interviewed for The Bulletin in 1896 she was the embodiment of strength and vivacity. Her magazine _The Dawn_ was in its eighth year of publication, she was politically active, an inventor, and pioneer of women’s rights in Australia.

Louisa Albury was born in 1848 at Guntawang station, near Mudgee in New South Wales to English immigrant parents. Louisa attended the public school in Mudgee where she was her teacher’s favourite pupil. He wished for her to enter the teaching profession, but Louisa’s mother objected. Louisa was raised in the Methodist faith, but she shocked and scandalised the congregation when she walked out of the church during the ministers’ sermon on the beauties of eternal damnation. Furthermore, she refused to apologise or return to church.

Louisa married Norwegian sailor Peter Larsen at the age of 18. The pair left for the goldfields soon after getting married where the first of their 5 children was born. Henry was born in a tent where Louisa was the only woman among 7000 miners. They decided to anglicise Henry’s name to Lawson and so a famous poet was born. But it is lesser known that Louisa herself was also a poet. It is a shame that her work is eclipsed by that of her famous son, because it displays genuine poetic talent. Her poems speak of Australia and the bush and of the political emancipation of women. Some of her most notable works are: A Reveire, The Lonely Crossing, and The Digger’s Daughter.

In 1883, Louisa and the children moved to Sydney, and in 1887 she bought the _Republican_ for which she and her son Henry wrote and edited articles. In 1888 she founded _The Dawn_, a magazine which focused on women’s issues, especially women’s suffrage. She paved the way for the legal and medical professions’ appointment of female doctors, resident officers, magistrates, and more. “One of the leading articles printed as late as February, 1905, dealt with the refusal of the Sydney and Royal Prince Alfred Hospitals to appoint a woman resident officer. In the fifteen years since then three

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2 NSW BDM registration number 1629/1848 V18481629 33A.
3 Her father Henry Albury, arrived in Australia in 1838 on the Woodbridge with his parents John and Ann and his siblings. Louisa’s mother Harriet Wynn arrived in 1841 on the Lady Kennaway with her sister Emma. Harriet and Emma were orphans of only 16 and 17 years old respectively. As an interesting side note, Harriet is often described as being from Devon, and a Clergyman’s daughter, though records say otherwise. According to the Lady Kennaway shipping records, Harriet was born in Middlesex (London), but her baptism took place in Norfolk. Furthermore, her father was not a Clergyman as his children’s baptism records variously refer to him as a “Rider”, “Commercial Traveller” and “Commercial Agent”. Although articles frequently deny Henry Lawson’s “gypsy roots”, it is certainly possible that Joseph Wynn was a Gypsy as these occupations were common in Roma Gypsies.
4 ‘Louisa Lawson and Her Son’ _The Bulletin_, Vol.41, No.,2116, p.2
5 ‘Louisa Lawson and Her Son’
6 NSW BDM Registration number 2535/1866.
7 ‘Louisa Lawson and Her Son’
women medical officers and one scientific chemist— all residents — have been appointed to Prince Alfred Hospital, and two women are on the staff of Sydney Hospital."

Despite the success of *The Dawn* Louisa faced much adversity. “How the men used to come and patronise us, and try to get something out of us!” She was boycotted at the post office and by the New South Wales Typographical Association. In a rare interview she described one encounter where a man tried to bully her into lending him a block but she did not wish to give it to him as it was expensive and she couldn’t spare it. “Well, he stood there and said nasty things, and poor Miss Greig – she’s my forewoman – and the girls, they got as white as chalk: the tears were in their eyes. I asked him three times to go, and he wouldn’t, so I took up a watering-pot full of water that we had for sweeping the floor, and I let him have it. It went up with a s-swish, and you should have seen him! He was so nicely dressed – all white flannel and straw – hat and spring flowers in his button-hole; and it wet him through – knocked his hat off and filled his coat pocket full of water. He was brave, I’ll say that; he wouldn’t go; he just wiped himself and stood there getting nastier and nastier and I lost patience. ‘Look here’ I said, ‘do you know what we do in the bush to tramps that come bothering us? We give ’em clean water first, and then, if they won’t go, we give ’em something like this.’ And I took up the lye-bucket, that we used for cleaning type: it was thick, with an inch of black scum on it like jelly, that wobbled when you shook it. I held it under his nose, and said: ‘Do you see this?’ And he went in a hurry.”

Louisa was also an inventor. In 1896 she noted that the straps used to fasten N.S.W. mail bags were inconvenient and slow. She designed an improved model which was adopted by the post office authorities. The new design saved two-thirds of the time in fastening the bags and hundreds of pounds annually in string and wax costs.

Louisa Lawson is credited as the pioneer for “votes for women”, she dedicated her life to championing the rights of women and helping others where she could. She was an outstanding poet herself and mothered one of Australia’s most famous poets. She was a strong, intelligent bush woman who applied her skills to a variety of interests. “Her friend Mrs E. J. Todd, who had been one of her journalists, remembered her as ‘so full of original ideas that she always seemed to have plenty to spare for others’. She is truly A Woman of Influence.

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9 Louisa Lawson Obituary. *Sun* (Sydney), 22 August 1920, p 17.
10 ‘A Poet’s Mother – Louisa Lawson’
11 ‘A Poet’s Mother – Louisa Lawson’
13 An item used in printing.
15 ‘A Poet’s Mother – Louisa Lawson’
16 Radi (1986)
A woman appreciated.

What more could be told about Caroline Chisholm—the legendary lady of Australia’s colonial history? So much has been written of her philanthropic work helping thousands of British immigrants.\(^1\) Surely there is not much to add. Nevertheless, linking one’s own immigrant ancestor to Mrs Chisholm’s achievements is very challenging, even when the clues entice you in that direction.

Ironically, the main problem is that Caroline Chisholm was particularly ethical in her work. She never revealed the names of those she helped, unless they had specifically agreed. She herself wrote accounts about how she established the Female Immigrants’ Home in 1841 and about the methods she used in finding employment for the hordes arriving to an already overcrowded Sydney.\(^2\) After she returned to England she gave public speeches encouraging people to emigrate, all the time drawing on her experiences in matching people and their skills to job opportunities in the colony. With Sydney swamped by new arrivals there were very few jobs available, but plenty in rural areas.\(^3,4\) She wrote to the chief magistrate and to prominent landholders in each regional district asking for information about the need for servants of various kinds in that locality. She then selected people amongst those for whom she provided accommodation and those who lined up for her assistance at the Female Immigrants’ Home in Bent Street. However, the new arrivals were reluctant to go. Stories of the dangers of snakes, bushrangers and Aborigines meant people wanted to stay in Sydney.

Undeterred, Mrs Chisholm herself took to the roads and waterways to take parties of people to locations where she knew positions were waiting for them. Liverpool, Bathurst, Port Macquarie, Newcastle, Maitland and Goulburn were all regional centres to which she escorted groups of men, women and children in 1841 and 1842. It seems the word spread and the whole colony came to know of her work. She was given a white horse which she named Captain. Perhaps the name was a sort of compliment, a salute, to her own husband who had returned to military duty in India in 1840. Imagine Mrs Chisholm on her white charger, riding beside a dray-load of people as they wended their way along dusty roads, across creeks, up and down hills, toward an embryonic town such as Goulburn. Surely this is the imagery of legends about which film-makers dream.

My great-great-grandmother found employment in 1842 as the housekeeper at a newly completed hotel. It was a grand 20-room establishment, situated at Patrick’s Plains, later named Singleton. She was well qualified having been the eldest daughter of a family that managed one of the best hotels in southern Ireland over two generations. My research suggests she may very well have been among the forty women Mrs Chisholm took to Maitland on a paddle steamer in February that same year. The newspaper published in Maitland on 15\(^{th}\) February 1842 reported…

*Forty young women, under the guidance of Mrs Chisholm, were expected to arrive yesterday from Sydney, but up to the time of our going to press the Steamer had not made her appearance.*\(^5\)

The paddle steamer had been delayed. A few days later, Robert Pattison, the captain of the vessel in question, the *Rose*, was moved to write to the newspaper and explain the reasons they were late in arriving to Morpeth.\(^6\)

Apparently the *Rose* left Sydney on the Thursday evening as usual, scheduled to steam up the coast overnight to Newcastle. But before they had passed Bradley’s
Head they ran into dense fog and were forced to stop. Despatching a small rowboat to probe for the shoreline, they eventually, at 11pm, decided to anchor for the rest of the night. There they sat until 6am the next morning when they were able to finally leave with safety. A combination of sail and steam made for a good run to Newcastle, but it was already 2pm when they docked at the wharf. Some townspeople arrived to hire some of the women and so the departure of the Rose was again delayed.

It was three o’clock when the captain set the paddles churning again. Another 33 miles of Hunter River lay before them. However, as Captain Pattison explained, ‘the steamer being laden and lying at least one foot lower than usual, they had insufficient time while the tide was up to get over the flats’. They were stuck fast until a rising tide eventually floated the ship free. By then it was 7pm, dark and blowing a gale with sheets of rain. Captain Pattison sent the rowboat ahead to find secure depth for anchorage and by setting down two anchors the Rose rode out the night. Mrs Chisholm and her women faced a second night in miserable circumstances.

As day broke the crew prepared to start upriver again. But around the bend came the sister steamer, the Thistle, ‘flying light’ and ready for the rescue. She drew alongside and a landing plank was laid between the vessels. One by one the women transferred to the Thistle that then took them to Morpeth. Captain Pattison and the Rose followed with the luggage.

The Thistle’s arrival on the scene had not been by accident. A cottage in Maitland had been readied to accommodate the women and the whole party were duly transferred there from Morpeth in a line of horse-drawn vehicles. Members of the Hunter Valley community had prepared what was to become a sub-branch of the Sydney Female Immigrants’ Home. It was not only the forty women who appreciated Mrs Chisholm’s organisational skills.

I will never know for sure whether my great-great-grandmother was on the Rose amongst those forty women with Mrs Caroline Chisholm. I like to imagine she was.


The March 1841 census showed there were just under 30,000 people in Sydney while the whole population of the colony stood at 130,000. Source: The Sydney Herald 8 May 1841, p2.

23,000 people arrived in Sydney as new immigrants in 1841. Mr Merewether, the Immigration Agent for the NSW Government, reported the numbers in his 1842 report. Source: The Sydney Herald, 16 June 1842, p2.


CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY
2019

1906
The Indomitable Miss Jane Skillicorn
The indomitable Miss Jane Skillicorn

In 1850, four ships from England sailed into Lyttelton Harbour. The mission of the so-called Canterbury Pilgrims was to establish a British colonial outpost in Christchurch, near the Māori settlement of Rāpaki. The British settlement grew. More ships arrived. Carpenters, sawyers and chainmen cut scrubby timbers from the mostly bare hillsides to establish a few rough buildings along the dusty lanes. Farmers and tradesmen came.¹

Among those ready for the tough challenge was an unaccompanied milliner in her early thirties, who’d come from the impoverished Isle of Man.²³ I can picture my fourth great aunt, Miss Jane Skillicorn, stepping from that gangplank, serenely confident, as she resolved to make her mark.

Port Lyttelton, showing the first four ships and emigrants landing from the Cressy, December 28th 1850. This is the type of scene that would have greeted Miss Skillicorn upon her arrival in the early 1850s.⁴

An adventurous pioneer, she became a much-loved and successful businesswoman, a household name in retail. Staunchly independent, Miss Skillicorn was a campaigner for retail workers’ rights, and a passionate advocate for justice and the welfare of women. Her generous contributions and participation in community projects influenced the social fabric and development of early Christchurch.

Sadly, as for many pioneering women, Miss Skillicorn’s life was not celebrated in any obituary. She was merely described upon her death as a ‘spinster’.⁵ Though her name appeared frequently in newspaper advertisements and various documents, virtually nothing was written about her life. Her story must be inferred from scant yet telling detail. But for

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her loving family who erected a monument,\(^6\) that future Skillicorns would discover, this talented woman would have remained invisible to history.

I found the tall and dignified stone cross on a grassy hill, a short climb from the Church Point ferry wharf, on the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney. The inscription reads: ‘Sacred to the memory of Jane Skillicorne (sic), late of Christchurch New Zealand, died 20th February 1891, aged 75 years.’\(^7\) The reference to Christchurch directed my search across the Tasman.

Christchurch newspapers of the late 19th century were peppered with her name. Regular advertisements portrayed her amazing shop, brimming with everything needed to furnish a home and clothe the family. Miss Skillicorn offered a touch of luxury to the fashionable ladies of Canterbury. Fine silks and cashmeres, jewellery, perfume and expertly crafted hats were much in demand for town balls and other social functions.\(^8,9,10,11,12,13\) The well-to-do purchased their wedding finery from Miss Skillicorn.\(^14\)

In the cultural heart of the sometimes troubled but ever-proud present-day Christchurch, the once grand Gothic revival cathedral now stands as a forlorn landmark, awaiting restoration. Compare this to Christchurch of the 1860s, where the cathedral was built ‘opposite Miss Skillicorn’s’, a landmark’s landmark.\(^15\) Early buildings were often referenced in terms of their proximity to Miss Skillicorn’s.\(^16,17,18\) Can you imagine how this indomitable woman managed to establish a thriving business within a few years of the arrival of the first ships,\(^19\) despite an exclusively male Council?\(^20\) Her shop in Cashel Street was one of the few substantial buildings in central Christchurch for several years.\(^21\) The site of her later shop at the intersection of Colombo and Hereford Streets was known as Skillicorn’s corner long after she sold the business.\(^22,23\)

Miss Skillicorn and other drapers spearheaded the ‘early closing campaign’ in the South Island, leading to fairer conditions for retail workers.\(^24,25,26\) She fought tenaciously for justice. She was cited in an academic legal review as a rare example of litigation brought by a woman at that time.\(^27\) Recovery of £100 against a male solicitor in the Supreme Court in 1860 was no trifling matter. Clearly, Miss Skillicorn was a woman of means and determination.

Concerned for the physical and moral welfare of female immigrants and servants, she helped to establish the Christchurch Home for Women of Respectable Character, to accommodate and protect newly arrived, unemployed and sick young women.\(^28\)

She travelled to and from Sydney, probably to purchase stock,\(^29\) and was sometimes accompanied by her niece.\(^30,31,32,33,34,35,36\) Jane’s sister, Rebecca Mulligan, lived near the Hawkesbury.\(^37\) She had emigrated to Sydney with their brother Philip and family in 1839.\(^38\) I imagine that family reunions would have been precious and valued.

The store traded prosperously until it was sold in 1864.\(^39\) Miss Skillicorn invested wisely in shares and property,\(^40\) and travelled to England for eighteen months upon retirement.\(^41,42\) She returned to New Zealand to occupy a 36-acre property in Opawa,\(^43\) by the Heathcote
River, a picturesque setting on the developing outskirts of Christchurch. Again, her property became a landmark to define the locations of many new subdivisions.\textsuperscript{44,45,46,47}

Miss Skillicorn lived independently in her tastefully furnished home, raising sheep, cattle, and fowl,\textsuperscript{48,49,50} growing prize-winning strawberries,\textsuperscript{51,52} and driving her own horse-drawn vehicle.\textsuperscript{53} She owned a ‘capital piano’\textsuperscript{54} and actively supported musical events.\textsuperscript{55,56} Over time, she acquired collections of ferns and ornithological specimens, and had a telescope to survey the southern skies.\textsuperscript{57}

I imagine Miss Skillicorn as a calmly dignified, resolute, yet persuasive woman, presenting her many petitions to the Heathcote Roads Board.\textsuperscript{58,59,60} She ordered the construction of new roads, culverts and infrastructure, contributing her own funds to ensure that the projects were completed to her satisfaction.\textsuperscript{61}

Miss Skillicorn was ever-ready to run a fund-raising stall,\textsuperscript{62,63} cater for local church functions,\textsuperscript{64,65} or support those in need, be they the poor of India,\textsuperscript{66} or persecuted Jews in Morocco.\textsuperscript{67} She maintained regular contributions to the Christchurch Cathedral fund.\textsuperscript{68,69}

In her late sixties, Miss Skillicorn became ill. I have a document saying that in August 1888 a judge labelled her a ‘lunatic’.\textsuperscript{70} A final diagnosis of ‘general paralysis’ suggests dementia.\textsuperscript{71} Sadly, her once bountiful farm deteriorated and had to be sold.\textsuperscript{72}

Miss Skillicorn’s last voyage to Sydney was in June 1889,\textsuperscript{73} to the loving care of her sister. She died eighteen months later,\textsuperscript{74} leaving her substantial £3000 estate to her sister and family. The will specified that all female beneficiaries must have sole use of the proceeds, not subject to control by any husband.\textsuperscript{75}

An emancipated woman. Unsung, but influential in her own ways. I am very proud of the indomitable Miss Jane Skillicorn.

\textsuperscript{1} Burke Manuscript. ca 1850-1870. p 251. Held at Christchurch City Library. \url{http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Digitised/Burke/Burke251.asp}, accessed 23 May 2019
\textsuperscript{2} Burke Manuscript. ca 1850-1870. p 121. Held at Christchurch City Library. \url{http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Digitised/Burke/Burke121.asp}, accessed 23 May 2019
\textsuperscript{3} NSW death certificate, District of St Leonards, Manly, Register no. 9012
\textsuperscript{4} Illustration held in Christchurch City Library and displayed online at \url{http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Photos/Disc10/IMG0017.asp}, accessed 22 May 2019. Reproduced with permission.
5 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 December 1891, p.1


7 Transcribed by author, May 2017

8 Lyttelton times, Volume IV, Issue 171, 15 April 1854, p.11

9 Lyttelton times, Volume V, Issue 265, 16 May 1855, p.11

10 Lyttelton times, Volume IX, Issue 545, 23 January 1858, p.7

11 Lyttelton times, Volume XII, Issue 786, 23 May 1860, p.5

12 Lyttelton times, Volume XVII, Issue 984, 16 April 1862, p.5

13 Lyttelton times, Volume XX, Issue 1152, 5 November 1863, p.6


15 Lyttelton Times, Volume XXI, Issue 1208, 12 March 1864

16 Lyttelton Times, Volume XII, Issue 731, 9 November 1859, p.7

17 Lyttelton times, Volume XIV, issue 808, 8 August 1860, p.6

18 Lyttelton times, volume XVII, issue 957, 11 January 1862 p.9

19 Lyttelton Times, Volume IV, issue 170, 8 April 1854, p.12


21 North Otago Times, Volume 1502, Issue XXV, 8 February 1877


24 Lyttelton Times, Volume XVI, Issue 952, 25 December 1861, p.6

25 Lyttelton Times, Volume XX, Issue 1115, 18 July 1863, p.6


28 Lyttelton Times, Volume XIX, Issue 1105, 13 June 1863


30 Lyttelton Times, Volume XVI, Issue 912, 7 August 1861

31 Press, Volume I, Issue 24, 2 November 1861

32 Star, Issue 722, 15 September 1870

33 Star, Issue 787, 1 December 1870

34 Globe, Volume VII, Issue 715, 4 October 1876

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35 Globe, Volume XX, Issue 1464, 25 October 1878
36 Star, Issue 5179, 8 December 1884
37 Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February 1891, p.1
38 Australian Chronicle, 24 April 1840, p. 2
41 Lyttelton Times, Volume XXIII, Issue 1392, 27 April 1865
42 Press, Volume XII, Issue 1568, 15 November 1867
43 Press, Volume XLVI, Issue 7356, 8 July 1889, p. 8
44 Press, Volume XXVII, Issue 3600, 22 January 1877
45 Press, Volume XXIX, Issue 3926, 21 February 1878, p.4
46 Lyttelton Times, Volume I, Issue 5474, 7 September 1878, p. 7
47 Press, Volume XXXIII, Issue 4533, 10 February 1880 p. 1
48 Press, Volume XLVI, Issue 7367, 20 July 1889, p. 8
49 Press, Volume XXXIV, Issue 4731, 1 October 1880
50 Press, Volume XXXVII, Issue 5101, 13 January 1882
51 Star, Issue 3617, 13 November 1879
52 Press, Volume XXXIII, Issue 4766, 11 November 1880
53 Lyttelton Times, Volume XLIII, Issue 4427, 22 April 1875
54 Press, Volume XLVI, Issue 7367, 20 July 1889, p. 8
55 Lyttelton Times, Volume XIII, Issue 774, 7 April 1860, p. 5
56 Lyttelton Times, Volume XV, Issue 879, 13 April 1861 p. 6
57 Press, Volume XLVI, Issue 7367, 20 July 1889, p. 8
58 Lyttelton Times, Volume XXXIII, Issue 2947, 21 June 1870
59 Lyttelton Times, Volume XLIII, Issue 4406, 29 March 1875
60 Press, Volume XXXIX, Issue 5636, 11 October 1883
61 Press, Volume XXII, Issue 2820, 22 August 1874
62 Lyttelton Times, Volume XXXVI, Issue 3362, 24 October 1871, p 3
63 Globe, Volume XXIV, Issue 2677, 4 November 1882
64 Star, Issue 1518, 11 January 1873
65 Globe, Volume V, Issue 531, 1 March 1876
66 Lyttelton Times, Volume V, Issue 568, 14 April 1858, p.5
67 Lyttelton Times, Volume XIII, Issue 788, 30 May 1860, p.6
68 Lyttelton Times, Volume XVIII, Issue 1058, 31 December 1862, p.6
69 Star, Issue 1986, 17 July 1874. p.4

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71 NSW death certificate, District of St Leonards, Manly, Register no. 9012

72 Press, Volume XLVI, Issue 7367, 20 July 1889, p. 8


74 Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February 1891, p.1

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY
2019

1907
Sheila Holman – A Woman of Influence
Sheila Holman - A Woman of Influence.

The Swan River water was clean and the small, swimmer cut through the competitors with ease. Sheila Holman, aged 13, was familiar with every corner and straight of the two-mile course of the Swim Thru from Barker's Bridge, Guildford to Point Reserve, Bassendean. Her sister Eileen, aged fifteen, had entered the race this year. Both girls had spent long summer evenings in the river. What else was there to do? Most Bassendean families were not well off and Mr Holman had died, so the rest of the family all pitched in for expenses.

Sheila's father had held the seat of Forrest but on his death his eldest daughter May Holman made history winning his seat and becoming the second woman in Western Australian Parliament (after Edith Cowan in 1920) and the first female Labor minister in 1925. Youngest sister, Sheila Josephine Holman was born in 1916 the youngest of nine. Her older siblings were Mary Alice (May), Kathleen, John, Winnifred (Lillian), Edward (Ted), William, Iris and Eileen Holman. A good Catholic family, all members were brought up in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Sheila attended Sacred Heart High School at Mt Lawley.

Sheila had no fear of the water, its depths or currents. In and out she breathed steadily as she gained the lead and held it. Who would have thought? She could hear the sound of cheering from the river banks and ploughed on relentlessly. Sheila's pace never changed as she rounded the bend at the Devil's Elbow, opposite Success Hill. The high cliff rose on her right where the fresh water springs came out as she came up to the straight and kept on going.

Did the two miles feel longer than usual? Were her arms burning with the effort? Sheila had no fancy swimming costume, no goggles or ear plugs. Instead she wore a woolen, knitted costume, wet hair and a cheeky smile. Swimming was by no means a socially acceptable pastime for young ladies. As recently as 1912 the scandalous behaviour of "mixed bathing" at West Guildford (now Bassendean) was reported in the Evening Star newspaper.

It was true that Swim Throughs were held in other places besides Guildford such as Bunbury and Como but women swimmers were regarded as a novelty. Sheila's
subsequent swimming success supports the claim for her being “a woman of influence” – an inspiring, athletic role model for Western Australian girls and women.

“In 1930 a thirteen year old girl, with no previous experience in long distance racing made an exhibition of a big field in this afternoon’s Swim Through Guildford,” ii sister Eileen Holman, was the first unplaced lady and the second lady to finish. iii Sheila’s win was just the beginning. The next year, in 1931, she finished pluckily to gain fifth place but displayed “bad tactics” as she kept well out into the stream whereas her pursuers hugged the left bank closely. iv

By 1932 at aged 15 Sheila established a new state record for 440 yards ladies free style event. v In 1934 Sheila represented the state at an interstate swimming competition with Evelyn de Lacy and Percy Oliver. May Holman, MLA accompanied the team at her own expense and Mr J. P. Sheedy was the coach and manager. vi

In 1936 Sheila won the Guildford Swim Thru with her win reported in the local press. The Mirror said she “won in a canter” vii The Westralian Worker congratulated Sheila and clarified that the victory was won easily on an eight minute handicap. viii Sheila won the event with more than 200 yards to the second competitor G. Macaulay in the 25th annual Swim Thru Guildford. ix

Sheila enhanced the reputation of the “fair sex as swimmers” when she conceded starts to many of the competitors and swam home ahead of the field of 43 in the ANA mile open handicap. x In 1939 Sheila again represented the state in swimming at Melbourne and Hobart and gained third place in the 220 yards beating Miss Green in 2 min 45 sec. xi

Sheila’s engagement was announced in the Daily News to Midland man and footballer, Tom Moiler. xii In 1939 Sheila and Tom married at St Joseph’s Catholic Church, Bassendean on Saturday, 15th July with the Rev. Father Carolan performing the ceremony. xiii The couple’s engagement and wedding were both delayed by the tragic, accidental death of May Holman in a motor accident while on a campaign trail, in which other family members were also involved. Sheila and May’s brother Edward (Ted) Holman, later became the third family member to hold the seat of Forrest after the death of his sister May Holman. Sheila overcame the adversity of the death of her mother in 1935 when she was eighteen years old. xiv

In 1940 Sheila won her third state title in swimming for 880 yards freestyle, previously she had won 110 and 220 yards. xv Also in 1940 Sheila Moiler was the first woman to finish [the Guildford Swim Through] in a time of 54 minutes, 21 seconds. xvi

Sheila Holman’s impressive swimming records and state representation inspired other women to participate and compete. She led the way for other women swimmers to become champions. While her first win as a teenager can be attributed to youthful energy and training, her win a decade later as a married woman, again in the Guildford Swim Through, shows her persistence and courage to achieve significant personal goals. Because of this, surely Sheila Homan can be called a woman of influence?
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\( ^{4} \) The West Australian 2 Feb 1931 p.6
\( ^{5} \) The Mount Barker and Denmark Record 10 March 1932 p.2
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CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1908

A Noble Harvest
A noble harvest

Elizabeth Taylor was born in 1831 at Clyde Iron Works (near Glasgow, Scotland), a hamlet with a single street named, very appropriately, Mud Row. On each side was a row of terrace houses built cheaply of local brick or stone, with brick floors and no damp course. They shared an unreliable well and five open privy middens. Drainage was by way of surface channels. With large families packed into just three damp rooms, each house was an envelope of fetid air and a crucible for disease.

The outside air was also badly polluted because the general area was a conglomeration of dirty industries including ironworks, foundries, kilns, quarries, mills, factories, a gas works and a shale-oil works.

Fire, smoke and soot, with the roar and rattle of machinery, are its leading characteristics; the flames of its furnaces cast on the midnight sky a glow as if of some vast conflagration.

Her father, uncle and grandfather were all coal miners. Their back-breaking jobs, pervasive air pollution and unhealthy houses caused chronic ill health and premature death. Dr S Scott Alison noted that

After the 50th year comparatively few survive, and those who ... are still left, for the most part are broken down and decrepit. Few are seen above 60 years of age and a collier of 70 has seldom come under my notice.

Elizabeth Taylor naively hoped that marriage would bring a change of scene. She married wagon driver Angus Fleming (both aged 20 years) on 7 December 1851, then continued with her job in a cotton-bleaching factory for a year until their son Angus was born.

Her husband Angus had endured an even harder childhood than Elizabeth. When his father (Angus) died suddenly in 1837, his mother (Margaret Lawson) was left with three small children. Within a year the two younger children died. Margaret and six-year-old Angus relied on charity provided by their parish. Eventually, parish officers found Angus a position as apprentice to James Landle, a wagon driver.

By 1859 Elizabeth and Angus had two more sons (Charles and William) and a daughter (Jane). With Elizabeth now devoted to home duties, the family was completely reliant on Angus’ earnings. He had to compete against other waggoneers for haulage work, resulting in a low and unreliable income. So he gave up his haulage work to become a sawyer. Presumably, this new profession paid regular and reliable wages.

Their eldest son Angus died around this time, and their fourth son (born in 1862) was named in honour of his late brother. This sad event may have been the trigger for a deterioration in Angus’ mental health. Apart from the adverse effects on physical health outlined above, the depressing local environment may have had a role in his mental decline.

Early in 1865 Angus became very erratic and aggressive. He abandoned his family, leaving a pregnant Elizabeth to raise four young children alone. Angus had left Elizabeth in a similar position to that which had confronted his own mother 18 years earlier. Despite this desperate situation, she was determined to do whatever she could to spare her children the drudgery and ill-health of a coal-mining life.
Elizabeth immediately moved her family back to Mud Row where she was well known and could utilise family and community support networks. Her brother Matthew, who was married but childless, proved to be her most reliable supporter. Two months later, when her sixth child was born at Mud Row, she named him Matthew Taylor Fleming.

She soon visited the local minister and sought financial support from the parish, which was provided. She was able to rely on parish support for many months to come.

Next, she sought help from Archibald Wilson (foreman at the iron foundry) to find a job for her eldest son, Charles. While foundry work was long and hard, it was highly skilled and paid accordingly; far better than cramped, polluted, unskilled drudgery underground. So, Charles became an apprentice iron moulder; his life-long trade.

Two years later, her husband was charged with having deserted his family, found guilty and sentenced to a fine of five pounds or 30 days in gaol; he chose gaol.

He returned home briefly during the following year, but his problems had worsened. He bashed Elizabeth badly and was punished with two months gaol.

Eventually Elizabeth’s ally Archibald Wilson found jobs at the iron foundry for her second son William (as an apprentice riveter) and her third son Angus (apprentice iron moulder). Her daughter Jane worked as a wool weaver and her youngest son Matthew was employed as a druggist, learning the pharmacy trade.

Elizabeth’s eldest son Charles married Margaret Ballantyne on 28 December 1877 and their first son was born a year later. Hitherto the Fleming, Taylor and Ballantyne families had invariably employed the Scottish naming convention. Had they done so now, Elizabeth’s first grandchild would have been named for his father’s father, Angus Fleming, but she did not want her no-hoper husband honoured in this way. She influenced Charles to instead name the child for her father, Charles Taylor.

Now in her late forties, Elizabeth suffered from type 1 diabetes. With no effective treatment, she was wasting away towards an early death. But even now her influence improved the lives of her children by urging them to emigrate for a better life.

Elizabeth died on 12 February 1881 at just 49 years old. All her children (except Matthew) emigrated to Australia soon afterwards (as did their mentor Archibald Wilson) and enjoyed better lives as a result.

Despite living a deprived life, Elizabeth Taylor had improved the lives of the next generation. Her determination and influence had enabled her family to capitalize on every opportunity and brought them through the desperate times that followed the departure of her husband Angus. She had lifted her descendants out of the cycle of poverty – a noble harvest.
1 S Scott Alison MD promised “a noble harvest” to any philanthropist who would help the impoverished colliers of East Lothian – see note 6.


3 The Housing Condition of Miners Report by the Medical Officer of Health, Dr John T Wilson, 1910, sourced from http://www.scottishmining.co.uk.

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8 Charles Taylor household, 1851 Census for Clyde Iron Works, 652/1/23, National Records of Scotland.

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10 Extract of Entries in Old Parish Register, 627/00 20/277, Mortcloth Money Register, Parish of Cambuslang, 30 Apr 1837, General Register Office, New Register House, Edinburgh.

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13 James Landles household, 1851 Census for Gartsherrie, 652/00 42/17, National Records of Scotland.

14 Angus Fleming household, 1861 Census for the Parish of Trinity College, Edinburgh, page 15 line 2, National Records of Scotland.


16 Newspaper article, Wife Desertion, Glasgow Daily Herald, 6 Jun 1867.

17 Her uncle (Alexander Taylor), grandmother (Jane Taylor nee Robertson) and brother (Matthew Taylor) all had households nearby.


19 Archibald Wilson household, iron founder, 1861 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 644/3 page 1 line 1, National Records of Scotland. Archibald Wilson household, iron founder, 1871 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 16 Queen Mary Street, 644/3 page 19 line 1, National Records of Scotland. Archibald Wilson household, iron moulder (foreman), 1881 Census for Bridgeton, Calton, Glasgow, 29 Queen Mary Street, 644/1 page 18 line 16, National Records of Scotland.

20 Iron moulders used great skill and craftsmanship in making moulds from sand and filling them with molten iron to make a finished object.

21 Newspaper Article, Justice of Peace Court, Evening Citizen, top of column 2, 9 Sep 1868. This is the last record of Angus. He was still living when Elizabeth died but had not returned to the family. He had died by 1884 when his son Angus married Martha Duncan – see Marriage Certificate 210 at Bridgeton, 18 Jul 1884, General Register Office, Scotland, Edinburgh.

22 Samuel Fleming household, William Fleming is a rivetter, 1881 Census for Barony, 206 Main Street, 644/1 38/8, National Records of Scotland.

23 Charles Fleming household, Angus Fleming an iron moulder, 1881 Census for Barony, 690 Springfield Street, 644/1 36/10, National Records of Scotland.


26 A second grandson was born two years later and named for his maternal grandfather, Thomas Ballantyne, in full accordance with the naming convention – see Death Certificate, Thomas Ballantyne Fleming, General Register Office, Scotland, Edinburgh, No 1012 in 1881 at Bridgeton.

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1909

Mrs Black
Mrs Black

I'd always known from childhood that my great-great grandmother Emily Kinley Wilson, Mrs Black (1853-1939) had been born in Pennsylvania, USA. To my Grandad, who also researched our family's history, this was the most interesting thing about her. I have discovered it was not.

Emily was born in 1853 in Cressona, Pennsylvania to William E Wilson (?-1859) and Matilda Bushe Wilson (c1830-?). Nothing is known of her mother's family, but her father, originally from Lecumpher near Magherafelt, Londonderry, Ireland, had followed his elder brother John (1801-c1850) to the USA. William and John were the sons of John Wilson (c1772-1821), the first minister at Lecumpher Presbyterian Church.

Soon after William and his family returned to Lecumpher in 1859, William died\(^i\). Details of Emily's life in Ireland are sketchy, but she stayed in Lecumpher. With her mother and sister, Emily was left to the care of her uncle and cousins who followed her grandfather as ministers at Lecumpher, as well as four aunts who bucked social convention by not marrying. Very prominent in Emily's upbringing would have been the social justice teachings of the Presbyterian Church.

Emily conformed to convention on 27 November 1872 by marrying Robert William Black (1848-1931)\(^ii\). Robert, originally from Co Tyrone, had immigrated with his parents to New Zealand as a teenager. He had been sent back to Ireland to marry Emily, allegedly a relative although no family relationship has yet been found. Only 19 years old, Emily immigrated to New Zealand.

For the following 15 years, Emily did the things wives of the era did. She had 7 children and supported her husband in his drapery business. But times were changing in New Zealand and Emily had a role to play.

In 1885, Mary Leavitt of the USA's Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) travelled to Australia and New Zealand. From a teetotal Presbyterian background, their work to "promote temperance, Christian values, and social reform, and to abolish the trade in alcohol and drugs"\(^iv\) was a perfect fit for Emily.

The most famous member of the New Zealand WCTU was Kate Sheppard who led the movement for women's suffrage\(^v\). Emily was part of this movement. Her signature can be found on both the 1892\(^vi\) and 1893\(^vii\) Women's Suffrage Petitions - the third 1893 petition was ultimately successful in granting universal suffrage in New Zealand.

Emily's efforts to get the vote did not end with the passing of the Electoral Act 1893. Attempting to register to vote, her American birth seems to have been held against her. This resulted in an application for Naturalisation\(^viii\). This was unnecessary as her marriage to Robert Black had automatically conferred British citizenship on her. Parliament clarified women such as her could vote\(^ix\), and she did.
Suffrage was only the beginning of Emily's efforts. She was a member of numerous charitable institutions in Christchurch including the Canterbury Women's Institute, the North Canterbury Charitable Aid Board, the Burnham Industrial School Board of Advice and Children's Aid Society. She was also a founding member of the National Council of Women. In her dealings with these organisations she was simply referred to as Mrs Black.

In many of these positions she had to fight the status quo - that these positions were not for women. When she was not reappointed to the Canterbury Aid Board in 1899, it was noted that she “did good and useful work”. She however noted that though she “felt that most of the members did not desire a woman among them, she had been treated with courtesy by all the members” but “the time was coming when a larger proportion of women would be elected on those Boards, and the election would not be left to chance as it was when the Chairman settled the matter by tossing a coin, and the man won”.

Her communications with Christchurch's newspapers, all signed with the gender neutral E.K Black, show a woman who would not have her reputation besmirched while doing all she could for the less fortunate than herself. She also campaigned for the rights of the disabled regardless of gender and against gambling.

In 1907, following her husband's retirement, Emily and Robert moved to Auckland. Towards the end of WWI, E.K Black turns up in Auckland's newspapers. She had become involved with the Auckland Civic League. One of their campaigns was to take women's suffrage a step further by getting a woman elected into Parliament following the law change in 1919 which allowed female parliamentarians. Efforts to support local Ellen Melville abounded but were ultimately unsuccessful until Elizabeth McCombs won the Lyttelton by-election in 1933.

The Auckland Civic League also continued to campaign for women's rights. An in-person attempt in 1918 to lobby Minister of Defence Sir James Allen to recall safe-sex campaigner Ettie Rout from Europe was not successful. Ettie’s pragmatic efforts to combat the high levels of venereal disease amongst soldiers put her at odds with the morals of the day.

Emily died in 1939. Her views from a century ago would not be out of place in the modern world. In her own words from 1901:

> Humanity is the concern of both male and female, and in the last resort no question can be considered apart from its interest to humanity. Woman’s influence has already made itself felt in our politics, for since she has taken a more active part in public affairs, social questions have received greater consideration.

> Old ideas of Government must give place to newer and better ones. ... But to bring about this consummation, so greatly to be desired, we believe that woman must take her place in all the councils and in "all the tangled business of the world".

The rights I enjoy in my life and the rights of many others around the world exist because of the efforts of Emily and her friends as "women of influence".
As noted in Hansard on 29 September 1893

- White Ribbon, 1 December 1899
- see for example the Lyttelton Times, 8 December 1899
- se for example her letters requesting Christmas donations to the children of the Burnham Industrial school - Lyttelton Times, 7 December 1901
- Lyttelton Times, 14 July 1900
- White Ribbon, 1 November 1898
- New Zealand Herald, 7 May 1918
- nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/parliaments-people/women-mps
- Observer, 20 July 1918
- nzhistory.govt.nz/people/ettie-rout
- Emily's President's address to the Canterbury Women's Institute, 13 February 1901, as reported in the White Ribbon, 1 March 1901

Submitted by Sarah Hewitt
Croker Prize for Biography 2019 - Society of Australian Genealogists
CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY
2019

1910
Elva Edith Morison MBE: A Lifetime Committed to Those Who Served
Elva Edith Morison MBE: A Lifetime Committed to Those Who Served

Elva Edith Morison, MBE (1897-1995), war worker and lifetime community volunteer, was born 25 January 1897 in Yongala South Australia, the only daughter of three children born to Charles John Shaw Harding, and Emily Edith, nee Torode. She spent her formative years in isolated settlements along the fledgling Broken Hill railway line where Charles was employed as the station master and telegraphist. Elva was initially educated at Yongala, but naturally personable and gregarious, she loathed the isolation of the more remote stations like Yunta and in 1907 welcomed the family’s move to Belair near Adelaide. Following several years at high school, she enrolled at Muirden Business College and gained employment as a clerk with the legal firm Fleming, Boucaut, Ashton and Hunter. The moral influence of her parents, the beginning of the First World War and her newly acquired business skills would cement Elva Harding’s life direction. At seventeen, she was one of the first volunteers to assist Mrs. Alexandrina Seager with the organizational work of the Cheer-Up Society, a South Australian based soldier and sailor’s welfare group. This work extended across two world wars, the depression and the rest of Elva’s life, in groups such as: the Cheer-Up Society; Missions to Seamen; Returned Soldiers Association; and, battalion organizations, resulting in an MBE awarded in 1947 for her dedication to the health and wellbeing of soldiers, sailors and airmen over three decades.

Elva Morison (sitting first row, second from left) with Sailors from the North Sea at Cheer-Up Hut c.1916
SLSA SRG6/34/5

2 Morison, Recollections of the South Coast, pp.46-47.
3 Elva Morison, interview by Beth Robertson, transcript, 27 August 1979, OH31/1 State Library of South Australia.
4 “Civilian awards Presented”, News (Adelaide), 15 April 1947, p.3.
Elva had been profoundly influenced by the talents and altruism of her parents who were musical, highly literate, deeply religious and extremely benevolent and this can be seen in her keen participation in church fund raising events and local theatre. Her mother Emily was an organist at local churches and volunteered for several welfare organizations including the Red Cross, Cheer-Up Society and sporting clubs. Charles Harding, a Congregationalist, was known to many through his lifetime of literary contributions to the South Australian newspapers as CJS Harding. He had an extensive knowledge of local history and geography, was a flautist and loved to debate. His own voluntary work with the Cheer-Up Society consisted of the collection and dispersal of many thousands of newspapers to Australian soldiers on all fronts, and he encouraged Elva to bring home any lost and lonely servicemen she considered might benefit from some family hospitality. Elva continued this practice with her own family throughout World War Two.

Elva was the youngest and one of the earliest volunteers at the Cheer-Up Society from its inception on 5 November 1914. She went with a friend to assist with the packing of comforts for departing soldiers and from the outset, had proven her worth. As early as April 1915, she had successfully organized and executed concert parties for the soldiers at the Mitcham Camp and was becoming an invaluable member of Mrs. Seager’s volunteer work base. Her secretarial and organizational proficiency did not go unnoticed and Elva was offered a full-time position as an assistant to Seager. The Cheer-Up workers would not only provide meals and a homely environment to the returned men, but was also assist with physical and mental health challenges and reintegration into the wider community prior to any government repatriation schemes. The work was difficult, sometimes strenuous and always emotive, and women like Elva would work up to six days per week, twelve hours per day, assisting hundreds of men and their families.

Elva would meet her husband, John Morison at the Cheer-Up Hut. Known as Jack, Private John Morison served with the 10th Battalion AIF and was severely injured at the landing at Gallipoli. He was hospitalized for fifteen months prior to his return to Adelaide and he spent many hours at the newly erected Cheer-Up Hut as part of his recuperation process. Elva and John would have three children: Douglas Charles Morison (1918), John Harding (1923), and, Mary Harding (1925). Each of them


6 ‘The Late Mrs. Emily Edith Harding’, Victor Harbor Times, Friday 26 May 1950, p.3.


9 Elva Morison, transcript, p.1. Elva never states her friend’s name. Elva is first listed as being involved with the CUS at the concert given on Thursday 12 November at Morphettville Camp where she is incorrectly named as Eva Harding. See: Cousin Kate, ‘Social Notes’, Mail (Adelaide), 14 November 1914, p.5.

10 ‘Entertaining the soldiers’, Mail (Adelaide), 17 April 1915, p.6.

11 Elva Morison, transcript, p.2.


13 Service Record of Jack Morison, p.1, B2455, National Archives of Australia.

14 Elva Morison, transcript, p.8.

would contribute to the Second World War effort as would Elva. Douglas served with the Armoured corps in Ambon; John enlisted in the R.A.A.F and served at Morotai; and, Mary would serve with the Royal Australian Navy as a locally based WRAN, as well as work at the Cheer-Up Hut with Elva who became the Honorary Country Organizer. Following the war, Elva was awarded an MBE for her commitment to helping those who had served Australia during times of war. She continued as Secretary of the Cheer-Up Society until 1964 when it was finally disbanded and became a social group. The close friendships she formed with her co-workers and servicemen in 1914 continued until her death in Adelaide on 8 July 1995. Elva Morison’s lifetime of contribution and commitment to those who served across two world wars and beyond was profoundly influenced by the actions and philosophies of her parents and peers, but are perhaps best understood by her own thoughts as an older mother and grandmother decades later.

They encapsulate the woman of substance that she was.

And the women were brave, because so many of them lost --- one boy, and sometimes two, and even when Mrs Seager lost her young son, George, at seventeen --- She came back on duty next day and never another word. The only outward sign was that she had a little enamel cross on a chain --- no recriminations, no outward grief, but inwardly – you know, so deep --- the women who lost their boys – there were so many of them– and their bravery and --- overcoming their inward grief, was just so wonderful --- I feel that I’ve been a very lucky person to have been privileged to help, and perhaps take inwardly the courage of other people. It gives you an inner strength. You know, it was a marvellous experience. I just feel that, to me, it made a big difference in my life, but it made me conscious of the need of help for others who were less fortunate --- [we were] privileged to be there --- to face life with a different outlook.

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16 Service Record of Douglas Charles Morison, SX15977, p.1, B883, National Archive of Australia; Service Record of John Harding Morison, 141416, p.1, A9301, National Archives of Australia; and, Mary Harding Morison, WR2445, p.1. 6770, National Archives of Australia. For Elva’s work during World War Two see for example: ‘Cheer-Up is serving 500 meals daily to men of forces’, Leader (Angaston), 4 July1940, p.5.
18 Elva Morison, transcript, pp. 8-10.
CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY

2019

1911

Eliza Do-A-Lot
Eliza Do-a-lot

Like a precursor to the war, a gun shot rang out through the Gayndah bush in 1913. Its sound echoed through Queensland’s oldest town, given Brisbane and Ipswich are classified as cities. The magistrate found John Patrick Denny’s death to be accidental, despite rumours to the contrary. This was not the last nor first of sorrows in the life of his long, dark haired daughter: Eliza Mena Denny.

Born in 1895, she lost her mother when she was just six years of age. During the following decade a grandfather, grandmother, sister, and niece also perished.

‘Time to leave,’ her favourite brother, Richard, stood before her. ‘I won’t cut my hair until you come home.’ Richard smiled down at her. Not long afterwards, he ran up the beaches of Gallipoli. She never cut her hair.

Despite all these sorrows, she managed to pack her bags to Australia from New Zealand in 1916 and married a bullocky named John Friedrich Zahl of German descent the next year.

Bullockies drove teams of bullocks hauling enormous loaded wagons long distances from the outback to the coast. Bullock teams accessed areas horse teams could not because they were more robust in rough or undeveloped country. This made them essential for delivering and exporting supplies to the remotest parts of Australia without good roads.

John Zahl, known as Jack and renowned along the bullocky track, found work often took him away on long trips to the pioneering frontlines, leaving Eliza to run the farm and raise their burgeoning family alone.

Things were happening fast in Eliza’s life. Lose a father one year; WWI breaks out the next year; lose a brother the following year; come to Australia the next; married the next; and lose a second brother the next, Private Charles Benjamin Denny. By 1918 when her second brother died, she was increasingly alone in a strange, new, expansive land and only 23 years

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3 There are no civil registrations for the birth of Eliza Mena Denny, born 14 December 1895, or her siblings. Baptism of RaihaTini (Eliza Denny), baptised 4 April 1898, Anglican Church Parish Register, Awanui, Far North, Northland, New Zealand, unpaginated, unnumbered.
4 There is no civil registration for the death of Ere Ngaru, died 3 November 1902, family knowledge.
6 Service Record of Richard John Denny, p. 185, Nominal Roll Vol. 1, Online Cenotaph.
7 Donald Pinwill, interview with author.
8 Diary of Eliza Zahl
11 Rohan Morris, interview with author, email, 24 May 2019, in author’s possession.
12 Rohan Morris, interview with author.
13 Donald Pinwill, interview with author, email, 27 May 2019, in author’s possession.
14 Unit War Diaries, 4th Machine Gun Battalion, AWM4 24/4/2, June 1918, p. 73, AWM.
of age. New husband, new farm, new climate. She may not have felt she had much influence at that time, but rather felt alone and small in the Australian bush.

However, despite the odds, Eliza Zahl did become a highly influential woman running a successful farm, volunteering extensive community work, and contributing to the lives of her many children. Like pioneering legend Elizabeth Macarthur with whom she shares a first name, Eliza blossomed into an independent businesswoman of incredible strength. Mrs Macarthur also had an often-absent husband, and she is credited with establishing the Australian sheep industry.\(^{15}\) Both had large families and journeyed alone for business.\(^{16}\) Eliza started as a dairy farmer with three cows that grew to 85 head, which were all hand milked.\(^{17}\)

Her midwifery skills served the community delivering ‘half of Gleneden,’ on the outskirts of Gayndah.\(^{18}\) The Gleneden population certainly needed a boost as before she arrived there were only eight families in 1912.\(^{19}\) When she wasn’t in labour herself, she was helping women who were.\(^{20}\) The Country Women’s Association regularly called on her to assist women and children because they knew she was always reliable, capable and willing. She contributed to the growing district of Gayndah. One could draw comparisons to St Mary MacKillop: travelling alone on a horse, off to assist a woman in need.\(^{21}\) Since Gayndah is traditionally a citrus region,\(^{22}\) hosting The Orange Festival biannually to this day,\(^{23}\) Eliza could be romantically pictured galloping through orange groves towards a lady in distress.

An example of her compassionate and generous contribution to the community sees her walking the Main Street of Gayndah. She noticed a woman crying and on asking what was the matter, the lady confided she was unable to breastfeed her newborn child who ‘would surely die.’\(^{24}\) This was long before the days of formula milk which, while invented in the 1800s, wasn’t readily available until 1950s.\(^{25}\) In a perpetual state of breastfeeding, Eliza never hesitated to offer herself.\(^{26}\) She produced copious amounts of milk,\(^{27}\) but with food scarce and so many physical demands upon her, it must have cost her to suckle an extra child.

Sorrow came again when her second youngest daughter, Lola, died in infancy.\(^{28}\) Yet once again she carried on despite the pain. She’d give birth, and be out chopping wood the next day with her large capable wrists managing a ‘man’s job’ like a pro. Her long heavy hair causing strife in the heat while she got the wood done as there was no hot cup of tea or bread without it.\(^{29}\)

\(^{17}\) ‘Queenslander Revisits Old Home Town,’ *Northland Age*, June 1 1965, p. 5.
\(^{18}\) Donald Pinwill, interview with author.
\(^{19}\) ‘Queenslander Revisits Old Home Town,’ *Northland Age*, p. 5.
\(^{20}\) Donald Pinwill, interview with author.
\(^{24}\) Charles Pinwill, interview with author, Brisbane, 30 June 2010.
\(^{26}\) Charles Pinwill, interview with author.
\(^{27}\) Charles Pinwill, interview with author.
\(^{28}\) Death Certificate of Lola Jean Zahl, died 13 August 1942, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages of Queensland, 1942/C2795.
\(^{29}\) Donald Pinwill, interview with author; Charles Pinwill, interview with author.
She successfully raised 15 children to adulthood. Inspired by her determination, strength, perseverance, and extreme work ethic, they continued to give to the community, hence extending her legacy of influence. There are so many examples of all her offspring have achieved, but here are a few. Her grandson John Zahl is a current day councillor of Gayndah, after working as a Gayndah clerk and solicitor for most of his life. Her son Colin who arrived with a bump following a car accident, went on to bump others well enough to become the local champion fighter.

Her great-grandchildren grew up seeing her comb long, dark grey hair. In sacred tones, they were told of her promise to the fallen hero; and the imperative to always keep one’s word. She respected loyalty and keeping promises. Eliza greatly influenced her children and grandchildren to be educated, hard-working, display moral values and become upstanding citizens in their communities.

She passed on 2 May of 1989 at Gayndah hospital aged 93. She was outlived by nearly 50 grandchildren, 70 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Her gravestone in the Gayndah Cemetery, with her family choosing to be buried next to her generation after generation however far away they may at times have lived and died, is a great testament to the woman who could truthfully sing like many pioneers the title words of the Starship pop song of 1985, ‘We built this city’ (albeit a town).

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31 Don Pinwill, interview with author.
32 Author’s memory.