

Margaret Francis: Miles Franklin diary hand-over speech

Dubbo. 8.3.2018

Distinguished guests, members of the Dubbo community, members of the Buddong Society (relatives of Miles Franklin on her mother's side).

I'm delighted that Kim Goldsmith and her family have made the decision for this diary to be 'with its mates'.

I'm proud that this happy outcome has been achieved through the existence of the Buddong Society – the family group founded in 1969, with a network of hundreds of families and with a focus on celebrating our pioneer ancestors and collecting history (results of which are now in our three published volumes.)

The diary story is one of many to be told in that context. It is because of the Buddong Society that I was shown the diary and sworn to secrecy and it's also the networking and history focus of the Buddong Society that led to my re-discovering it.

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The story begins in the late 1980s. For a few years, the Buddong Society had been planning a family history and I as secretary, and co-editor, had been reminding people in newsletters that we were collecting copies of memorabilia – documents, photographs etc. that people might be willing to let us use in that history.

Bill Lampe, Kim's grandfather, rang up, stating that he had just inherited some memorabilia from his aunt Thelma (I'll return to Thelma later in my speech.)

My mother, Stella Vernon and I visited Bill and he presented me with a bundle of items to copy and return within a few days – which I did.

This bundle included family photographs, some papers, and Miles Franklin's diary and address book. I was of course amazed at this, however he insisted that the diary remain a secret as he had to make all the arrangements to carry out his intention of putting it in the Mitchell Library.

We continued with the family history, finding his photographs (copies) invaluable and believing that his plan was carried out.

Sometime after his death came contact with some people associated with his family who indicated that arrangements were being made for his papers to be put in the Mitchell Library.

When the Paul Brunton edition of the Miles Franklin diaries came out, I still thought that the process of arrangements with the Mitchell were being carried out, perhaps with some time constraint on their accessioning or announcement.

The re-discovery happened this way...

At the time of active editing of material for Volume 3 a special newsletter was sent to all the family group in a last appeal for memorabilia. The suitcase lent as a result by the Goldsmith family was inherited from Bill Lampe, although he had not actually shown me a suitcase when Mum and I visited. As I expected I therefore found inside some items I hadn't seen, including another unique photograph album. And then I saw the two tiny books. Imagine my exhilaration when the truth dawned on me – only matched by Kim's reaction when my husband and I met with her and her husband at their house and I prompted her to look closely inside.

So, now we can rejoice in this precious little book. With permission from Kim Goldsmith and family I have edited this diary as a chapter in our Volume 3 book and the diary lives on.

The last diary takes Miles Franklin from 2nd January 1954 in her Carlton house through to June when she had a heart attack in that house then to her move to Beecroft, (to her cousin Thelma Perryman's house) in early July. It finishes on 14th September five days before her death, which occurred in 'Seacombe', a private hospital in Drummoyne, on 19th September.

The other diaries and her memorabilia from her Carlton house were taken, according to her wishes, to the Mitchell library and it's my belief that the diary hadn't gone with her to the hospital, instead becoming caught up in the Beecroft house with Thelma's own possessions then being passed on to Thelma's nephew, Bill Lampe, almost two decades later.

So what did I get from reading and editing it?

The diary impresses upon me the overwhelming urge Miles Franklin had to write, to put her thoughts down on paper.

Biographer, Professor Jill Roe, realised from Miles' letters, that there was a period in her final illness when she seems to have written no correspondence. The diary actually shows that during part of that period she did do some writing – in her diary. Perhaps the very fact that it was so tiny allowed her to keep it close to her for her personal thoughts.

Other items from my reading include-

- A conflict in her attitudes to her daily life. She had set her house up as a country house in the suburbs yet despaired of her domestic drudgery. She had a giving nature, reflected in her hosting and helping of friends, neighbours, family and mentoring of young writers and she hankered for intellectual contact with the range of literary and artistic people, yet she wrote often of her longing to be left alone. These traits, already noted in previous biographies and publication of earlier diaries, continue to be evident through the 1954 diary.
- Tantalising mentions of the Permanent Trustee Company (but not of what she was arranging with the company) and of friends such as Inky Stephensen who, she says, suggested the concept of the Waratah book to her.

- Several delightful accounts of her attending family functions with people we've known in the Buddong Society
- Many meetings with Beatrice Davis, an editor at Angus and Robertson. All Miles Franklin lovers owe a debt of gratitude to Beatrice who brought to publication several of Miles' works after her death. The collaboration with Beatrice however, also highlights the constant struggle she had to get time to spend on her planned writings as she became more and more unwell.

The most delightful of the posthumous publications was the memoir suggested by Pixie O'Harris, who is shown in the diary to be such a true friend. *Childhood at Brindabella* is a delightful record of Miles' own personality and for family members a record of her relationship with her family. In that delightful memoir, Miles makes mention of 'the tribe'. The Buddong Society has been the modern equivalent of the tribe. As Brent of Bin Bin, (a pseudonym), Miles gave us special advice that some old pioneers had (presumably!) given to Brent for him (Brent) to write a family saga. It had to involve 'The Old Hands' and also 'Genuine People'. It also had to take into account 'Those Precious Ones'. These titles have become the titles of our three volumes and 'those precious ones' who Miles/Brent stated 'would dither and yarn with The Old Hands' we have taken to be those who listen to, record and keep the stories of the Old Hands.

Some members of our tribe are here tonight and many partners. The connections are the following...

We have a Dubbo member of the family whose uncle is our president.

We have a Gundagai member whose grandmother's collection of photographs was extensively used in our volumes.

We have a great grandson of Thomas Bridle, one of the pioneers of Peak Hill.

We have several descendants of Fred Lampe, great western pastoralist.

We have the daughter and niece of Jack Bridle who widely promoted Miles Franklin and her connection to her birthplace Talbingo.

I am one of the editors of our history.

And we have the descendants of Gus Lampe and Martha Wilkinson, another pioneering couple of Peak Hill. This is the branch down through which the diary was inherited, so it makes the Dubbo venue for this hand-over very appropriate.

Miles Franklin herself had made connections to her relatives in this area. Here is that story...

In the 1880s, Thomas Bridle and wife Mary left the tribe and took up a pastoral holding in this district. He named his property 'Wilga Vale'. It still exists today under different owners, a few kilometres west of Peak Hill.

A decade later, he was followed by his nephew and niece, Gus Lampe and his wife, the former Martha Wilkinson. Their property Buddong, also now in different hands, also still exists today just north of Peak Hill on the highway.

It is known that Miles Franklin visited both those family properties in 1905 (twice!) and that Thomas Bridle's son Edwin Ernest Bridle wrote ardently to her in America for the next year after that visit. It is also known that she used both properties as models for

some of the pastoral landscape in her early writing. She later went on to develop further this technique of using examples of her relatives' pastoral landscapes and day-to-day life as material for her family sagas and it is known that she quizzed all her Lampe uncles, their families and friends either in letters or by visits - Gus at Peak Hill. Fred from Coonamble, especially at his snow lease Goandra, and Theo at Talbingo. She used their family knowledge and their knowledge of pastoral life along with her own reading of the family diaries and papers to which she had access.

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin...

When the young woman Stella Franklin came to choose a male name – often done at that time – she was able to choose from one of her own Christian names. Her first name was her own, the second, that of her father's mother, the third that of her mother's mother and the fourth that of her great-great grandfather.

Edward Miles, our common First Fleet convict ancestor, could not sign his name. How ironic that his descendant, was to use that name in her chosen profession and was to bring fame to that name in the field of writing – both through her own literary works and especially through her establishment of the award that has given so much assistance to other Australian writers.

Edward Miles could not write, nor could his daughter Martha... yet Martha's husband, another convict William Bridle could do so and he wrote a poem in a family bible revealing his belief in the importance of learning. We believe he either encouraged or even taught his wife to read and we know that in her old age she would sit with some of her grandchildren at the table and encourage them to do lessons or write in their diaries. Her eldest grandchild, Susannah went on to keep a diary. Her daughter was Stella. Stella Franklin grew up in a culture where writing and learning was encouraged.

Miles Franklin's first and second novels (2001 and 2009) both had a feminist theme. By the time of the publication of the second novel Miles was in Chicago where she was working for the National Women's Trade Union League – secretary and editor of their magazine. She was part of the wave of women's activism that eventually led to the establishment of the International Women's Day now celebrated world-wide on 8th March each year – that is today! Her time in America was also the time of the first of her diaries that are now in the Mitchell Library. The first one in the Mitchell Library begins on 1st January 1909 and goes through till 1st January 1954 and now they will be joined by the diary going from 2nd January till 14th September, five days before her death.

The lost diary is now the last diary...

And Kim Goldsmith as its final keeper is someone Miles would have greatly admired. She is the type of woman Miles would have loved to have been!