

Entry type: Person  
Entry ID: AWE2193

# Bjelke-Petersen, Marie Caroline

(1874 - 1969)

Born	23 December, 1874, Copenhagen Denmark
Died	11 October, 1969, Lindisfarne Tasmania Australia
Occupation	Physical Culturalist, Teacher, Writer

## Summary

Marie Bjelke-Petersen is best known as a writer, but as a young woman she enjoyed playing sport and was, it has been argued, instrumental in introducing the sport of netball to Tasmania.

She migrated with her family to Hobart, Tasmania in 1891, where her brother, Hans Christian, established the Bjelke-Peterson Physical Culture school in 1892. Marie joined as instructor in charge of the women's section; she also taught the subject in schools. It was during that time, it is suggested, that the Bjelke-Petersen's learned about a new game called basketball that was being played in the United States. Marie introduced drills designed for the game in to the Physical Culture program that she taught in the schools.

Unfortunately, injuries prevented her from continuing with her teaching career much past 1910. At this point, she picked up her career as a writer. She published her first novel *The Captive Singer*, in 1917 to much acclaim; it sold 100,000 copies in English and 40,000 in Danish. In 1935 she won the King's Jubilee medal for services to literature.

In recent years, Bjelke-Petersen has become a gay and lesbian icon. She lived in an intimate relationship with Silvia Mills, who she met in 1898, and who, it is argued, *The Captive Singer* was about, for thirty years.

## Events

**1935 - 1935**  
For Services to Literature

## Published resources

### Resource Section

Bjelke-Petersen, Marie Caroline (1874-1969), Weidenhofer, Margaret, 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070307b.htm>

### Book

A Netball History in Tasmania: 'The First Bounce' - An Account of the History of the Sport in Tasmania, Barker, Pauline, 2005

The Scandinavians in Australia, New Zealand and the Western Pacific, Lyng, J, 1939

A Mortal Flame: Marie Bjelke-Petersen: Australian Romance Writer 1874-1969, Alexander, Alison, 1994

The Captive Singer, Bjelke-Petersen, Marie, 1917

### Edited Book

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

### Site Exhibition

She's Game: Women Making Australian Sporting History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2007,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/sg/sport-home.html>

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

### Archives Office of Tasmania

Newspaper clippings, photographs and copies of letters re Marie Bjelke-Peterson, collected by Maggie Weidenhofer and photographs of Maria Island

Papers of the Bjelke-Petersen family

### Author Details

Nikki Henningham

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## Digital resources



**Title:** Women's class at the Bjelke-Petersen School of Physical Culture  
**Type:** Image  
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