

# The Australian Women's Register

---

Entry type: Person  
Entry ID: IMP0032

## Gilmore, Mary Jean

(1865 - 1962)

Born	16 August, 1865, Woodhouselee, near Goulburn New South Wales Australia
Died	3 December, 1962, SydneySydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Poet, Teacher, Writer

### Summary

For her services to literature, Mary Gilmore was appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 1 February 1937. The major themes of her work covered nationalism, the spirit of pioneering, motherhood, women's rights, history, Aboriginal welfare, treatment of prisoners, health and pensions.

## Details

Dame Mary Gilmore is the female face of the Australian \$10 note. When she died, aged 97, Dame Mary was given a State funeral by both the Federal and New South Wales state governments. Her funeral was attended by all members of the New South Wales Cabinet. Dame Mary donated the Archibald winning portrait painted by William Dobell in 1957 to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Due to the itinerant lifestyle of her parents, Donald and Mary Ann Cameron, Mary was educated at a number of country state schools. Aged 16 she became a pupil-teacher at the Superior Public School for Girls in Wagga Wagga, and was transferred to the Infants' Department in 1884. She taught at Beaconsfield Provisional School in 1886, followed by Illabo Public School, and in October 1887 was appointed temporary assistant at Silverton Public School near Broken Hill, New South Wales. In May 1889, Mary wrote to the Chief Inspector at the Department of Public Instruction requesting a move from Silverton back to Sydney on the grounds that her home was in Sydney and that the climate of the Barrier District was too severe for her constitution. She returned to Sydney in 1890 and taught at Neutral Bay, though her name and the dates of her residency are still proudly displayed on the Silverton Public School sign.

During the 1890s Mary became interested in social reform and supported the maritime and shearers' strikes. So as not to break the rules of the Department of Public Instruction, through which she was employed as a teacher, Mary wrote under the pen names Em Jaycey, Sister Jaycey and Rudione Calvert. At about this time she met and became a life-long friend of Henry Lawson.

Mary became the first woman member of the Australian Workers Union, which she claimed she joined under her brother's name. She later became a member of the executive. By 1895 Mary had given up teaching to join William Lane's New Australia Movement. She sailed to his Cosme settlement in Paraguay, arriving January 1896 and there married shearer William Gilmore (1866-1945). A year after their only son William (1898-1945) was born, the family left the settlement and returned to Australia after visiting Henry Lawson and family in London.

From 1902-1912 the Gilmores lived at William's parents' farm in Casterton in Western Victoria. Here Mary was able to re-establish her writing and political links. In 1903 she was featured on the *Bulletin's* 'Red Page' and she helped with campaigning for the Labor Party in the 1906 and 1910 federal elections for the seat of Wannon. In 1908 Mary commenced editing the woman's page of the *Australian Worker*, a position she held until 1931. In 1910 her first collections of poems *Marri'd, and other verses* was published.

In 1912 Mary and her son Billy went to live in Sydney while William joined his brother at Cloncurry in North Queensland. By 1918 her second book of poetry, *The Passionate Heart* was published, followed by books of prose: *Hound of the Road* (1922) and *The Tilted Cart* (1925). Mary's writing was regularly in print, with her last collection of poetry, *Fourteen Men*, published in 1954 when she was 89 years old.

Besides being a prolific writer, Mary was also a founder-member of the Lyceum Club (Sydney), founder and vice-president of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, member of the New South Wales Institute of Journalists and life member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Dame Mary Gilmore's ashes were buried in her husband's grave at Cloncurry cemetery.

## Events

### 2001 - 2001

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

## Published resources

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Victorian Women's Roll of Honour: Women Shaping the Nation, 2001,  
<https://herplacemuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2001-Honour-Roll-Booklet.pdf>

### Resource Section

Gilmore, Mary Jean (1865-1962), Wilde, W. H., 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090015b.htm>

List of Electoral Divisions Named After Women, Australian Electoral Commission,  
<http://www.aec.gov.au/history/women/women3.htm>

Gilmore, Mary (1865 - 1962), Elford, Ross G, 2002,  
<http://www.atua.org.au/biogs/ALE1201b.htm>

### Edited Book

Monash Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Australia, Arnold, John and Morris, Deirdre, 1994

Australian Feminism: A Companion, Caine, Barbara, Gatens, Moira et al., 1998

### Book

The Changemakers : Ten Significant Australian Women, Suzane Fabian and Morag Loh, 1983

1000 Famous Australians, 1978

100 great Australians, Macklin, Robert, 1983

Australian women writers : a bibliographic guide, Adelaide, Debra, 1988

The Complete Book of Great Australian Women: Thirty-six women who changed the course of Australia, De Vries, Susanna, 2003

Some Outstanding Women of Broken Hill and District, Camilleri, Jenny, 2002

### Journal Article

Mary Gilmore - A Memoir, Foster, I. M, 1972

### Magazine article

Great poet was once a £13 a week teacher, 1973

### Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html>

## Archival resources

### Fryer Library, The University of Queensland

[Letters, 1971-1972: to the University of Queensland.](#)

### Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

National Council of Women of NSW - program for the launch of the Centenary Stamp Issue and a complete set of the issue, 1996

National Council of Women of New South Wales further papers, 1895-1981

National Council of Women of NSW Inc. - further records, 1926-1927, 1937-1990

Papers relating to National Council of Women of New South Wales, 1895-1897

National Council of Women of New South Wales further records, 1895-1997

William Morrow - recordings of addresses given by Jessie Street, and interviews with Jessie Street, 1953-1960

Dame Mary Gilmore papers, 1911-1954

National Council of Women of New South Wales records, 1895-1976

Miles Franklin - Papers, 1841-1954

Dowell O'Reilly - Papers, 1884-1923, with additional family papers, 1877-1944

Sub-series 7.1: Papers relating to Louisa Lawson and Henry Lawson, 1859-1934

**National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**

Diaries of Dame Mary Gilmore, 1940-1949 [manuscript]

Papers of Dame Mary Gilmore, 1923-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Mary Gilmore, 1865-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Mary Gilmore, 1883-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Dame Mary Gilmore, 1902-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Dame Mary Gilmore 1948 [manuscript]

Records, 1895-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Kate Baker, 1893-1946 [manuscript]

Correspondence and diaries, 1910-1962 [manuscript]

Photographs, 19-- [manuscript]

Papers of Eleanor Dark, 1910-1974 [manuscript]

Papers of Dame Mary Gilmore, 1837-1962 [manuscript]

Papers of Myrtle Rose White, 1940-1961 [manuscript]

Papers of Jean L. Stevenson, 1932-1959 [manuscript]

Records, 1928-1994 [manuscript]

**State Library of Victoria**

Papers, [manuscript].

**National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra**

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence 'G' [Mrs F R Gale - Gordon Branch Australian Labor Party, includes poem sent to Mrs Elsie Curtin by Dame Mary Gilmore]

**Outback Archives, Broken Hill City Library**

Gilmore, Dame Mary

**National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection**

Talking history program on the National Library's Oral History section and the Hazel de Berg Collection compiled by Tim Bowden [sound recording]

**State Library of New South Wales**

Windeyer family papers, 1829-1943

Ruth Park letters received from Dame Mary Gilmore, 15 January 1946-28 April 1953, including two letters to D'Arcy Niland, 11 September and 28 September 19

**National Library of Australia**

[Biographical cuttings on Mary Gilmore, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

**Author Details**

Anne Heywood and Barbara Lemon

**Created** 24 April 2002  
**Last modified** 12 September 2017