Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5414

Miller, Jane Mary Elizabeth

(1865 - 1932)

Born	18650101, Bungendore New South Wales Australia
Died	19320201, SydneySydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Volunteer, War Worker

Summary

Jane Miller lived in Canberra from 1913 after her husband Colonel David Miller was appointed the first administrator of the Federal Capital Territory (as the ACT was called until 1938) in 1912. Early in World War I, she founded and became President of the Federal Territory War Food Fund. She also organised collections of clothes for Belgian babies and oversaw the organisation of many fundraising concerts. Her son, Selwyn Miller, served with the British Army in Palestine from 1917, returning to Australia in 1919.

Details

Jane Mary Elizabeth Thompson was born in Bungendore, New South Wales, Australia to Margaret Catherine Carroll and James Burford Thompson, civil servant, who served as the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Queanbeyan during the 1880s. On 23 April 1890 Jane married widower, Major David Miller, a citizen soldier, at Harris Park, Sydney.

In August 1912 Jane's husband, then Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs, was appointed as Administrator of the new Federal Capital Territory. On 20 February 1913 when King O'Malley, the Minister for Home Affairs, ceremoniously drove the first peg to mark the axis between the Capitol and Mount Ainslie and define the central feature of Parliament House, he invited Jane Miller to name the site. She christened it 'Canberra Hill'. ('The Federal Capital', 1913, p. 15).

The Millers initially lived under canvas before moving in 1913 into Canberra's first permanent building – The Residency (now Old Canberra House on the Australian National University grounds) in Acton.

Soon after the outbreak of war on August 1914, Jane convened a meeting of women residents of Canberra and the Federal Capital Territory to initiate a movement 'for the purpose of helping our soldiers and sailors who are at the present moment on active service upholding the British Empire in the great war now… and for relieving distress amongst the relations of soldiers and sailors or the poor' ('Patriotic Fund', 1914, p. 2). She proposed a division of districts each with a representative who would appeal for funds and distribute collecting boxes, and suggested that money collected be donated to the War Food Fund established by the Sydney Chamber of Commerce.

The War Food Fund had two purposes: to help soldiers, and to benefit Australian workers on the home front by purchasing foodstuffs and articles that were produced in Australia by Australian workers, thus providing employment opportunities at a difficult time. The Queanbeyan Age reported that the women present enthusiastically approved Jane Miller's scheme and appointed a committee comprising 'Mesdames Miller, Broinowski, Piggin, and Brown, of Canberra; Mesdames Macartney and Barnard of the Royal Military College; Mrs. E. G. Crace, of Gininderra, and Mrs. Sheaffe, of Tharwa.' ('Patriotic Fund', 1914, p. 2).

In addition to the proposed collecting boxes, Jane and her committee members arranged fundraising events, including a concert reported in the Queanbeyan Age on 29 October 1914, at which the Canberra Amusement Hall was 'packed to the doors' and the audience 'lustily' joined in patriotic airs from

the National Anthem… the Marseillaise; and… "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," The Canberra Orchestral Society supplied music and actors presented the final scene of "The Merchant of Venice" and comedy. During the interval Jane, as president of the Territory War Food Fund, presented prizes to winners of the fundraising sports meeting held at the Canberra sports ground on 17 October. ('Patriotic Sports Meeting Canberra', 1914, p. 31).

The War Food Fund distributed money donated from its branches, including the Federal Capital Territory fund, to a number of organisations: Committees for Relief of the Distressed Poor, hospitals receiving wounded soldiers, Belgian Relief Fund, Homes for Belgian Refugees, Belgian Soldiers' Fund, Belgian Relief Commission for Belgian Refugees in Holland, Distressed Belgians in Belgium, Serbian Relief Fund, and the Committee for assistance to families of French soldiers. By August 1915 the Sydney Chamber of Commerce noted that the Federal Capital Territory fund had contributed £1531/17/5 (around $150,000 in 2014) from which no expenses had been taken, and expressed their heartiest thanks ('Federal Territory War Food Fund', 1915, p. 2). (2014 equivalent based on the Reserve Bank of Australia Pre-Decimal Inflation Calculator.)

On 11 May 1915 the Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer reported on Jane's project collecting clothes for Belgian babies and appealed for warm clothes for 'the poor destitute Belgian mothers caring for their little ones in many of the towns of Belgium, France, England and Holland'. She told the reporter who called on her at the Residency: 'This is what we women are doing… And not one has been asked for, all have been brought or sent here by the donors without being approached'. The report described a room 'filled with hundreds of little garments of all descriptions, flannel and flannelette night dresses, pilchers, flannels, petticoats, dresses of various materials, hoods, bonnets, lovely bootees, boots, even to a fur boa,… the useful and practical work of patriotic women'. The article lauded the efforts of 'the patriotic women in all parts of the Federal territory making up useful little garments during their spare hours'; and reported that 'the school girls are now interesting themselves in the praiseworthy object'. ('Clothes for the Belgian Babies', 1915, p. 2).

In late October 1915 the Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer reported that the Federal Territory War Relief Fund committee, "under the able presidency of Mrs. Miller, wife of the Administrator, continue to do good work on behalf of the excellent cause they have so enthusiastically taken up." ('Federal Territory War Relief Fund', 1915, p. 2). The following month the newspaper reported that at the third Canberra Sports Carnival held at the Canberra Recreation ground in aid of Allies' Day, Jane 'very thoughtfully arranged a marquee in which to receive clothes for the Belgian children, and a liberal response was made by the ladies of the district, especially those residing in the vicinity of Canberra'. It noted that in addition to Colonel and Mrs Miller, 'Colonel and Mrs Parnell and other prominent residents lent their patronage to the Carnival' ('Canberra Sports Carnival', 1915, p. 2). And so it continued, on Friday 21 January 1916 the Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer included an advertisement for 'A popular open-air entertainment' in aid of the Federal Territory War Relief Fund, naming Mrs Miller as president.

During the latter two years of the war, Jane's own son, Selwyn Miller (born 1892) served as a Second Lieutenant with the Army Service Corps in Palestine, arriving back in Australia in September 1919. Her stepson – Captain David Frederick Miller (b.1879) – had died in 1902 in the Boer War where he had commanded a troop of Imperial Bushmen from New South Wales.

After clashes with King O'Malley, and with his credibility damaged in a seven-month commission of inquiry into the administration of the territory, David Miller took early retirement in 1917. The Millers left Canberra for a grazing property near Glen Innes, New South Wales where they remained until David Miller's death in 1920.

Jane Miller died in Sydney in February 1932.

Published resources

Resource Section
Miller, David (1857-1934), Harrison, Peter, 2006,
http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/miller-david-7580/text13233

Book
The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Australia during the war, Scott, Ernest, 1938

Australian women at war, Adam-Smith, Patsy, 1984

Newspaper Article
Canberra Sports Carnival, 1915,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31668244

Federal Territory War Food Fund, 1915,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31667055

Patriotic Fund, 1914,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31402795

Clothes for the Belgian Babies, 1915,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31665755

Advertising, 2015,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31668994

Obituary. Mrs David Miller, 1932,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2266406

The Federal Capital, 1913,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5374752

Magazine article
Patriotic Sports Meeting, Canberra, 1914,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article146329297

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1

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