The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6120

Brown, May Victoria

(1875 - 1939)

Born	18750524, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Died	19390723, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Businesswoman, Miner, Publican

Summary

May Victoria Brown was a miner, publican and business woman who played a pivotal role in the Northern Territories social and economic development, particularly in the areas mining industry. She was a flamboyant and outspoken woman who led a very colourful life.

Details

May Brown made her first trip to the Northern Territory in June 1890, where she helped her sister and brother-in-law run the Terminus Hotel in Darwin. She made several visits to the Territory between then and 1901, when she married George Seale, a former Australian amateur boxing champion.

May and George had their first and only child George in 1902. Her husband died in March 1906 after suffering from pleuro-pneumonia for seven weeks. A little over six months later, May married James Burns, one of the partners in the rich Wolfram Camp mine near Pine Creek in the Norther Territory. May and George arrived in the Territory in January 1907. Their wealth from the mine enabled May to travel regularly and widely.

May helped her husband work the mine and eventually the pair bought out their partner. In 1912 James died from alcoholism and May inherited everything. However, within seven months of James' death, May married Charles Albert 'Bert' Brown.

With the outbreak of the First World War the demand for wolfram increased rapidly, as did the price of May's mine. By 1916 it was acknowledged as the richest mine of its kind in Australia, at a value of 20,000 pounds. May helped the war effort in many ways; she joined the Red Cross and helped raise much-needed funds.

Mining from Wolfram Hill had virtually ceased by July 1919 and in need of an income to support her extravagant lifestyle, May turned to the hotel trade. She won the lease of Darwin's Hotel Victoria when the Gilruth administration had ended its hold on the hotel trade in 1921. In 1926 Hotel Victoria was offered to Christina Gordon, who obliged but also transferred her lease on the Playford Hotel in Pine Creek on to May. In the same year, her beloved Bert died of malaria in Queensland.

Unfortunately May was reckless with her money and by 1934 she was in great financial trouble, with her extravagant lifestyle and the Great Depression both taking their toll. By February she was forced to forfeit both her Wolfram Hill and Crest of the Wave Mines for 'non-payment of rent and non-compliance of labour conditions'.

May eventually moved to Sydney and on 23 July 1939 she passed away, virtually penniless.

Author Details
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