

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0027

Durack, Mary

(1913 - 1994)

Born 20 February, 1913, Adelaide South Australia Australia

Died 16 December, 1994

Occupation Author, Historian

Summary

On the 31 December 1977, Mary Durack was appointed to the Order of the British Empire, Dames Commander, for her services to literature. In acknowledgment of her accomplishments she was also honoured with an AC (1989) and OBE in 1966. Dame Mary Durack is remembered as being the author of publications that includes *Kings in Grass Castles*, *To Ride a Fine Horse*, *Sons in the Saddle* and *Swan River Saga: Life of Early Pioneer Eliza Shaw*.

Details

Born in Adelaide South Australia, the daughter of Michael Patrick and Bessie Ida Muriel (née Johnstone) Durack Mary's childhood was spent on the Argyle and Ivanhoe stations in the West Australian East Kimberley area. After being educated at Loreto Convent in Perth she returned to the family properties.

During her lifetime Mary became a prolific writer, with her first known work being *Little Poems of Sunshine* (1923). Mary and her sister Elizabeth, who also became a noted author, completed their first book together *Allabout: The Story of a Black Community on Argyle Station, Kimberley* in 1935. Mary also wrote under the name of 'Virgilia' for *The West Australian* newspaper.

In 1987 Dame Mary Durack became a Fellow of Curtin University and was commended by the Childrens' Book Council in 1965 for *The Courteous Savage: Yagan of Swan River* (1964), illustrations by Elizabeth Durack. The title was changed to *Yagan of the Bibbulmun* (1976), illustrations by Revel Cooper, a Bibbulmun descendant, as 'savage' was now considered racist.

Dame Mary Durack was a director and patron of the Stockmans' Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre, and a former executive member of the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation. She was a member of the Australian Society of Women Writers, The Royal Western Australian Historical Society, the National Trust and honorary life member of International PEN Australia.

The Australian Irish Heritage Association of WA conducts the Mary Durack Memorial Lecture commemorating the distinguished writer and their first patron. In 1979 the Western Australian Shires of Mundaring, Kalamunda and the Cities of Armadale and Swan established the Mary Durack Award.

On 2 December 1938 Mary married Capt. Horace Clive Miller OBE (died 1980) and they had six children.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Edited Book

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

Pilgrimage : a journey through the life and writings of Mary Durack / edited by, Millett, Patsy and Millett, Naomi, 2000

Sound recording

Conversation with Mary Durack, Durack, Mary, 1913-1994, 1976

Book

The End of Dreaming, Drysdale, Ingrid, [c1974]

The matriarchs: twelve Australian women talk about their lives to Susan Mitchell., Mitchell, Susan, 1987

Reflections : profiles of 150 women who helped make Western Australia's history; Project of the Womens Committee for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Western Australia, Popham, Daphne; Stokes, K.A.; Lewis, Julie, 1979

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

Book Section

Travel hopefully: The Duracks, Browning, Julie, 2002

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>

Archival resources

State Library of South Australia

[Yarn spinners \[sound recording\]](#)

State Library of Western Australia

[Durack family papers, 1886-1991 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Perth PEN Centre records](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Mary Durack Miller interviewed by Stuart Reid for the Battye Library collection \[sound recording\]](#)

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Nancy Cato, 1939-1995 \[manuscript\]](#)

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Florence James - papers, 1890-1993](#)

Author Details

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