

DAME MARY GILMOREby K. J. SWAN - Lecturer in History.President, Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

So much has been written and said of Dame Mary Gilmore since her death early this week that one must be careful to avoid needless repetition. Details of her education at Brucedale, at Mr. Pentland's "Academy" at North Wagga, and at the Curwood Street, Wagga Wagga Public School in the 1870's have been mentioned, but there has been little concerning her family and its vital association with the early history of the district. Her father, Donald Cameron, conducted the wayside inn at Houlaghan's Creek Bridge on the Coolamon Road, and though the building disappeared many years ago its site can still be distinguished. Her mother's father was Hugh Beattie of "Brooklyn", an early property in the Brucedale district, while other family connections were John Stinson of "Kinira", Coolamon, and Matt Devlin of Deepwater and Garraim stations.

It is fitting, therefore, that here in Wagga, at the Teachers' College, there should be concrete reminders of Dame Mary. Shortly after the opening of the College in 1947 a portrait of her, originally presented to the Minister for Education in 1938, was transferred from the Department of Education, and has hung in the College Library ever since. So there began, between Dame Mary and the first Principal of the College, the late G. L. Blakemore, a correspondence which continued until his death in 1958. Mr. Blakemore placed these letters in a special Gilmore collection, to which Dame Mary herself gradually added pieces - aboriginal stones, rare coins, a piece of shingle she picked up on the beach at Puerta Gallegos, South Patagonia in 1901. Moreover, being keenly interested in the preservation of local history, she sent a donation for the purchase of a book in which the most important events at the College could be set down. The donation was gratefully accepted, and the Chronicle is now regularly maintained, two pages being devoted to each year.

Finally, however, Mr. Blakemore felt that there should be a memorial more visible to the public, so he encouraged a session of students to donate the Dame Mary Gilmore Gates, which were officially opened on 30th October, 1956. Designed by Lionel Gailer, the Lecturer in Art, they were meant to capture the spirit of "Jiamba", the evening or dancing star, the name given to Dame Mary as a child by local aborigines.

Dame Mary Gilmore's name is closely associated with the early history of this district. In her poetry she referred often to it, as in the lines

"Let us turn once again to the place where we were born,

And the River Murrumbidgee winds away, "

It is good, then, that a memorial to her exists in this place.

*K. J. Swan*