

Talbingo honours its famous daughter



Cousins of Miles Franklin, from left, Mrs Pearl Cotterill, Mrs Lindsay Franklin and Mrs Thelma Perry looking across part of the area where the authoress lived as a child.

By THEO BENET

DOWN around Talbingo way they're mostly very proud of the authoress Miles Franklin — although there's still some mixed feeling about her feminist activities.

Last weekend the people of Talbingo unveiled a cairn in honour of Miles Franklin. More than 160 people, including some 40 or 50 relatives and close

ing some 40 or 50 relatives and close friends of the authoress gathered in the cold park grounds in front of the Country Club to see Mrs Pearl Cotterill, 75, of Tumut, unveil the monument. Mrs Cotterill was one of Miles Franklin's cousins.

"I remember her well", she said. "Apart from being born here 100 years ago, she used to spend her holidays at Talbingo. We had a common grandmother — Grandmother Bridle . . . and she loved this area so much that she had her ashes scattered here in the Jounama

she chose this area so much that she had her ashes scattered here in the Jounama Creek after she died in 1954".

Mrs Cotterill had been given the task of scattering the ashes along the banks of the creek which has since swollen, being the feed stream for Blowering Dam. The waters now cover the old Lampe homestead where Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin was born on October 14, 1879.

She was the eldest daughter of the seven children of John Maurice and Susannah Franklin who owned Brindabella Station on the Goodradigbee River, about 65 kilometres from Canberra — a popular area today with hikers and bushwalkers.

The Brindabellas present a magnificent environment and one which had a lasting effect on the young Miles Franklin. She used the area and the people she knew there as background for her novels and the important trilogy written under the pseudonym of "Breat of Bin Bin". This trilogy was said to be comparable with Henry Handel Richardson's Australian classic, 'Fortunes of Richard Mahony'.

By the time she was 11 Miles was forced to move from Brindabella Station because her father had fallen on hard times and had to transfer his interests to a small dairy farm near Goulburn. It was there that she received most of her education and later wrote 'My Brilliant Career'.

The novel was more autobiographical than fiction, telling as it did of the frustrations of the young writer, Sybylla Melvyn, who lived in the narrow-minded Victorian environment of a southern NSW farm.

'My Brilliant Career' was published with the help of Henry Lawson in 1901 in Scotland. Almost immediately relatives and friends of the Franklins took offence at what some believed to be undue criticism and indiscreet writing.

Arguments and conflict over the novel forced the young writer to abandon further efforts to have her work published and she fled to Melbourne where she met the feminist Alice Henry. The pair moved to the United States where they set up house in Chicago. Henry and Franklin spent their time together

and Franklin spent their time together campaigning for better working conditions for women through the Women's Trade Union League.

Miles appeared during those years to have given up writing and, except for one feminist propaganda work, seemed to do little to pursue her "brilliant career".

Part of the old resentment towards her having made "certain disclosures"

was coupled with her militant feminism for a couple of old timers who cared to remember in nearby Tamat last weekend. The couple did not want to be named and said only that Miles Franklin had not lived a "normal" life. When pressed they explained that she had not married.

The authoress had never made any secret of her aversion for men whom she was once heard to describe as "the uselessst, good-for-nothingest, clumsiest animals in the world". Another time, when asked why she had not married, she said, "Because I'm no charwoman".

But it mattered little to the people of Talbingo that she was a militant feminist — although there were still some minor reservations about her first famous novel.