



## ***Richmond River Historical Society Inc.***

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### ***Mary Girard, an Amazing Woman***

Kevin Olivieri has been delving into the early life of Mary Girard, a pioneer of Lismore and Dungarubba. It is Mary after whom Girards Hill in Lismore was named and it was she who lived at Lismore House after she purchased Lismore Station from William Wilson in 1861.

Mary had a family history which many researchers would love to claim. Though she was born in 1806 she was a second generation Australian. Her maternal grandmother, Susan Huffnell was a First Fleet convict, her crime being petty larceny, i.e. stealing goods valued at 1/- (10c) or less. For this she was transported.

On the voyage to Australia Susan had established a liaison with a Marine Sergeant, William Baker, who was orderly sergeant to Governor Phillip. This would have been an advantageous liaison and it would have no doubt protected her from many of the abuses doled out to convict women at that time.

Soon after arrival in the new Colony Susan gave birth to a girl whom she called Elizabeth. The relationship with Baker apparently continued as in 1790 when Phillip ordered a group of convicts and soldiers to Norfolk Island in an endeavour to grow food for the starving Sydney population Baker, Susan, and Elizabeth went together.

However, some time later Baker returned to Sydney and Susan then formed a relationship with John Hosier by whom she had two children. In 1810 she and her two younger children returned to Sydney. Elizabeth stayed on Norfolk as she had married Michael Hayes, a convict, in 1805 at the age of 15 years. Their daughter Mary (who was to become Mary Girard) was born on Norfolk in 1806.

Michael Hayes had come from Ireland and was a distiller and spirit merchant in Sydney. He had been charged with illicit dealings in spirits and sent to Norfolk Island. However, there he found it easy to continue his business dealings and he soon amassed a fortune. When he and his family later returned to Sydney he bought a hotel and a boot shop. He was also an influential member of the Catholic Church.

Mary Hayes grew up in Sydney and in 1824 at the age of 18 married an attractive French adventurer named Francois Girard. He had been an officer in Napoleon's Grand Army but, when Napoleon was defeated, he had gone to London where he taught French and fencing. He was an accomplished swordsman.

Possibly there was little call for his talents as a teacher and he soon found himself charged with stealing a watch for which he was sentenced to seven years transportation. He arrived in Sydney in 1820. However, the Sydney elite recognised a French gentleman when they saw one and he was immediately given his freedom whereupon he again started teaching, adding dancing to his accomplishments.

He soon discovered, however, that he was a born businessman. He was energetic and ambitious and, on his marriage to Mary Hayes, he included her family in his enterprises. Some enterprises were better than others but Mary supported him through everything even when he was challenged to a duel or when he was almost bankrupt.

For some years they lived in a mill where Francois crushed grain and made it into bread. This business was not always successful as the bread was sometimes said to be anything but edible. At one

time when he was supplying bread to the local garrison the soldiers went on strike literally – they threw the rock hard bread through the windows of the mill and caused a great deal of damage!

No doubt Mary learnt a great deal in those days, and of course we should not forget that her own father was a very successful businessman and she possibly had inherited some of his talents. Francois Girard traded in cedar and so had links to the Northern Rivers. He took out the first pastoral lease on the Clarence River.



“Lismore House” in Victoria Street.

On his death in 1859 Mary and her sons continued to run the business empire and in 1861 she decided to purchase Lismore and Dungarubba Stations. It is said that her sons were of little use to her as businessmen so the success of the Richmond River enterprise could solely be credited to Mary, an amazing woman who died in 1876

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