

ON THE STREETS WHERE YOU LIVE



Mary Carlson Park

Mary Carlson Park, Greenwich was named for an outstanding woman; her contributions to the community and her family's long connection to the Greenwich area. The park, originally part of Greenwich Point Reserve was re-named in 1999 following a petition by local citizens to Lane Cove Council. Robina Mary Carlson (known as Mary) was a granddaughter of Greenwich pioneers, Frederick and Bridget Carlson.

Frederick Carlson was an able bodied seaman of Swedish origins. He arrived in Sydney on the *Africana* in 1866 about age 22. The family legend recalled he ran away to sea to avoid an arranged marriage. His parents were said to be wealthy ship owners plying the route from Sweden to America. In 1869 he married Irish immigrant, Bridget Mary Kennelly in Sydney and they settled in Balmain where their first son was born in 1870. By the time their second son arrived in 1873 they were living at Greenwich. The family settled in a stone cottage in St Lawrence Street (which was sometimes known as St Leonards Street between 1879-1898). Frederick owned two sailing ships that carried goods from Balmain as far as Newcastle and the 1879 and 1880 *Sands Directory* lists him as a shipwright in St Leonards Street, Greenwich.

In June 1880, tragedy struck the family when a fire broke out at their cottage. Frederick injured his leg when he fell from the roof while trying to douse the flames. His wound became gangrenous and he died a week later at the age of 33. Bridget, widowed with four young sons and a daughter, initially returned to Balmain before re-establishing her family in Greenwich, where she owned three cottages. In 1893 she built two of the terrace houses in St Lawrence Street, adding the next two in 1897. She had planned to build a fifth one, one for each of her children, but it was not built by the time of her death in 1902.

Bridget was a pioneering woman of the district. While she rented out her extra cottages, she also worked as a laundress to support her children. A devout Catholic family, they would regularly walk across the log bridge at Wollstonecraft to attend mass at North Sydney and the children crossed the river to attend school at St Augustine's in Balmain. Bridget was one of the 306 signatories to the second petition for local self-government in 1893, which resulted in the establishment of Lane Cove Municipality in 1895.

Frederick and Bridget's granddaughter, Mary Carlson (Robina Mary), the daughter of George and Robina, was born at Greenwich in 1901. She was only seven when her mother died and was subsequently raised with the assistance of her uncle and aunt, William and Amelia Carlson. Following their death, she took over their terrace at 22 St Lawrence Street, where she lived for the remainder of her life. Mary devoted her life to the service of others and had a lifelong commitment to the Greenwich community where her warmth, generosity and welcoming nature endeared her to all. She was an active and devout parishioner at Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Church, Greenwich, and tireless worker for St Vincent de Paul Society. Mary was also a foundation member and committee member of the Greenwich Senior Citizen Centre for many years. She assisted with history and photographs when the Local Studies collection was established at Lane Cove Library during the 1980s. Outside the local area she was a regular visitor at Sydney Hospital and helped with Meals on Wheels in the city.

Mary died at age 96 in 1997, having occupied one of the St Lawrence Street terraces all her life. Her funeral service was held at Our Lady of Dolours Church, Greenwich and she was buried at Macquarie Park Cemetery. Following her death the Greenwich community petitioned Council to identify a patch of parkland by naming it in her honour. The park is situated at Greenwich Point overlooking the bay where her grandfather regularly moored his ship's dingy. It was officially named MARY CARLSON PARK by Lane Cove Mayor, Anthony Roberts on 19 December 1999.



The unveiling of Mary Carlson Park in 1999
(*The Village Observer*, Jan/Feb 2000, p.39)