
Mary MacKillop Penola Centre
A SAINT FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

Mary MacKillop Exhibition: Penola – Where it all Began

Text for final panel: A saint for all Australians

‘Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you in all your life.’¹

Mary died in Sydney on 8 August 1909, aged sixty-seven. When she was beatified by Pope Paul II in January 1995, her life of exceptional holiness was formally recognised, and once she is canonised the Blessed Mary MacKillop will become Australia’s first saint.

Mary was a forthright, courageous leader who re-defined the role of women in colonial Australia by overcoming the restrictive religious and social conventions of the time. She:

- co-founded a very special Australian Institute of Sisters; shaped its development to meet diverse and changing needs; and firmly guided it into the twentieth century
- revolutionised a colonial Australian system of education such that it compared more than favourably with contemporary practice in Europe and Great Britain
- left to the people of Australia and New Zealand at the time of her death a legacy of 750 Sisters; 117 schools catering for 12,409 pupils; and 106 Houses, including 12 social welfare institutions ²
- became an inspiration to the 3,781 Sisters of St Joseph ³ who, since 1866, have devoted their lives to God through service to others both here and overseas.



Mary MacKillop

Mary’s exemplary life and her acceptance of all people irrespective of their religious, racial, or cultural differences, make her *‘a saint for all Australians’*.⁴ Her powerful but serene presence can still be felt here, in Penola, where she first met Father Julian Tenison Woods and the story of the Josephites began.

¹ MacKillop to Sisters, 12.1.1909

² Father O’Dowling SJ, *The Southern Cross*, 10.9.1909, for 1909 figures

³ Sisters of St Joseph Archives, Mount Street, North Sydney, for 1866 – 1997 figure

⁴ Max Harris, ‘A saint for all Australians’, *The Advertiser*, 6.4.1985

Penola – Where it all Began exhibition text: Margaret Muller, Mary MacKillop Penola Centre, 1998