



Emily Gillies was the daughter of Charles Henry Street, a Land and Estate agent in Dunedin, the mother of famous surgeon Sir Harold Delf Gillies and the grand-niece of Edward Lear the famous English watercolourist and writer of nonsense verse, the best known of which is *The Owl and the Pussycat*, who named his house in San Remo 'Villa Emily' in her honour. Lear was the brother of Charles Street's mother Sarah, who came to NZ after her husband died with her son and his wife and daughter in the *Maori* in 1853. In 1861 Street joined Robert Gillies to establish Gillies and Street, a land and estate agency in Dunedin, which was later to become the foundation of the

Perpetual Trustees and Agency Company, and Emily his only daughter, subsequently married Robert Gillies. They had six sons and two daughters.

Emily's husband, Robert Gillies, was born in Rothesay, Buteshire, on July 31, 1836. In 1852, at the age of 17 he emigrated with his family to Otago in the *Stains Castle*. Prior to founding his business in Dunedin, he had farmed at Tokomairiro, and worked for the Provincial Surveying Department. He was one of the first to discover and announce the existence of gold in Otago. In addition to his business interests, he was an active supporter of the Presbyterian Church, and charitable causes. He was one of the founders of Knox Church and its library, and for many years the president of the Knox Church Young Men's Association. He also entered political life and in 1882 was elected to the House of Representatives as the member for the Bruce constituency.

Sadly, Robert Gillies died suddenly at his home in Queen Street on 15 June 1886, shortly before his fiftieth birthday after an illness from which it was thought he was recovering. Emily was left a widow with eight children ranging in age from seventeen to four years. However, Robert had left them well provided for, and all the children received a good education at private schools. The youngest son, Harold, studied at Cambridge University and later became world-renowned as the pioneer of modern plastic surgery.

It is evident from the collections of his correspondence that Edward Lear was very fond of the grand-niece for whom he had named his villa, and mourned the deaths of her husband and father occurring so closely. He kept closely in touch with the activities of his sister and her New Zealand family, and when he died childless before her she inherited his valuable residuary collection. Emily Gillies died in Auckland on 7 September 1913. Her remains returned to Dunedin, to lie with her husband Robert in the Northern cemetery.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) by Helen Gilmore.

Sources: *Later Letters of Edward Lear* by Lady Constance Braham Strachie
Edward Lear a Biography by Peter Levi
Issues of *Otago Witness* paperspast
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