

## GENERAL MITE IS HONORED IN AUSTRALIA

By Valerie Ross

Greene's native son Francis Flynn, also known as General Mite, has been honored with a beautiful headstone and burial plot in Broken Hill, Australia. Thanks to the efforts of Broken Hill reporter Paul Armstrong and a Mr. Ray Harvey, one of our most famous residents can be located and remembered for his contributions to the world.

Francis Flynn was born in Greene on 16 September 1872 to Edward Flynn and Mary Ann (Casey) Flynn. Francis's highly unusual stature was apparent quickly, as he never grew much after his birth. By the age of 4 he was already a noted celebrity at 23" and 12 pounds. He was exhibited at various locations around New York State. By the age of 6 he was well-known enough to be mentioned in newspapers in North Dakota. His career as a showman began in earnest at the age of 8 when he traveled to England with a travelling showman's caravan. He "married" another little person at the age of 12 (though his entourage claimed he was much older) in Manchester, a publicity stunt which nevertheless resulted in a life-long companionship with Millie Edwards. "General Mite" is still considered one of the smallest human beings ever documented. His adult height was 27" and his weight around 12 pounds. He presented a stage show in which he rode a bicycle, sang, dressed in various costumes, and told jokes. By all accounts he was a lively, talkative, sparkly little fellow who was a consummate showman. He worked with another famous little person, Lucia Zarate, briefly joined the Lilliputian Opera Company, and toured with his wife Millie. He met the Queen of England and many other dignitaries. Francis traveled to Australia in 1890. By then, the enthusiasm for General Mite's type of show had waned in the US and Australia was a common destination for circuses and sideshows. He and Millie toured all around that country. In October of 1898 General Mite presented his show in Broken Hill, Australia, a small but vibrant mining town in the Australian outback. He died there on October 5 at the age of 25, probably from kidney failure.

My interest in General Mite was spurred by two things: the portrayal in Mildred Folsom's book "From Raft to Railroad"; and a photo in a book from the 1970's called "Very Special People". I found it amazing that one of the world's smallest people, extraordinarily famous in his day, had been born in my small hometown. "Whatever happened to General Mite?" was a question I asked for decades but to which I could find no answers. Then my mother, Peg Ross, and I harnessed the internet to find the answers. Sleuthing involved eBay correspondence ("Who are you, why are you bidding on General Mite materials, what do you know?"), postings on numerous genealogy billboards ("Calling all Flynn genealogists. Do you know Francis Flynn, aka General Mite?"), perusals of graveyard rosters, church records, death certificates, birth records, passenger ship records, circus websites, sideshow books, old Scribner's, and on and on. Every clue was ruthlessly pursued. People put us in touch with people, and after a few years we discovered Francis Flynn's tiny body in an unmarked grave in the Australian outback. The experience was fascinating and finally finding his resting place was thrilling and satisfying.

Broken Hill reporter Paul Armstrong took a deep interest in the story of General Mite and Millie Edwards, and published several accounts of their time in Australia. He and local businessman Ray Harvey organized a thoughtful memorial to mark Francis Flynn's final resting place. The inscription on the plaque reads: In Memory of Francis Joseph Flynn "General Mite". Died October 5, 1898 Aged 25. He was the smallest man in the world. He stood just 27" high and weighed 9 lbs. He toured America, Europe, Britain, and Australia and received notoriety wherever he went, over a 21 year period. He found a way to live his short life to the fullest with amazing and exciting accomplishments across the globe. R.I.P. "General Mite".

So, on your next trip to the Australian outback, be sure to stop in Broken Hill and pay your respects to General Mite.

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FRANCIS JOSEPH FLYNN

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"GENERAL MITE"





General Mite's Grave in Broken Hill, Australia