



# "Nurungi"

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

email: [chs@concordheritage.asn.au](mailto:chs@concordheritage.asn.au)

[www.concordheritage.asn.au](http://www.concordheritage.asn.au)

EDITOR

PRESIDENT  
**TRISH HARRINGTON**  
9764-3296

PUBLIC RELATIONS  
**TRISH SKEHAN**  
9743-4172

SECRETARY/TREASURER  
**LOIS MICHEL**  
3 Flavelle Street  
(P.O. Box 152)  
Concord 2137  
Phone: 9744-8528  
Fax: 9744-7591

\*

## MEETINGS

### General Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month  
at 7:30 pm in the  
Concord Citizens' Centre

### Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month  
at 7:45 pm in the  
Concord Citizens' Centre

### Walker Estates Committee

1st Thursday each month  
(please contact to confirm)  
Concord Bowling Club  
Clermont Ave, North Strathfield  
Graham Packett, 9743-3007

### Other Committees

As arranged  
*Watch the newsletter*

### Museum

Fred Stansfield, 9743-1866

### Archives/Local History

Kate Skillman, 9706-7479

### Heritage

Bill Barlow, 9743-3662

### Oral/Family History

Lola Sharp, 8753-0659

\*

**CONCORD  
HERITAGE MUSEUM**  
5 Wellbank Street

Open 2:00 - 4:00 pm  
Wednesday & Saturday

**No. 91**

**October 2003**

## A Nurse's Memories of Dame Eadith Walker Hospital

I was posted as Night Reliever to Dame Eadith Convalescent Unit in 1947. War was over but we were still experiencing restrictions, shortages and some chaos.

RPAH had acquired the Home some time before the polio epidemic, or just after it started. We were given some horrific tales of the epidemic by oldtimers.

When things began to settle down and discharges could be made, various long-term cases were sent to Dame Eadith to convalesce before final discharge.

There were still three or four left, badly incapacitated, around when I started my training but these were finally accommodated elsewhere.

So, in 1947, it was a more general type of convalescent home, with few problems of a more social kind – people whose future had to be decided, with no facilities available.

The first impression was the long drive in to the Home, and the huge walnut tree hovering over the front entrance.

There were three or four of us – I'm hazy now – but we were dumped in the foyer with our suitcases to be sorted out by the Sister-in-Charge, an elderly woman who didn't always seem to know what was happening. She knew what she wanted to do with us, however!

The foyer was large, gracious, full of light, the beautiful staircase leading to the upper floor was truly impressive. I can't remember how many pillars were supporting the high roof over the foyer, but some departmental nit had had them painted institution cream. The paint was flaking in places, you could remove a little more with a fingernail each time you thought of it and see the marble underneath. The floor of the foyer was black and white marble squares.

I think the office was on the left of the main door. There seemed to be still quite a bit of the original furniture left in position – glass-fronted bookcases, big chairs, all in lovely dark wood and leather. The dining room along the corridor to the right of the main doors still had the massive suite of table, chairs and sideboards. We had our midday meal there when we were on duty. The dining room opened onto a small courtyard

garden and beyond that was the kitchen.

I can't quite remember how the smaller downstairs rooms were used. Some were bedrooms, I think, others were storerooms and utility rooms. Upstairs were mainly small bedrooms, and they were small. Very pleasant, nevertheless.

The big drawing room downstairs – I can't quite remember how that was used, but the matching room upstairs, which we referred to as the ballroom (*Ed. Probably Dame Eadith's bedroom*) was a 6 or 8-bed ward. I'm not sure which, now.

When Sister went off duty we then took a few liberties. To the back of the house was the billiard room, with the billiard table and cues still hanging on the walls. I don't remember if everything was complete but when I was there no damage had been done.

If I remember correctly, we went from the billiard room through the conservatory, which was full of cineraria for that period, and then into the Indian Room. This was truly exotic, out of some Indian romantic novel. The walls were panelled in dark polished wood. I think there were still a couple of glass-fronted cabinets with ornaments in them, but the real interest and attraction were the wall lamps. All round this big room were electric lights with the most delicate butterfly covers in rich colours – just like tropical butterflies.

When I was there this room was used as a convalescent ward for nursing staff, some of whom could not travel to their homes for recovery, but still needed more than just a few days off. I don't know how often it was used, but one of my group spent some weeks there. It was lonely and isolated, and she relied on us to keep



### Bulletin Board

**October 8 - Kevin Hatton "The Red Cross Theatre at Concord Hospital & the Stars who played there"**

**November 12 - Joffe, well-known Cartoonist**

her in touch with life! Again when Sister was off duty, we supplied some social activity for the girls.

The gardens had been left fallow, only one man remained on the gardening staff. The swimming pool, so I was told, had been used to exercise polio victims, but was now suffering a bad leak. When we approached the gardener he was agreeable to trying to get it to operate if we supplied the labour to shift the silt. Of the four enthusiasts only two turned up and we spent an exhausting morning in the summer heat, nearly waist deep in slushy silt, moving it with brooms to where the gardener had the pump running. It didn't do much good, the job was too big for our brooms and the little pump, and the leak was actually too big.

Any bath house building that had been over the end of the pool had gone and left no trace.

Gardens were clean and tidy, but minimal, reflecting lack of a labour force.

The dairy was there, with its neat little setup for mechanical milking. The dairy man was busy and friendly and seemed quite happy if we went over and helped with the milking. The milk went into the big cans and was collected each morning by the trucks that took it to the main hospital where it was delivered to the wards. I think all the time I was training we mostly had the milk from Yaralla.

Across fallow paddocks from the main building, two little weatherboard cottages stood, separated by about 100 metres (as I remember, you wouldn't shout from one to the other).

The day staff cottage was better appointed than the one used for the night staff. I was doing night relieving and, although I did some days to round out the two-week roster, I was quartered in the night cottage.

It was a small weatherboard cottage (*Ed. possibly Woodbine*) which had originally housed outdoor staff. There were no mod cons. There was a bath in a closed in section of the back verandah, but no laundry tubs. There was hot water but no cooling or heating appliances. I think we had a small primitive wardrobe in each tiny bedroom (there were three) but little else. We could make a cup of coffee with an electric jug, but we had to remember to cadge some of the essential makings from the kitchen staff (whose use of stores was closely monitored) or bring things in from our days off.

The stables and manager's house were across the paddock and drive-

way from the cottage and were out of bounds to us. We could admire from a distance the dark brick, elegant buildings covered with ivy, beautiful and remote in the summer sun.

It was a very quiet life. The work was not challenging, only where some patients didn't really want to take on the responsibility for their own care and we had to persuade them to accept the inevitable – there wasn't much in the way of backup facilities once you left the hospital, and our patients were really OK anyway. Except for the odd one crippled with arthritis or some debilitating condition who were waiting to transfer to somewhere more permanent. All this meant that some of the girls, who were used to whizzing out to parties after work, were bored to the back teeth. Because it was a long way to get public transport, and said transport was inclined to be haphazard at that time, we had to entertain ourselves as best we could until escape on the day off.

The river was just across the lawns and we could hear the activities, particularly in the evening when the sound of voices and boats seemed to carry more clearly. One evening a couple of the more mischievous nurses went down to the little wharf and cheered the passers-by on the water. Sister had long toddled off duty and we were in charge! Night staff were just arriving, still sleepy and mildly resentful of being trapped for another night. The two explorers suddenly burst into the foyer where most of us were gathered and, the next moment, something dark was squirming and squishing around the marble floor of the foyer. They had caught an eel and couldn't think of any other ways to maximise their 'fun'. I and my junior didn't really appreciate this, apart from the eel's feelings, as our colleagues went off leaving us to clean up the mess.

During Sister's afternoons off and the evenings, once things were settled for the night, which didn't take all that long, we could go round to the Indian Room and keep our convalescent friend company. Sister restricted her roamings in the daytime, but she was free to come join us for supper at night.

Upstairs we had a little old lady, totally crippled with arthritis. She was a sweetie and we all loved her. She admitted on one occasion that she could conduct a seance, and oh boy! We had a wonderful week or so when she said: "Fine. You make the arrangements and I'll do the seance."

We had to pick a night when there would least likely be interruptions (such as Sister ringing up about 10 pm to ask if her library book was in the office or some such) and then we had to find out who was going to be available. There were about five of us in the end. I was doing my days, two were on the night run and two others were days with me.

When all was quiet, about 11 pm, we carried our little lady down the stairs to the big dark furnished dining room. Under her instructions we made the little paper slips carrying the letters of the alphabet, and borrowed one of the lovely water glasses from the depths of the old sideboard. We had a table lamp at the end of the big shiny dining table and took our places in the big leather covered chairs. In the soft light of the lamp we played out the 'fingers on the glass' bit and squeaked and aah'd when the thing seemed to move under our touch. I've no idea now what it was supposed to have told us, but our little lady said she hadn't enjoyed herself so much in years and slept like a baby afterwards when we carried her back to bed.

The night staff were OK. They went back to the office and huddled over cups of coffee. Us off-duties had to traverse the dark paddock in the quiet of a very black night to get to our cottages. None of us owned a torch and the hospital didn't supply them to nurses. We were all suitably, delightfully trembly after our little exploit, but the two day girls were quite terrified. In the end I had to conduct them to their cottage and see them tucked into bed before I could make my way, alone, over the dark of the rough ground to the night staff cottage.

I was at the Dame Eadith Walker Home for about four months, then I was posted back to the hurly burly of the main hospital.

*(Nurse Daphne Ockenden was in training from April 1944 to May 1948. She visited on one of our Yaralla tours and kindly gave us her memories of Yaralla. We sincerely thank her for this wonderful contribution about life at the Hospital.)*

---

## City of Canada Bay Community Grants

We would like to thank the Council for their grant of \$500 which has enabled us to purchase a TV/Video unit which Trish Skehan uses extensively when she talks to other groups. We will also be able to use it on Open Day to show videos we have of Yaralla and also at general meetings when we can show historic videos, etc.

## Rookwood Open Day

If you have some spare time on Sunday, 19th October why not visit Rookwood, the largest cemetery in the southern hemisphere, for a day of fun and entertainment. The grounds are open from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Admission is FREE, but there will be a small charge for some activities.

Don't miss the Grand Parade, which departs the Anglican Village Green at 11:00 am and finishes at the Catholic Office. It will include people in costume, military soldiers, bands playing, an array of hearses, volunteers, school students, mounted police, Rusty and many more.

If that's not enough then there are: Crematorium tours (behind the scenes); Heritage Walks; Sydney War Graves tours; Labor Party identity tours. Take a guided bus tour around the cemetery.

For extra entertainment there will be: Australian Heritage Dancers, Homebush West Public School Students; South Side Swing Big Band; Yagoona Brass Band; K Troop Horsemen; Scottish Piper and Dancer; face painting; balloons for the kids.

Things to see will include: heritage roses and Victorian gardens; grave digging demonstration; St. Michael's Chapel; Frazer Mausoleum (only open once a year); Independent Mausoleum of Eternal Rest; Restoration of the Serpentine Canal and ponds; Site of the No.1 and No.3 Mortuary Station; St. Athanasius Greek Orthodox Chapel; Monumental masons' demonstrating work; old hearses and funerary industry displays; funerary Museum (only on Open Day) and much, much more.

There will be stalls selling heritage roses and plants, crafts and gift items, cakes, sweets, jams and yummy delights, potpourri made from Rookwood's famous heritage roses and (as always) a White Elephant stall.

If you're feeling peckish after all this why not refresh yourself with Devonshire Tea, steak and sausage sandwiches at the BBQ and tea, coffee and soft drinks.

## Just for a Laugh

Worker, reading a paper: "Hey Bill! What's a cubic foot?" Bill: "Dunno! But I'm sure you can get compo for it!"

Why is it that the shortest distance between two points is always under repair.

## Relay for Life

The inaugural City of Canada Bay Relay for Life - a local fundraising event for the Cancer Council - will be held on Saturday, 25th October and Sunday, 26th October - and everyone is invited to take part in this experience.

This is a fun outdoor and overnight community based event, where teams of ten to fifteen people will take turns to walk or run around our local oval to honour the lives of all people touched by cancer.

To register your team, or for more information, contact the Cancer Council on 9334-1413, fax 9326-9408 or PO Box 572, Kings Cross, 1340.

## Emanuel Neich Family Reunion - 2nd November:

On this date St. John's, Ashfield, will be celebrating All Saints Day and having an afternoon memorial service for all those interred at St. John's, this will also be a service for the Friends of St. John's.

Thomas, Jane, Joanna and Dame Eadith Walker are buried at St. John's.

This year also marks the 110th year since the passing of Emanuel (who is buried there with members of his family), and the Parish Council has kindly allowed descendants of Emanuel Neich to hold a reunion to coincide with the church's afternoon's service and refreshments.

The family will meet at the church at 1:30 pm to view the grave, meet friends and family and see family artefacts. The church service will be held at 2:00 p.m. and will be followed by afternoon tea provided by the Ladies Auxiliary.

## Concord Nurses' Museum

This museum is usually only open Monday to Thursday from 10 am to 3 pm. but we have been informed that they would be prepared to open one weekend to allow our members to visit.

If you would be interested let the secretary know so that we can arrange it.

It sounds like a fascinating place with lots of history.

## The Ethel Lane Nurses' Museum

Last month we were delighted to have Jan Bell tell us about this museum, situated in the grounds of Concord R.G. Hospital.

Miss Gladys Farthing, Matron of Concord Repatriation General Hospital in the 1970s was the first person to suggest a nurses museum on this site. Her idea was to acknowledge the dedicated work of nurses during the war years.

Miss Farthing, one of the first five Army Military Nurses who opened 113th AGH in March 1941, held a large collection of military memorabilia obtained over the war years.

Mrs. Ethel (Stalky) Lane, AM, MBE, served as an Army Nurse in the 1940s. With help from Miss Flora Macrae and Miss Evelyn Cowell, both retired nurses, the women got together and formalised the collection. This was stored in the No.1 Nurses Home until it became the Medical Centre in 1995. Stored away in boxes, the collection was without a home for several years.

Mrs. Lane, then on the hospital's consultative committee, and President of the Sub-branch of the Returned Sisters' Association, played a big role in obtaining a new location for this amazing collection. Photographs, medals, uniforms and other memorabilia trace the history of military nursing over the past 100 years, from the Boer War to the present time.

In 1999 Sir Roden Cutler opened the Nurses' Museum at its present site.

## Red Cross Theatre - Concord RG Hospital

This month (October) we will hear from Kevin Hatton on this building, another well kept secret on former Walker land holdings.

During its heyday the 800-seat theatre hosted most of the famous names of theatre and vaudeville. Many stars left their signature on the walls backstage, including Googie Withers and Sir Laurence Olivier.

All the major reviews in Sydney played for one night at the theatre. Jan Bell recalls it being used as an evacuation area during bomb scares. She remembers one orderly performing such a successful impromptu act to calm patients that they refused to leave the theatre when the all-clear sounded.

Trish Skehan

**YARALLA OPEN DAY - 12th OCTOBER:** If you can help on this day please set the secretary know as soon as possible

# Yaralla Progress Report

## The Four Winds Fountain

September 11<sup>th</sup> is now noteworthy for another, more positive, reason. On that Thursday in 2003 the superstructure of the fountain was put back onto its plinth in a major exercise which took over five hours and a team of four experts to complete.

Even in its raw state, it is a joy to see this project progressing yet one more step closer to completion. This new superstructure is an exact cast from the original and is made in a limestone effect using a mix of off white cement, various grades of marble dust and zircon flour. We now also have the original pieces of the fountain with plaster infill where the original parts were missing however these must now be kept out of the weather as the plaster cannot be allowed to get wet. The rubber moulds are also in our possession so, should you wish to have a fountain exactly like the Yaralla Four Winds Fountain, you can! Just bring your cheque book with you.



Work will now progress on plumbing, electrics, and a pumping system together with surrounding landscaping. We expect the fountain will be fully operational in about six to eight weeks. This will take us to mid November which means we will have to postpone an official opening celebration until early in the New Year

## The Squash Court

By the time this has gone to print the painter will have finished painting the lead ridge capping, skylight surrounds and front and back gables. Also the roof repairers will have finished their work to repair ridge capping and replace broken tiles.

Our favourite contractor, Con Ioannidis will then finish off his repair work to the eaves and the reglazing of the high windows.

Whilst we have commenced to clean off the old interior paintwork, this will be a long and painstaking job. The whole project must be looked at as a long term one with work ongoing well into 2004.

## “Magnolia” (the Engineer’s Cottage)

The restoration and modification of this building is continuing apace in preparation for its use as an aged care unit. Members can form their own opinion as to whether the extension on this building is appropriate or not. This is a project of The Dept. of Health and your Society has no involvement. We should keep in mind that, at least, the building is being saved which is far preferable to demolition by neglect.

Graham Packett

## Dates for your Diary . . .

- ☛ **Thurs. 2nd October** - Walker Estates/Yaralla Committee
- ☛ **Wed. 8th October** - Kevin Hatton, “The Red Cross Theatre at Concord Hospital and the Stars who appeared there”
- ☛ **Sun. 12th October** - Open Day at Yaralla
- ☛ **Wed. 22nd October** - Executive Meeting
- ☛ **Thurs. 6th November** - Walker Estates/Yaralla Committee
- ☛ **Wed. 12th November** - Well known cartoonist, Joffe
- ☛ **Sat. 22nd November** - Visit to Camden area and their Museum
- ☛ **Wed. 26th November** - Executive Meeting
- ☛ **Wed. 10th December** - CHRISTMAS BARBECUE PARTY

**This takes us up to the end of the current year. Please mark these dates on your calendar now so you won’t forget.**

## From the Secretary’s Desk

**ROOKWOOD OPEN DAY:** If you are helping us support the Rookwood Open Day on Sunday, 19th October, by volunteering your services, please contact the Secretary for details.

**YARALLA OPEN DAY:** We need to know the names of all those who will be helping on 12th October. Please telephone the secretary on 9744-8528 as soon as possible.

## VISIT TO CAMDEN AREA

**Please note!!** We have changed the date for this visit to **Saturday, 22nd November, 2003** as the date to visit their very modern and attractive museum (to see if we can steal some of their ideas) and to look around the historic area.

If you are interested in joining us, please let the secretary know as soon as possible so that we will have an idea of what transport will be needed.

Depending on cost and the number of people wanting to take the trip we will look at hiring a bus or driving down in private cars. (At the present time it looks as if we will be travelling by car as we don’t have the numbers for a bus, but we can find room for any non-drivers wanting to join us.)

**But we need to know numbers soon.**

## YARALLA OPEN DAY

We need to finalise details **NOW** so would all those who will be available to help on the day please telephone me (9744-8528) to confirm.

**DAYTIME MEETING:** We have found that this daytime meeting is not attracting visitors or people who don’t want to come to an evening meeting (just the same old regulars) so it was decided to discontinue it and hold our July meeting in the evening as usual.

## WALKER ESTATES/YARALLA COMMITTEES:

These meetings will continue to be held at the Concord Bowling Club but will now commence at 7:30 p.m. Membership of this group is quite informal, everyone and anyone is welcome to attend to share ideas and suggestions. Why not come along and join this very active group.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:** Would all members of this committee, particularly the newly elected, note in their calendar that this meeting is held in the Senior Citizens’ Centre on the 4th Wednesday of the month, commencing at 7:45 pm.

**CHRISTMAS BARBECUE:** Please make a note of the date in your calendar now so that you’ll keep the evening free - Wednesday, 10th December