



"Nurungi"

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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MEETINGS

General Meetings

1st Saturday of month
(except January)
at 2:00 pm in the
City of Canada Bay
Museum
1 Bent Street, Concord
9743-3034

Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Museum
(all members welcome)

Walker Estates Committee

Meets at Yaralla on the
3rd Saturday of month
at 2:00 pm

Chairperson

Anne Griffin, 9745-3067

Anne Griffin

bca001@tpg.com.au

Tours Organiser

Sandra Elliott, 9797-1040

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Museum Committee

Meets on 2nd Wednesday of
month at 9:30 am at museum

Chairperson

Lorraine Holmes, 9743-2682

Oral History Committee

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CITY OF CANADA BAY MUSEUM

1 Bent Street, Concord

Open Wed & Sat
10am to 4pm

Phone: 9743-3034

No.181

September 2011

The McDonagh Sisters Three Young Ladies Ahead of Their Time

Isobel (1899-1982), Phyllis (1900-1978) and Paulette (1901-1978) McDonagh were the eldest of seven children of John and Anita McDonagh of Drummoyne. Their father was the honorary doctor to the J. C. Williamson theatrical empire so the girls grew up in the world of show business.

The McDonagh sisters eventually decided to try their luck in film production and went on to become an influential artistic force in the Australian film industry in the late 1920s. With their independent spirit, they were undaunted by a film industry dominated by men and by American interests.

The sisters made four films together: *Those Who Love* (1926), *The Far Paradise* (1928), *The Cheaters* (1930) which were all silent feature films, while their final film, *Two Minutes Silence* (1932-1934), a strong anti-war drama, included some sound. In addition they produced several sporting documentaries, including one which featured Andrew 'Boy' Charleton.

Their first feature film, *Those Who Love*, was a social drama, showing class distinctions and family loyalties coming between the heroine and the hero. J.C. Williamson distributed the film and, at its premiere in Sydney on 11 December 1926, it was publicly and professionally acclaimed. The critics praised the story, sets, acting and costumes as well as the fact that the budget had been so small. It was not generally

known that the palatial Drummoyne House, which provided the lavish interiors, was the McDonagh family home. Paulette was the principal writer and director, Phyllis was the business manager, publicist and art director and Isobel, known professionally as Marie Lorraine, was the principal actress.



Isobel McDonagh

Originally comprising some 1800 metres of footage, *Those Who Love* was produced on a budget of £1000 and filmed in ten days. Sadly, little of the film has survived to the present, however, in 1986, two minutes of the film was purchased by the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra.

With the profits from *Those Who Love*, the sisters embarked on *The Far Paradise* (1928), another society drama. *Smith Weekly* said: "This picture has a smoothness and finish rare in Australian films; apparently the sisters have realised that America has developed the technique of production to a fine art, and have been willing to learn."

Their third film, *The Cheaters*, was completed as a silent film in 1929. Since there were no immediate offers of release, the sisters incorporated some talkie scenes to try



Paulette McDonagh,



Bulletin Board

Sat. 3rd September at 2:00 pm. TV Documentary from SBS on the McDonagh Sisters

Sat. 8th October at 2:00 pm. To be advised.

Sat. 6th November at 2:00 pm. Ken Bock, "Radio for the Print Handicapped"

(All meeting in the City of Canada Bay Museum)

to improve the commercial potential of the film. These additional scenes were filmed in Melbourne in the Hotel Australia and a popular nightclub, Ambassadors. Although none of these scenes has survived, they included a fancy dress party sequence and a romantic interlude in which Isobel (Marie Lorraine) sings to her lover.

The sisters' final film was their most daring. Based on a successful play, *Two Minutes Silence* (1933) was a stark anti-war drama set in London on Armistice Day. Paulette believed this to be the sisters' best film and she considered the mediocre response of the Australian audiences to mean that it was largely misunderstood. It was the first Australian sound feature to explore a serious social issue and for the time was avant-garde.

The combined career of the McDonagh sisters was then dissolved. Isobel married in 1932 and went to live in London where they stayed until 1935. She returned to acting in 1959 when she and her three children played in Tennessee Williams' drama *Orpheus Descending* at the Ensemble Theatre.

Phyllis also left film-making and emigrated to New Zealand where she became a journalist and then editor of the *New Zealand Truth*. She later married and returned to Sydney where she continued to work as a freelance journalist. In the early 1960s Phyllis became the social editor of the *North Shore Times* and in 1978 she accepted, on behalf of the McDonagh sisters, the Raymond Longford Award for their contribution to Australian film. She died a few months after the presentation.

Paulette's interest and participation in film-making continued for a few years until she was financially unable to continue as an independent film maker. She lived with her younger sisters until 1940 and then moved to Kings Cross where she lived until her death in 1978.



Another item from our popular "Faces in the Street" project

The McDonagh Sisters

Screening at the
City of Canada May Museum
Saturday, 3rd September
at 2:00 pm

This half hour SBS documentary,
written and directed by Rebecca Barry
and produced by Kathy Sport
was broadcast on

SBS Flickerfest 2004, WOW Festival 2004

Best Documentary Screen Critics Circle Awards AFTRS;
Award for Technical Excellence - International Student
Documentary Festival Chicago



In the 1920s, Isabel, Phyllis and Paulette McDonagh were sisters, best friends and business partners. Together they were the first Australian women to form their own film company. Amazing footage from their films that has survived and been preserved, combined with interviews, archival photographs, and colourful re-enactments describe a remarkable life of women making movies more than 70 years ago.

Rivendell Open Day

Sunday, 11th September, 2011

Information Sought

We have been approached by the Concord RSL seeking information on missing plaques in Majors Bay Reserve, adjacent to the RSL complex.

By luck, thanks to one of our members, we have a photograph of one of the plaques. It was erected on the two pillars you can see in the middle of the photo below.

However, we have no information of the ceremony, who organised it or who took part. This is well within living memory and we are hoping that some of you may have information or photographs of the day.

The other plaque was attached to the large rock you can see on the left of the photographs. We have no knowledge of what was on this plaque. Do you know? Can you help?



There's a war on! ***World War II at home***

World War II was a period of dramatic change for the people of NSW. For some it brought new opportunities, adventure, love, lasting friendships and exciting experiences. For others, war-time meant loss and hardship, fear and uncertainty, or a term in a POW / Interment Camp.

This display is a Museums & Galleries NSW travelling exhibition. It showcases the varied experiences of the men, women and children who fought the war on the home front and includes precious World War II artefacts, memorabilia, photographs and video footage from around NSW.

This exhibition will be on display at our museum from 16th April to 17th June next year.

However, to complement this exhibition we need our own special items focusing on the changes that occurred in our area during the war years. These could be items belonging to local NES wardens, members of the Australian Women's Land Army, etc.

We would appreciate stories and photos from locals on how the war impacted on their lives whether it be domestic or working in the various factories and industries connected with the war.

Photographs, paper documents, posters - anything connected with WWII at home. All would be appreciated.

Can you help?

Or, do you know anyone who can help?

Officers & Committee Members

At our AGM on 6th August, the following people were elected to the Executive Committee:

President Mark Durance
Vice-President Alan Wright
Secretary/Treasurer Lois Michel
Editor "Nurungi" Lois Michel
Chairpersons:
Museum Com. Lorraine Holmes
Walker Estates Com. Anne Griffin
Tours Organiser Sandra Elliott
Committee Terry Robinson
..... Betty Fletcher
..... Graham Ferguson

There are still several positions vacant: Assistant Secretary, Public Relations Officer, and some Committee members. If you would like to become active in this society please volunteer your name for any of those vacancies.

We need new members, bringing new ideas, to help make our Society even bigger and better.

The Phantom Schooner

Australia possesses vast territories in the Southern Ocean surrounding the Antarctic Circle—such as Queen Mary Land, King George V Land, etc—all of which are dependencies of the Commonwealth. In these waters occurred a fantastic sea incident.

On September 22, 1860, Captain Brighton, of the whaler Hope, opened his log book and wrote the date, together with the entry:

"Sighted a whale. Followed her for hours, but eventually she gave us the slip. Now close to the ice barrier."

That was all he had to report. Little did he know that in but an hour's time he was to set down in his log one of the most amazing reports that ever a skipper wrote.

As he made his way to the deck there came from the ice barrier several hundred yards away, an ominous crack. Another and another followed, detonating like canon shot in the chill still night air.

The crew stared across the intervening strip of water to the ice barrier. However, the whaler was far enough away to be safe. Then, with a reverberating roar, the towering walls parted abruptly. Hundreds of tons of ice crashed into the sea throwing up a great spout of green water.

Suddenly a deck hand cried out in alarm and pointed with trembling finger to an apparition. The men gasped in fear, and some began mumbling prayers as *The Thing* slowly approached them. Even stout hearted Captain Brighton felt the cold sweat of fear on his forehead. For from the frozen heart of the ice barrier floated a ghost ship!

Its decks were covered with ice and snow. Its sails hung and flapped in tarred frozen shreds. Its rigging was all awry, drooping here and there in a rotting noose like a hangman's rope. The deck and hull was crushed and battered as if by some giant hand. But grim and eerie as was the vessel, it was the sight of the crew of the phantom ship that raised a strangled cry of horror from those on the whaler. For on

that ice-strewn deck were seven dead men, statuesque in their frozen whiteness.

Although inwardly trembling Captain Brighton knew it was essential to calm his panic stricken crew. In as scornful tones as he could summon he turned to the men:

"Flying Dutchman, my eye! Man me a boat and I'll board your ghost ship myself."

His coolness had the desired effect. But he required all his courage to set foot on that hoary, silent deck, among the dead men. His footsteps echoed eerily as he made his way to the cabins below.

As he opened a door Captain Brighton started. There, leaning back in a chair, with a pen in hand and the ship's log before him, was a fellow captain.

"Your ship—what is the name of your ship? What has happened to you all?"

The man remained silent.

The whaling captain was speaking to a dead man. His glanced fell on the log-book spread open before the immobile figure. He read the last entry under the dead hand:

'May 4, 1823. No food for 71 days. I am the only one left alive'.

1823—thirty seven years before! For that incredible length of time this strange ship had been on her untiring commission of death, locked in the heart of the giant ice barrier.

In another cabin was found the body of a woman—the captain's wife. She too, like all the others, was in perfect state of preservation.

The ship was the English schooner, Jenny, which had left the port of Lima, Peru, half a life time ago.

Reverently the nine bodies discovered aboard were buried at sea.

A few months later Captain Brighton, on his return to England handed over to the Admiralty the log book of the strangely fated Jenny.

(Printed in the Heron Flyer, November 2008 and reprinted with permission.)

Wise Words"

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." -- Benjamin Franklin

"Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

"I think I've discovered the secret of life — you just hang around until you get used to it." -- Charles Schulz

"Life is not always what one wants it to be, but to make the best of it as it is, is the only way of being happy." — Jennie Jerome Churchill



The Enemy at Home: German internees in World War I Australia.

During World War I nearly 7000 so-called "enemy aliens" were interned in camps in NSW. One was young Bavarian photographer Paul Dubotzki, whose remarkable photographs record the experience of internment from 1915 to 1919. These photographs tell an extraordinary story. Australians of German and Austrian descent, and Germans captured by the Allies in Asia, were imprisoned in isolated camps. These internees from all walks of life transformed their situation in detention with ingenuity, industry and determination. They created intricate societies with cafes, clubs, newspapers, an array of small businesses, theatres, tennis courts, kitchen gardens, laundries, boat-building and regattas, beach activities and athletic demonstrations.

Museum of Sydney until Sunday, 11th September. Hours: Daily 9:30 to 5:00. Admission: Adult \$10, child/concession \$5.

Shell-shocked: Australia After Armistice

This explores the personal impact of war on Australian men, women and children, and the nation's attempts to recover from the loss or injury of almost three-quarters of its soldiers serving overseas in WWI.

Female Orphan School Gallery, USW, Parramatta Campus, until 23rd September. Hours: Monday to Friday, 10:00 to 4:00. Entry Fee \$5.00. www.whitlam.org.

Old & New, Borrowed & Blue: 100 years of Wedding Gowns

Featuring wedding gowns, veils, wedding memorabilia, bridesmaids outfits, mother-of-the-bride hats, flower arrangements, cake decorations, etc.

Carisbrook House Museum, 334 Burns Bay Road, Lane Cove. Hours: weekends August to October, 11:00 to 4:00. Entry: \$8 adults, \$4 concession

Concord Carnival 2011

This year will be different as dinosaurs and reptiles will show prominence to provide family fun.

Sunday, 16th October

Nearer My God

An American decided to write a book about famous churches around the world.

So he bought a plane ticket and took a trip to Orlando, thinking that he would start by working his way across the USA from South to North.

On his first day he was inside a church taking photographs when he noticed a golden telephone mounted on the wall with a sign that read '\$10,000 per call'.

The American, being intrigued, asked a priest who was strolling by what the telephone was used for.

The priest replied that it was a direct line to heaven and that for \$10,000 you could talk to God.

The American thanked the priest and went along his way.

Next stop was in Atlanta. There, at a very large cathedral, he saw the same looking golden telephone with the same sign under it.

He wondered if this was the same kind of telephone he saw in Orlando and he asked a nearby nun what was its purpose.

She told him that it was a direct line to heaven and that for \$10,000 he could talk to God.

'O.K., thank you,' said the American. He then travelled all across America, Europe, England, Japan, New Zealand.

In every church he saw the same looking golden telephone with the same '\$US10,000 per call' sign under it.

The American decided to travel to Australia to see if Australians had the same phone.

He arrived at Ulladulla in Australia and again, in the first church he entered, there was the same looking golden telephone, but this time the sign under it read '40 cents per call.'

The American was surprised so he asked the priest about the sign.

'Father, I've travelled all over the world and I've seen this same golden telephone in many churches. I'm told that it is a direct line to Heaven, but in all of them the price was \$10,000 per call.

Why is it so cheap here?'

The priest smiled and answered, 'You're in Australia now, son - this is Heaven, so it's only a local call'.

Please make a note that our general meetings are now held on the first Saturday of each month at 2:00 pm in the museum

From the Secretary's Desk

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS: If you have not yet paid there will be a reminder in this newsletter.

SOCIETY KEYS: Reminder that we need to know what keys you hold to either Yaralla or the Museum.

FACES IN THE STREET: We still need more stories. Have you sent yours in?

Also, we need to get release forms signed by those who did submit items. If this is you could you please get a form from the museum to sign.

If you were instrumental in obtaining any of these stories could you please pick up a copy of the story and a release form so that the person concerned can also sign one.

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED: We require additional volunteers at the museum for a range of tasks, including museum guiding, assessing and cataloguing objects in the collection, scanning images and setting up displays. If you or any friends are able to assist, please contact us.

GUEST SPEAKERS: Have you attended any meetings recently where there has been a very good speaker? Why not get their details and pass them on so we can make contact and ask them to come to one of our meetings.

OCTOBER MEETING: Please make a note that, due to a public holiday weekend, our October meeting will be held on the 8th.

RIVENDELL OPEN DAY is on Sunday, 11th September. We have posters available if you know of somewhere they could be displayed, or we could email a copy to you which you could then forward to any of your friends who might be interested.

If you can help on the day please contact Anne Griffin or Sandra Elliott. Their details are on the front of this newsletter.

ORGAN RECITAL at St Luke's Anglican Church, Concord, on Sunday, 18th September - to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dame Eadith Walker. This will be followed by afternoon tea in the church hall.

Full details later, but please keep this date free and let all your friends know.