



# 'Nurungi'

(Remembered)

Official Newsletter of the City of Canada Bay Heritage Society

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#### GENERAL MEETINGS

1st Saturday of month  
(except January)  
**at 12:30 pm in the**  
City of Canada Bay  
Museum

1 Bent Street, Concord  
9743-3034  
followed by  
**our Guest Speaker**  
**at 2:00 pm sharp.**

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**Museum Committee**  
Meets on 3rd Wednesday of month  
at 10:00 am at museum  
(everyone welcome)  
**Chairperson**  
Lorraine Holmes,  
9743-2682

**Walker Estates Committee**  
Meets as required  
**Chairperson**  
(vacant)

#### CITY OF CANADA BAY MUSEUM

1 Bent Street, Concord

**Open Wed & Sat**  
**10am to 4pm**

**Guest Speaker**  
on 1st Saturday of each  
month at 2:00 pm

Phone: 9743-3034  
during museum hours  
or email

[museum@canadabayheritage.asn](mailto:museum@canadabayheritage.asn)

## The Saga of Munro Ferguson and Yaralla

### Yaralla 'given away to the Government'

Good intentions are often misconstrued as Miss Eadith Walker discovered to her dismay in 1914. Returning from an overseas trip, Miss Walker heard that the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, did not have a place to call home for his stay in Sydney. She generously offered the use of Yaralla, not realising the political and social storm that would follow.

Newspapers across the country took up the story. As the old adage says, never let the truth get in the way of a good story, and good stories abounded. According to which report one read, Yaralla was being given away, rented or otherwise disposed of, to the Government.

### New Home for the Governor-General

The S.M. Herald came out yesterday morning with what is known in journalistic circles as a "scoop." Following a big scare heading - the biggest in the paper - came the information: "A residence has been provided for the Governor-General in Sydney.

"By the generosity of Miss Eadith Walker, Yaralla, Concord, has been placed at the disposal of the Federal Government for the use of Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson."

"Mr. J. Anstruther, A.D.C. to the Governor-General, inspected Yaralla yesterday on behalf of his Excellency and Miss Walker's well-known palatial property on the Parramatta River is regarded in every way as a suitable home for the representative of the King in the Commonwealth.

"Considerable improvements have been made to the house and grounds in recent years, and they now comprise one of the finest residences in New South Wales.

"It is understood that Miss Walker, who returned from a visit to the United States only a few days ago, has intimated her desire to present the estate to the Government, as a permanent home for the Governor-General, and that this generous

offer will probably be accepted.

"With customary self-effacement, Miss Walker, on being approached last night, preferred not to discuss the matter, being content to make her patriotic gift without comment."

The whole article continued with a history of the mansion, a short sketch of Miss Walker's career, and a strong eulogy of the lady as a philanthropist.

According to another article, Government House in Macquarie Street had been appropriated by the Holman state government, and the Governor-General was denied the use of it. Eadith's offer then became a political football.

### A Political Move

Labor Charge. Governor-General not a Party to It.

A Federal Labor member stated this afternoon that the offer of Miss Walker to loan Yaralla to the Governor-General had been brought about for political purposes in order to assist the Federal Government in the coming election campaign, although Miss Walker had no intention of assisting such a scheme, and was entirely ignorant of the significance that might be attached to her generous offer.

Nor was it slighted that the Governor General was in any way party to the arrangement or had the remotest idea of its political aspect.

It is also reported that the Governor of New South Wales felt it his duty to advise the Governor-General on the position. The arrival in Melbourne of an official attached to the New South Wales Government House staff gives colour to this statement. It is believed his mission is to place the whole facts before the Governor-General so that the latter may not be induced to

### DIARY DATES

June 4 - Carol Overington, "Last Woman Hanged"

July 2 - to be announced

avail himself of Miss Walker's hospitality without the fullest realisation of the circumstances and the position he may otherwise unwittingly help to create.

"It is one of the cutest political moves I have heard of for a long time," said the member in question. "I doubt that Miss Walker offered the freehold of Yaralla to the Federal Government, but rather that she notified her readiness to hand over the house and grounds for the convenience of the Governor-General when he is visiting Sydney. His Excellency would in these circumstances be Miss Walker's guest while he remained there."

*(The Tamworth Daily Observer)  
Saturday 20 June 1914*

### **New Home for the Governor-General. Yaralla**

Another article continued the SMH's theme.

"His Excellency, accompanied by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, will come to Sydney on the occasion of their first visit to New South Wales, on July 10, and will stay at Yaralla for about a month. They will then proceed to Brisbane, where the Governor-General will open the show, and will return to Melbourne in time to welcome the delegates of the British Association Congress towards the end of August.

"Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson was desirous of paying a visit to New South Wales at the earliest possible moment, especially as he did not, unlike previous Governors-General, make Sydney his first landing-place in Australia. The fact that the historic building in Macquarie Street was no longer available created a serious difficulty, which has been overcome by Miss Walker's timely offer."

This article also stated "her desire to present the estate to the Government, as a permanent home for the Governor-General, and that this generous offer will probably be accepted. With customary self-effacement, Miss Walker, on being approached last night, preferred not to discuss the matter, being content to make her patriotic gift without comment."

It was hardly 'without comment'.

### **The Story Contradicted. Miss Walker Indignant..**

Our Sydney correspondent last night wired as follows: The report that Miss Eadith Walker had offered her fine residence, Yaralla, at Concord to the Commonwealth Government for the permanent use of the Gover-

nor- General is contradicted by Miss Walker.

"There is not a word of truth in it," said Miss Walker, "and I feel the utmost indignation at being placed in such a position. I have nothing further to say until I have consulted my trustees." It is stated, however, that the Federal Government had approached Miss Walker with a view of obtaining Yaralla for a month when the Governor-General visited Sydney, and Miss Walker had acceded to the request.

Papers as far afield as the *Kalgoorlie Miner* quoted the Prime Minister, Mr Cook, as stating that no rent was being paid for Yaralla.

The *Sunday Times* reported the following information: "The Governor-General, on account of Yaralla, Concord, being situated some distance from Sydney, was threatened with some inconvenience. This has been overcome by the Navy authorities having granted him the use of a launch and the Government having placed, in addition, the launch Premier at his disposal during the month that he will stay in Sydney."

*The Clarence and Richmond Examiner (Grafton, Thursday 16 July 1914)* reprinted this article which appeared in a number of papers across the state, proving how popular the G-G was according to the general populace.

### **The Governor-General.**

Although the opportunities have been few and inconspicuous, the new Governor-General has evidently made the most of them since he arrived in Sydney, as he has created a distinctly favourable impression both by his personal appearance and bearing, and by what he has said. There is no doubt that in the important political trouble with which he was faced almost from the day he landed in Melbourne, his Excellency came through with flying colours, notwithstanding some of the Labour party's jibes; and anyhow people here seem as if they are very serious in their desire to give him a very loyal as well as a personal welcome.

This is partly due to the fact that his Excellency has no home of his own, historic Government House having been appropriated by Mr. Holman and his crowd for other and baser purposes than those for which it was provided and used for so many years. This was one of Mr. Holman's big mistakes, and it will take a long time for many people to forgive him for it. Meanwhile, Sir Ronald and his already popular wife are doing very

well at Yaralla, Miss Eadith Walker's charming home at Concord, and the signs are that they will spend an interesting and enjoyable time in New South Wales."

Some of these enjoyable times included a garden party at Yaralla. The *Newcastle Morning Herald's* report follows: "Garden parties in the winter are not ideal functions. An English lady, driving in a motor car to Yaralla, Concord, where the Governor-General and Lady Helen Munro-Ferguson held a reception on Friday, said that she had never felt so frozen before in her life. The bitter wind made fur coats indispensable, and the distance of Yaralla from town was a very great drawback. Remarks that were not intended in the nature of blessings were uttered as people toiled tediously up the river in three steamers, and one lady whose gown was washed by a wave said something quite unprintable.

"The third boat load of guests arrived too late to be received, and when Sir Gerald Strickland left early, and the band played "God Save," many guests hurried away also, thinking the party had broken up.

Yaralla was not looking its best, as this is not the time for flowers. Most people had not time to explore the rose garden, or visit the swimming pool. As soon as they had greeted a few friends, and scrambled for tea and strawberries in an all-to-small marque, it was time to undertake the interminable journey back to town. Also Eadith Walker did not appear at the party, nor did her usual faithful bodyguard.

Lady Helen wore an elegant gown of black soleil tulle and chiffon, the bodice embroidered in royal blue and gold, a becoming black toque with autumnal flowers in front. The best dress worn by a guest was probably that of Miss Macarthur Onslow (Camden Park). "

*Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners Advocate: Friday 7 August 1914.*

### **Miss Walker Speaks Again**

Miss Eadith Walker said this afternoon that the true facts of the case were that she was requested by the Federal Government to place Yaralla at the disposal of Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson for a month, from July 10, and she consented.

There was never any question of handing over to the Federal Government as a permanent abode for this or any other Governor-General."

*Leader (Orange, NSW)  
Saturday 20 June 1914*

## In the Evening of her Days. A Notable Philanthropist

Miss Eadith Campbell Walker is the only child of the late Thomas Walker, from whom she inherited Yaralla. It is interesting to note, in connection with her present action, that Thomas Walker was a native of Leith, Scotland, which Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson represented in the House of Commons for many years. It was in this part of Scotland that the families of the Governor-General and Miss Walker lived for many generations. Miss Walker's father was, it will be remembered, one of the earliest supporters of representative government in Australia. He was a representative of Port Phillip in the old Legislative Council of New South Wales before separation, of which he was an advocate. Ex-Senator J. T. Walker, who is a cousin of Miss Walker, was born in Midlothian, and his father, who was also a native of Leith, came to Australia in 1844.

Miss Walker belongs to the class

of philanthropists who do good by stealth. Her name seldom figures in published donation lists, but it is well known that she has been a munificent contributor to almost every deserving philanthropic institution in New South Wales, especially in Sydney. Naturally of a retiring disposition, she has preferred to do her charitable work quietly and without publicity. The Walker Convalescent Home owes its existence to her munificence, and she has been a most generous contributor to hospitals and numerous other institutions. In the evening of her days she has not relaxed her zeal and sympathy for all good causes. Her latest patriotic act is in keeping with her whole life, which has been abundantly full of public spirited service for her fellow-creatures and her country.

SMH, 19 June 1914

## The Prime Minister's Statement

The Prime Minister had the last word, in referring to the 'Yaralla incident'

and making an apology to Miss Eadith. Mr. Cook, referring to the offer of Miss Walker to lend Yaralla to the Governor-General for a month, said that he deeply regretted that the matter should be given the complexion it had. Miss Walker, when approached by him (Mr. Cook) had simply acted as she had always done, with kind spirit, patriotism and good citizenship. The Government was deeply grateful to her for her generosity and it was to be regretted that the facts were garbled in the first instance.

Daily Advertiser (Wagga Wagga,  
Monday 22 June 1914)

(Ed: Politics and rumours - things never change. It is amazing what wonderful information can be garnered by just typing a single word into the search engine of the National Library of Australia's Trove data base [a collection of digitised newspapers from all over Australia].)

A special thank you to our Trish Skehan for weaving them together into an interesting story.)

## Buying a Car - a Retrospect

Nowadays there's no mystery about motor cars. They infest every road and are driven with varying degrees of competence by teenagers and grandmothers. When it comes to buying a car, schoolboys can usually give their fathers all the performance figures of the leading makes but back at the dawn of motoring things were very different indeed.

Between fifty and sixty years ago the tempo of Australian life was undergoing a radical change. The horseless carriage had ceased to be a mere curiosity and was developing into a status symbol. Coachhouses were being turned into garages, hay and chaff were giving way to oil and petrol, as chauffeurs in dustcoats and goggles chugged about the streets in massive, backfiring cars with great gear levers and brake handles on the outside of their bodywork. The motor age had levers and brake handles on the outside of their bodywork. The motor age had arrived - but there were very few who knew much about cars. The biggest problem confronting a man buying his first car was where to get advice on the most suitable machine. To meet this need a Sydney newspaper published the first motoring columns, which makes fascinating reading in our space age.

Intending buyers of a horseless carriage were warned that no single make was ideal for the whole of New South Wales because country roads

were often full of pot holes and cart ruts. Then followed some advice that is still good today - "do not take your wife with you when selecting the automobile or you may find yourself choosing a machine for the shape of its radiator and bonnet". He might have added its colour, the pattern of its upholstery or the note of its big brass bulb horn!

Those early cars were not intended for long journeys: you bought a vehicle adapted to your own district. When you visited a car dealer you were encouraged to tell him the nature of the roads and the gradient of the hills in your neighbourhood. "Never buy a car of less than four cylinders" was the golden rule ". . . and insist upon magneto ignition". No motorist in his right mind would consider battery ignition alone, especially if he lived in a country district where it was practically impossible to get a battery recharged. The new motorist was told to look underneath the car before he bought it and make sure that all the machinery was enclosed against dust, sand, stones and water splashes. Then there was the matter of the radiator - "examine the radiator and ensure that it is large enough for this climate. European radiators will often boil in the Australian sun and you will find yourself adding water at every town

and village". There was so much to be learned by horsemen buying their first car - "have the carburettor explained to you by an expert" . . . "make a special study of the car's springs and their ground clearance to make certain that the machine will negotiate the ruts of your district" and "money should not be skimmed on tyres because narrow pneumatics are apt to get caught in tramlines". It is obvious that car dealers were looked upon as mere hucksters - "don't bother with a guarantee because it is not worth the paper it is written on; the terms can be so easily evaded by dealers".

Yes, choosing one's first car was a fearsome business in those pioneering days. Now we have just as much trouble buying a horse!

Philip Geeves

(Originally printed in the June 1968 newsletter of the Royal Australian Historical Society. Reprinted with permission.)



# Calling all Volunteers

## Yaralla Workgroup

Thank you to all those who indicated they would like to get this group working again.

There is still some work we need to do in this regard, such as

1. Finish small amount of timber work in ceiling of poultry shed
2. Rebuild chicken run - minor timber structure
3. Restore pig pen - mainly cleaning out weed and other growths.
4. Clean rubbish out of some of the outbuildings
5. Rebuild the Four-Way Pergola.

If you would like to become involved in this work with our current volunteers please let me know.

I will be calling a meeting of this group very shortly.

It is possible we will also have assistance from some of the hospital staff to help with this.

## Oral History Volunteers

Thank you to all those who indicated they would like to undertake some of the work of this group.

If you didn't put your name forward on the recent Membership Update form, please feel free to come forward now.

We will be calling a meeting shortly to discuss the work that needs to be done and who will take on which tasks.

We already have some wonderful tapes that need to be logged/transcribed.

But we also have names of people willing to be interviewed and we need to tackle this list as soon as possible.

## Yaralla Volunteers

Our next Open Day at Rivendell will be held on Sunday, 31st July.

We still need more people to become guides. We supply kits that give you all the information you need to conduct tours of both Yaralla and Rivendell.

These Open Days are our major fund-raisers to help with our preservation of Yaralla and we are limited to the number of visitors we can take if we don't have enough guides.

It's not hard and can be a lot of fun.

## Museum Committee

Despite having 28 volunteers listed on this committee, lately we have only had a very small number attending our monthly meetings.

If you no longer wish to be notified of these meetings please let me know and I will stop sending unwanted emails.

However, if it is the date or time that is causing problems please let us know and we can discuss any needed changes.

It is very hard to continue the great work of this committee with only a handful of workers.

We have a great reputation and we want to continue to uphold it.

There are many different ways in which this committee can work - both at the museum or at home. A lot of it involves computer work.

Currently some of the work that needs to be done includes:

1. Researching and writing up a history of Bill Fisher, rower. We have a pair of his oars at the museum but we need some history to go with them.
2. Extracting information from the recent Membership Update forms and set out in table form.
3. Updating our booklet of the Bays and Headlands, which gives a short explanation around their naming, etc.. The original book covered Concord but we now need to include Drummoyne.
4. Undertaking work on our collections data base - ensuring that names and categories are consistent with museum best practices, and entering descriptions. This would initially need to be undertaken at the museum.
5. Sorting, filing and cataloguing our collection of documents, newspaper cuttings. etc.

If you can help with any of these, even if you are not a member of the Museum Committee, your assistance would be gratefully accepted.



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

## Our Betty

On 6th June Betty Robertson will be celebrating her 90th birthday.

Ninety is a milestone that many of us may never know.

But, for Betty, it's a time to celebrate her life and times; to commemorate her 90 years; to recognise her many works and deeds and her community volunteering.

May her day be filled with wishes for a marvelous day; let it be filled with memories and the great things people will say, and the voices of those she loves singing "Happy Birthday"!

## Happy 90th Birthday

*90 years is a lifetime  
That only few people live.  
But when they do it's a gift;  
A gift only God can give.  
90 years and still alive,  
Still going strong with a  
Heart that beats inside.  
90 years is a long way;  
A long way to look back.*

*But when you have walked  
This long stretch of road,  
There is no reason to stop walking,  
Because you made the right turns.  
90 years is a number  
That people only dream of  
And will never get to see.*

*But you're living this dream,  
And you have 90 years to treasure.  
90 years to look back on  
And call your own.  
So happy 90th birthday and  
May there be more to come.  
Take one day at a time  
And look forward to 91.*

*(This poem, written by Andrew Hall to his grandfather, says it all.)*

To dear Betty, we send our love and best wishes for a wonderful day, and more to come.

