

# THE WALKERS AND YARALLA

## FACT SHEET



*Rivendell, formerly Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital*

**Yaralla, covering an area of 37 hectares, occupies an important part of the Concord peninsular and contains several buildings and gardens of historical local interest.**

### History of the Yaralla Estate

In 1797 Isaac Nichols (1770-1819) received a land grant in Concord which he named *Yaralla*, an Aboriginal word believed to mean 'camp' or 'home'. Nichols, who had the distinction of becoming Australia's first Postmaster in 1810, established an extensive farm and orchard on the property.

In 1840 Yaralla was purchased from the Nichols family by Thomas Walker (1804-1886), a merchant, banker and benefactor. In the 1860s Walker commissioned Edmund Blackett to design and build a house which was later



*Yaralla House*

extended by another noted architect, Sir John Sulman, between 1893 and 1899.

Thomas Walker's will, by way of codicil, left £100,000 to

establish a convalescent hospital on the land that he owned at Concord. The executors of his will set aside a portion of Walker's land at Rocky Point on which to build *The Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital*. The Hospital, which was also designed by Sir John Sulman, eventually was completed at the cost of over £130,000. The shortfall was met by Eadith and Joanna Walker and Anne Masefield.

The costs of running the Hospital were met from Thomas Walker's estate, administered by the Perpetual Trustee Company, until it became too costly to continue the operation and the Hospital was finally closed. Today the building is known as *Rivendell*.

Yaralla was inherited by Eadith Walker (1861-1937) and was a centre for social life in Sydney in the early 1900s. Dame Eadith was noted for her charitable work and was a strong supporter throughout her life of the Red Cross and the RSL. Following the death of Dame Eadith Walker, the trustees of the Walker Estate purchased the land on which Yaralla stands and it was handed over to the State to be used as a convalescent hospital. It became known as the *Dame Eadith Convalescent Hospital* and today remains an important part of the Central Sydney Area Health Service.

### Isaac Nichols (1770-1819)

Isaac Nichols was transported to New South Wales for theft and arrived in Sydney in 1791, aged 21. Nichols proved to be a good example of a capable and hard working convict who successfully rehabilitated himself and went on to become a successful entrepreneur and land owner. In 1797 Nichols received a land grant in Concord which he named *Yaralla*. Over a number of years he developed the property for mixed farming, growing crops such as wheat, barley and maize, together with livestock and an orchard. The property was acquired by Thomas Walker in 1840.

On 25 April 1809 Nichols was appointed as the first Postmaster in the Colony. The Post Office was operated from Nichols' Sydney residence in Lower George Street. Postal charges were one shilling for a letter, two shillings for a parcel under nine kilograms and five shillings for a larger parcel. Prior to this, mail delivery in the colony was a haphazard affair.

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## Thomas Walker (1804-1886)

Thomas Walker was born on 3 May 1804 at Leith, Scotland, the elder son of James Thomas Walker, merchant, and his wife Anne, née Walker, of Perth. Thomas Walker came to Sydney and joined his uncle in the firm of William Walker & Co., general merchants, about 1822. Later, with a cousin, he succeeded to the business. Thomas Walker was a magistrate in 1835.

Walker was regarded by some as tight-fisted. He was, however, conscientious and benevolent, and for a time



Thomas Walker

employed an agent privately to seek out and relieve people in distress; before visiting Europe in 1882 he left £10,000 to be distributed among Sydney charities. On 25 July 1860 he married Jane, the daughter of Thomas Hart, merchant, of Woolloomooloo. She died in December 1870, leaving one child, Eadith Campbell Walker.

Thomas Walker died on 2 September 1886 at Yaralla, Concord, Sydney. His will set aside £100,000 for the building and support of what is now the Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital at Concord; in seventy years more than 50,000 patients passed through it. The rest of his fortune he left in trust to his daughter.

## Dame Eadith Walker (1861-1937)

Born in Sydney in 1861, Eadith Campbell was the only child of Thomas Walker and his wife Jane. In 1886, at the age of 25, she inherited her father's fortune of just under £1 Million, an enormous amount at the time.

Eadith Walker had a wide range of interests and a sincere love of sport and animals. She was an executive member of what is now the RSPCA, vice-president of the Sydney

Rowing Club and patron of the Yaralla Cricket Club. She was involved with the Queen's Jubilee Fund, the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children and the Royal Hospital for Women, where she served as vice-president of the auxiliary in 1922.

Dame Eadith was a member of the council of the new Women's College at the University of Sydney for two years from 1893. Between 1895 and 1930, she offered an annual scholarship of £50 – known as the Yaralla Scholarship – to go to a high achieving student wishing to reside at the College, but requiring financial assistance to do so. To the original building fund she subscribed £1,000, to be paid over only when the fund had reached £4,000 by public subscription.

During wartime, through to 1920, Eadith set up a camp at Yaralla where she accommodated and cared for soldiers suffering from tuberculosis, 32 at a time. She donated a second home, 'Leura', for use by consumptive soldiers, and established a library at the Prince of Wales Hospital. Eadith was heavily involved with the Australian Red Cross Society, as a member of its executive committee, and the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia. She continued to support the Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital, founded with a £100,000 gift from her father, as well as various religious and educational institutions including her local church.



Dame Eadith Walker

Eadith Walker was awarded the C.B.E. in 1918 and the D.B.E. in 1928. She died at Yaralla in October 1937, leaving her £265,345 estate to the Walker Trusts.

## Further information

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