

SOME HISTORICAL LINKS BETWEEN RYDE AND CONCORD

Paper presented to the meeting of the Concord Historical Society

by Mr. A.W. Stacey on the 17th June 1975.

Divided by the river, Ryde was isolated for almost 100 years. It is natural that the two communities, Ryde and Concord, which are along the waterways are so much a part of Sydney's lifeline and should have much in common.

As early as 1788 Governor Phillip explored the riverlands in search of farm (food) land. James, Ruse and other settlers had become established at Rosehill in 1789, hence the 12 mile journey in heavy ships and rowboats from Farm Cove to Rosehill, which necessitated some landings on the way for both rest and meal times. Our areas were about midway on the journey and landings were often made on the various points on either side of the river.

FIRST SETTLEMENTS: There is quite a parallel between the first settlements of the two areas.

RYDE:

- a) Grants to 9 ex-convicts of 30 acres each by Governor Phillip at "Eastern Farms".
- b) Later the same year grants were given to 8 ex-marines at the Ermington Flats, called by Phillip "The Field of Mars". The former of these two areas became the foundation area of Ryde.

CONCORD:

In Dec 1793, Lieutenant Governor Major Grose made grants to:

- a) 6 serving members of the NSW Corps
- b) To 4 settlers who had arrived here as immigrants: Thomas Rose, wife and children (120 acres), Thomas and Joseph Webb (80 acres), Edward Powell (80 acres), Fred Meredith (80 acres).

It will be seen that both communities were made up of military and civilian personnel. However, the settlers at Concord differed from those at Ryde in that:

- (i) the military grantees were still in service;
- (ii) the civil grantees were not ex-convicts but free settlers; and
- (iii) the land grants were larger. However, in both settlements, some of the grantees found their land unsuitable and surrendered or abandoned their allotments.

NAMING OF THE AREAS:

In both areas, the settlements had variable names before reaching their final titles. There has been conflicting stories about the origins of names in both areas.

RYDE:

- (i) "Eastern Farms" - the name derived from the fact that the area was east of the farms at Rosehill. This name had little use.
- (ii) "Field of Mars"- this name applied to the ex-marine area on the Flats. Early settlement did not develop here and the name shifted its location later to a large area to the north of the Eastern Farm. It

was entitled the Field of Mars Common, which existed till about 1880. An area of about 5,000 acres where pasturing of stock, timber getting, and activities of dubious nature was carried on.

- (iii) “Kissing Point” - this was the name more commonly used for the first 50 years. Various uncertain stories have been given of the origin of this name. Two of them relate to picnic parties containing the Governor and members of the fair sex, when some of the latter were kissed by the Governor or kissed the Governor, in fun, whilst he had his after lunch siesta. The third story is that the name was derived from the fact that shallow water over the rocks at this point often caused the boats to touch or kiss the rocks as they passed over them.
- (iv) “Ryde” - the wife of the fourth rector of St Anne’s Church, Rev Turner, who had come from the Isle of White, was enthusiastic about the beauty of the landscape and proudly proclaimed it’s resemblance to that of Ryde in the Isle of White. This led to the adoption of this name for the area in the 1840s.

CONCORD:

- (i) “Liberty Plains” - no doubt derived from the fact that some of the early grants were to free settlers.
- (ii) “Longbottom” - “bottom” meaning lowland or swamp. An early bushland track was followed from Farm Cove to Rosehill and parties of convicts with leg irons were at times escorted along this track. The distance of 14 miles was too great for such parties to encompass in one day and so the authorities established a rest stockade midway. This was named Long Bottom and it existed north of where the Burwood bus depot now stands.
- (iii) “Fields of Concord” - soon abbreviated to Concord. Two theories exist about the origin of this name.
 - a) Phillip Geeves’ “Place of Pioneers” says it owed it’s name to a nice subtlety born of in-service rivalry between army and navy. Phillip had named the northern area Field of Mars (war), so Grose, in contrast, called his area of military and civil settlers “Field of Concord“ (harmony).
 - b) Paul Horne disagreed with this “Concord” theory and expounds the view that Grose, a stern military man, chose the name from that of Concord in Massachusetts where he served in the Royalist army and fought a battle in the American War of Independence.

STAGE 2 DEVELOPMENT:

In both Ryde and Concord, after 20 or 30 years, many of the initial small grants were acquired by later arrivals, some of whom had completed their terms of 7 years confinement and who became very successful farmers and business men, prominent leaders in their communities and builders of big homes, many of which still stand.

RYDE:

James Squires was the first big business man. He arrived here in 1790. He established a brewery near Kissing Point. He grew hops, had his own wharf, imported hops, acquired 15 farms and had 1500 acres when he died in 1822. His grandson, James Farnell, became Premier of NSW. The Farnell home , “Squireville”, is now part of St. Brigid Orphanage on Victoria Road.

James Shepherd arrived in 1795 and married a pioneer woman grantee, Ann Thorn. By 1823 also had 1500 acres and was a very successful orchardist. His home was “Addington” and his son Isaac became an M.L.A. in 1860 and his home was “Hellenie”, on the Plessey site. Sir Henry Parkes often lived there too.

Gregory Blaxland arrived in our area in 1806 when he bought “Brush Farm” from Darcy Wentworth and Simeon Lord. Blaxland was a wealthy English squire and brought much equipment with him from England. He had extensive land holdings west of Ryde and, with his brother John who established “Newington”, was

regarded as the founder of the cattle industry . Gregory's son-in-law, Dr. Thomas Forster, took over "Brush Farm" and his son William also became Premier of N.S.W.

James Devlin, a grandson of Squires, born in 1808, became a very successful business man and public benefactor and a keen member of St. Anne's Church congregation. He built a large home that's still standing. It was originally called "Ryde House", and later called "Willandra". John Small arrived here 1794, a head of a large family - many descendants prominent in public life.

Major Edward Darvall didn't arrive until 1840 but was a leader in the area. He lived at "Cleves" and built "Ryedale" which recently was demolished.

Edward Terry acquired "Eastwood House", originally connected with the Forster family of "Brush Farm" through its owner Routledge. Terry was Ryde's first Mayor.

Richard Rouse Terry acquired "Deniston" House from Forster and built a new stone mansion, now part of the Ryde Hospital.

Finally "Weemala" was another large home - A. W. Meikle and later Henry Moses - which later was to become Home for Insurables.

CONCORD:

Parallel prominent personalities and their homes.

Isaac Nichols - 1797 - ex-convict - prospered and when he died in 1819 had 600 acres. He built a home which he called "Yaralla". He married Rosanna Abrahams and had 3 sons. Of these, Bob became a leading member of parliament and was a contemporary of Parkes, Forster and Isaac Shepherd, and probably Farnell. He was a strong advocate of self-government and joined Wentworth in his advocacy. George Nichols, too, was prominent and is said to have been the first native born admitted to the Supreme Court to practise as solicitor.

Thomas Walker (No.1) - purchased Meredith's grant at Uhr's Point and built a large home, which he named "Rhodes". He married Anne, daughter of John Blaxland of "Newington". It can be seen that prominent people of Ryde and Concord would have mixed considerably socially.

John and Mary Gray, early settlers, built "Bray Grove" now part of Tulloch's buildings. The grandsons of John and Mary were prominent in Concord's first Council, Alf being the first Mayor.

Thomas Walker (No.2) - M.L.C. for Port Phillip - acquired the Nichols' lands and built the large home also named "Yaralla" (1857). There are abundant monuments to the success of this merchant prince who had made much of his fortune from land in the early development of Melbourne. The philanthropy of both Thomas and his daughter Dame Eadith is well known.

John Flavelle built a large home, "Wellbank", later demolished to make way for the Concord Council Chambers.

CHURCH & SCHOOLING:

Notwithstanding convict origins, many of the earliest settlers of both areas were respectable Christian adherents, believing in prayer and worship, and in these there were early links between the two settlements. In Ryde, it is known that William Henry, a South Seas Missionary, preached a service as early as 26th August, 1798.

Rowland Hassall carried on services and James Shepherd became active in the establishment of a church and school. The first school was opened on the 16th July, 1800 but Matthew Hughes had begun teaching

before that.

The Rev Samuel Marsden also ranged over a large area as churchman, magistrate and business man. He was connected with the establishment of St Anne's and he officiated at "Yarralla" at the wedding of Major Johnston and Mrs Abrahams, mother of Rosanna Nichols, in 1814.

It is also recorded that William Pascoe Crook, a Sydney preacher, conducted services at both Concord and Ryde. He wrote: "On Sunday 24th April 1814, I rode to Concord, preached and from thence swam my horse across about ¼ mile to preach to my usual congregation at Kissing Point."

With the establishment of St Anne's Church in 1826, people of Concord crossed the river to worship there. In 1827 the Rector, Rev Charles Wilton, urged the government to provide a punt so that settlers at Concord could attend church and their children attend school at St Anne's. Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General, was interested but decided against the route in favour of that at Bedlam Point.

Geeves writes (p.72 "Place of Pioneers"): As the 1830s drew to a close, the inhabitants of Concord helped to crowd the pews of St Anne's and their children learned the three Rs at the parochial school nearby. Many years later Mrs Fitzhardinge, daughter of James Devlin, wrote that: "A Norfolk Island pine was planted in the grounds of St Anne's in memory of Mrs Bray of Bray's Bay. They attended the church as did the Misses Walker from "Rhodes."

THE RIVER:

This was a barrier but also a traffic way. Early river boats to and from Sydney were used by residents of both Ryde and Concord, while rowing boats were used for visiting. We read of convicts being ferried across to work on the construction of Parramatta Road.

Apart from crossing to church and school, people also crossed to picnic grounds. Many from Ryde went to Correy's Pleasure Grounds at Cabarita, to Pig Tree Hill in the Mortlake area and to Levy's Folly picnic grounds, where the Repatriation General Hospital now stands.

During the latter half of last century, the people of the two sides of the river joined in the enjoyment of sculling races. From 1856 to 1891 stirring contests, over a course of 3 miles from Charity Point to Searle's monument, were held. Many of them were regarded as world championships.

Names well known were those of Searle, Stanbury, Towns, Kemp, Beach, Trickett, Hanlan and others. On 16th August 1884 a match sculling race between the Canadian champion Hanlan and William Beach, the "Dapto Marvel", was rowed for a stake of £500 before an estimated crowd of 60,000. Beach had many further successes and became an idol of Australian crowds. A monument in Cabarita park honours his memory. Of course, the headquarters of many of these contestants and their supporters were at local inns, no doubt on both sides of the river.

At Ryde, the Steamboats and the Royal were centres. From 1893 to 1935 the Annual G.P.S. Regattas drew large crowds to vantage points on both sides of the river. These races were between Blaxland Point (Kissing Point) and Gladesville Bridge (1½ miles).

HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT:

Though more distinguished on the Concord side, the development of hospitals from, or in, large homes has been a parallel growth.

CONCORD:

The Thomas Walker complex:

- (i) From the “Yaralla” home there is the Dame Eadith Walker Convalescent Hospital, established in her home after her death and eventually taken over by the government and made an adjunct of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital since 1938.
- (ii) The Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital, established in 1893 from a bequest from Thomas Walker, who died in 1886.
- (iii) The Concord Repatriation Hospital, built by the Commonwealth Government in 1941.

RYDE:

- (i) Here, what was formerly “Denistone House” owned originally by Dr Thomas Forster and rebuilt by Richard Terry, was acquired by the government after the death of the latter in 1898 and used as a convalescent home. It became Ryde District Soldiers Memorial Hospital in 1934 and its name was officially changed to Ryde Hospital in March 1975.
- (ii) “Weemala”, formerly the large home of Thomas Moses, was established as the Ryde Home for Incurables in 1906 and is now part of Royal Ryde Homes, which embrace Moorong and Coorabel.

RIVER CROSSINGS:

The first vehicular ferry between the north and south sides of the river in this area was the Bedlam Ferry, established in 1832. For over 50 years people suffered much inconvenience and annoyance from ill equipped means of crossing. In 1895 the Beecroft Progress Association agitated to the government for the establishment of a ferry between Ryde and Concord. One was commenced, a man power punt, from Rhodes to Ryde in 1896.

In 1907 this service was vested in the Ryde and Concord Councils. It was free by day but a charge was made for crossings between 11 pm and 5 am. A change was made in 1908 when no charges were made but the cost was to be borne by the Councils. The service continued until 1935 when the opening of the Ryde Bridge made it no longer necessary. A further punt service was established between Putney and Mortlake in 1925 and an efficient steam ferry operated for many years.

THE RYDE TRAFFIC BRIDGE:

In 1927 a large and representative meeting of people from both sides of the river was convened jointly by Ryde and Concord Councils to try to secure a bridge across the river in this area. Various routes were considered and the cost (£125,796) was a worry to ratepayers and councils alike. Agreement could not be reached by the Councils so, in 1932, Ryde Council decided to go ahead alone. It was constructed and officially opened by Premier Stevens on 7th December 1935. A toll was charged for its use and by 1949 the full cost had been recouped and the bridge was handed over to the Main Roads Board.

RAILWAY:

Further contact between the people of both sides was effected with the opening of the Main Northern Line railway in 1886.

HOUSING SCHEMES:

After World War II, when housing was such an urgent problem, both Ryde and Concord Councils were moved to do something. In Ryde the Council borrowed £2,750,000 to buy land and build homes, which were then sold to people on terms.

By 1952 a total of 960 dwellings were provided, and what was really a pioneer large scale local government housing scheme, proved a great service to the community

Shortly after Ryde's beginning, a State Housing Commission was set up and it resumed large areas of land in Concord. The Concord Council wished to follow Ryde's example but the government terms were considered too harsh and beyond the resources of the Council so it was left to the State Housing Commission which erected 200 homes in the area.

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