THE EDDISON FAMILY

Sub-Branch response to criticism of Southern Cross Club

Sub-Branch members may have noticed a letter to the Editor of the Canberra Times published on 18 November 2018 in which the author was critical of the CSCCC’s respect for the Eddison family.

Deputy President Brooke Thorpe responded to the letter but his response was not published. Brooke’s unpublished letter to the Canberra Times is published in full below.

From: Woden RSL Deputy President

Sent: Thursday, 22 November 2018 9:38 AM

To: 'letter.editor@canberratimes.com.au' <letter.editor@canberratimes.com.au>

Subject: The Eddison Brothers

Dear Sir,

Howard Carew’s letter (Canberra Times of 18 November titled “Lacking Respect”) in which he states that the Canberra Southern Cross Club “showed no respect for the Eddison boys. With apartments covering the area, they truly will be forgotten”. Nothing could be further from the truth. The CSCC has for many years supported, both financially and in kind, the Woden Valley Sub-Branch of the RSL. In turn, the Eddison brothers (and Eddison Park) are central to the ceremonial activities of the Sub-Branch. Further, the CSCC financially supported the Sub-Branch while located in the Phillip and in its move from there to Holder when the development of the Yamba Club area started to intrude on Sub-Branch operations. A marble tablet commemorating the Eddison Brothers is being held by our Sub-Branch while the area development is in progress following which it will be returned to the area.

Brooke Thorpe

Deputy President

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 **From The first 50 years: a History of RSL Woden Valley Sub-Branch**

See Eddison Day Club on this website.

See ANZAC and Peace Ceremony held annually by RSL WV SB at Eddison Park.

YAMBA AND THE EDDISON FAMILY From The Canberra Times, June 2003, and Recollections of Pam Yonge (nee Eddison) Compiled by Alex Reynolds

When John Francis Gaha, Federal Labor Member for Denison in the 1940s, remarked that Canberra was "a good sheep station spoiled", he was only referring to the site for the National Capital. He could never have imagined how the city would mushroom. Neither could the early 20th century soldier settlers of the Woden Valley. Barely 40 years ago, Woden Valley was pastoral land with many of the properties being soldier settlements established after World War I. One of these returned servicemen was Walter Eddison whose story is told in the Horizons Gallery at the National Museum of Australia. One of his six children - daughter Pamela - still lives in Canberra. An English farmer and fine horseman, Eddison spent seven years with the Hampshire Yeomanry before coming to Australia in 1913, ahead of his family, in searching for a better life. However, with the outbreak of war, he joined the 6th Light Horse in Liverpool by bringing his age down to 36 years. Number 61 Trooper Walter Herbert Eddison sailed with the AIF to the Middle East and Gallipoli with the 2nd Light Horse. He later served with the 6th Light Horse and was promoted 2nd lieutenant in 1916. Transferring to the 56th Battalion, he sailed to France as a transport officer. While serving in the Somme and Villiers-Brettoneux Lt Eddison was gassed and returned to England for treatment. He rejoined his unit in France for a short time where he was promoted to Captain. By 1918 he was back in England at Weymouth where he was granted leave for farm training at Brown Hill Farm. Many Australians waiting to return home took the opportunity to be retrained in various skills. By 1919 most Australian servicemen had returned home.

The Eddison family, now with four children, Tom, Diana, Jack and Keith, sailed for home on the Orveto, disembarking in Sydney in December 1919. Captain Eddison was discharged from the AIF in Sydney in January 1920. For several months the family stayed in a house lent to them in Bellevue but this proved to be rather an expensive pastime. Eventually they moved to Cooma, to a property, ‘Bobingarth’, where they stayed for a few months while “Pop” (the family name for Walter) managed the property. Meanwhile, a remarkable old English uncle bought a lowly old home, ‘The Oaks’, in Queanbeyan, situated between the railway station and the Molonglo River in the Federal Capital Territory, as it was called in those days, on the border of New South Wales. The house had been built by the convicts and was one of the many houses that Robert Campbell had built. The Eddison family settled in Queanbeyan where daughters Pamela and Marion were born in the early 1920s.

With a home established and two more children added, the family life changed. In the early 1920s land was opened up for returned servicemen with a ballot for land blocks and Walter Eddison was lucky enough to win block #28A, about 600ha, in the Woden Valley. The property was called Yamba, and had to be farmed from Queanbeyan. Walter travelled to and fro in a sulky and slept overnight in a little slab hut, very near to Taylor's Hill, or Mount Taylor. In 1926-27 the farmers were asked to live on their property, so a house was built and became the home for the Eddison family, now comprising six children all of whom were educated in Canberra. The three boys, Tom, Jack and Keith, attended Telopea, and then the Canberra Grammar School. The girls, Diana, Pam and Marion, attended St Gabriel’s and after 1934 the Church of England Girls’ School. They all rode their ponies to school. The family homestead was built on the site of what is now the Yamba Sports Club, using discarded timber from construction huts at the Girls’ Grammar School. In addition to his beloved horses, Eddison raised sheep and cattle as well as growing oats and lucerne. Canberra's Civic Centre was six miles away by horse. "As children, it seemed a very easy, open life," Pamela recalls. "We didn't worry too much about what was going on in town. Our world was what was going on at Yamba." Before Marion’s sad death in early 2004, she and Pamela recalled how adjacent properties would cooperate during harvest time, sheep marking, shearing and lambing. But there were irritations, such as regular visits from officials of the newly-formed Federal Capital Commission. It's hardly surprising that self-made men who had served their country, such as Walter Eddison, should have had little time for red tap

A problem many former servicemen discovered was that the land allocated was insufficient to support families. Yamba was 1500 acres and the family soon found it necessary to look for further land to add to Yamba. The Woden Valley community consisted of servicemen and their families who had either one block or bought one. They all had similar problems such as little money and the need for extra help with cropping and shearing, so they banded together and the valley became a happy place to live in, with wonderful support for each family.

Tom had always wanted to fly. He had no wish to be a farmer so he eventually went off to England where he was first with the Mounted Police in Palestine, and then with the RAF1 . Keith joined the RAAF in 1939 , and Jack, not wanting to be the Eddison who was left behind, joined the 8th Division and was taken prisoner in Singapore. He died in a POW camp in Japan.3 Pam recalls, “I left school at the end of 1939 as war broke out. I decided to help by staying at home as a Land Girl at Yamba. Marion and I always had jobs to do as kids, and I ended up full time with Pop, helping on the farm.

“Shearing was done at Yarralumla Woolshed. We would take the sheep through Melrose, Maguire's property, Tanner’s Illoura, and then come out onto the Cotter Road and thence to the shed, where they were yarded up overnight. Les McGuinness and his son had the contract and there'd be about six or seven other sheep farmers who had their sheep shorn there too. The journey was repeated six weeks later when we'd return to the shed for sheep dipping, leaving the sheep overnight, so we could get an early start dipping in the morning, and home before it was too hot,” Pam said. Wendy Townley, Marion Douglas and Pam Yonge on the site of the Yamba Sports Club, with one of the two remaining trees which graced the yard of the original homestead that stood on the site.

By the early 1950s, Yamba was becoming too onerous for Walter Eddison, now in his 80s. His three sons had been killed during World War II and he had to fight off bushfires in 1952 which had come perilously close to the homestead. Walter and Marion decided to move to Deakin. "Providing Pop had his horses - which he kept in a paddock behind the house - he was quite happy," daughter Marion says. Canberra was then only a city of some 30,000 people. Many of the officials and politicians who lived there had little regard for its development. Though it was the National Capital, its future direction was uncertain. It took a Senate Inquiry and subsequent establishment of the National Capital Development Commission for the city to develop. Development meant that pastoral lands would have to go. So, how did the Eddisons feel about this?

 "My grandmother wouldn't look over the other side of the hill," grand-daughter Wendy Townley recalls. "Like many, she hated that the land was being built over." As a lover of horses, Walter was also concerned that development should not deny Canberra children a safe place to ride. "He felt Australia. owed a debt to the horse and campaigned for a memorial park for horses," Marion says. “The equestrian park near the Yarralumla Woolshed was his initiative. As was the replica statue of the Desert Mounted Corps erected on ANZAC Parade. Permission for this was granted on the day he died in 1966 at the age of 83.”

The house was sold prior to the Canberra West RSL Sub-branch (later Woden Valley RSL Sub-branch) commencing development of their new club facilities in 1968. A plaque at the Yamba Sports Centre now marks the former site of the Eddison family home. Marion summed up the Eddison family thoughts when she said: "Although Yamba is no longer our home, the land has given so much pleasure to people over the years as picnic and sports grounds. We like visiting there."

Addenda WALTER HERBERT EDDISON Walter Herbert Eddison will always be remembered for his efforts to have a replica of the Desert Mounted Corps Memorial of World War I.\* erected in ANZAC Parade in Canberra. He was also a strong campaigner for a replica to be erected in Canberra of a bronze memorial erected at the head of the Suez canal to commemorate the role played by the Australian Mounted Regiments in the fighting in Palestine and the Sinai Peninsula. For 40 years, he and his family were parishioners of St John the Baptist Church. Deeply saddened by the loss of his three sons in World War II, Walter Eddison had a memorial plaque placed close to what was his regular pew in St Johns.

Walter Eddison died on 15 April 1966 and a memorial tablet was unveiled by Mrs Eddison at a ceremony officiated by the Venerable Archdeacon Robertson who said “This tablet will forever speak of the sacrifice that not only your boys have made, but that you too made. It will be forever a witness to the fact that the men of this generation counted life but of little worth when the freedom of the world was at stake”.

\* The Desert Mounted Corps Memorial, more commonly known as the Light Horse Memorial, commemorates the men of the Australian Light Horse Brigade, as well as the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, the Imperial Camel Corps and the Australian Flying Corps who lost their lives in Egypt, Palestine and Syria between 1916 and 1918. Another replica is located in Albany WA.

SQUADRON LEADER LESLIE HERBERT "TOM" EDDISON DFC Joined the RAF in 1936 and graduated from Cranwell in 1937. He became a member of the Caterpillar Club as a result of parachuting from his Wellington after it was struck by lightning. After officially completing his first tour with No 214 RAF Squadron in May 1941, he elected to do one more trip. On his return from Germany his aircraft was shot down over Holland. Tom's DFC Citation read: “Squadron Leader L H Eddison No 214 Squadron - awarded 9 May 1941. This officer has always shown the greatest; enthusiasm in carrying out all operations against the enemy. His cheerful personality has given encouragement to less experienced crews on the station. He has set an excellent example and has afforded the utmost assistance to his Unit Commander. He has particularly distinguished himself in raids on Brest, Eindover and Hamburg.”

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT EDWARD DALKEITH "GRUMPY" EDDISON Joined the RAAF in 1938, graduating from Point Cook in 1939. He joined No. 1 Squadron and served with the Central Flying School until posting to the Beaufighter Officer Training Unit. After conversion training "Grumpy" was posted to No. 30 Squadron in New Guinea. There he completed 17 sorties before his aircraft was brought down by ground fire whilst strafing Lae airstrip.

PRIVATE JACK OSBALDESTON EDDISON Joined 2/20th Battalion 8th Division in 1939 and served at Halgrove, Ingelburn and Bathurst before leaving for active service in Malaya. Jack saw conflict in Port Dickson, Serembam, Mersing, Endau and Kota-Tinggi in and around the perimeter of the Tengah airfield. With the collapse of Singapore, Jack, along with many others was transported to Japan to work in the coal mines. Jack died of pneumonia and pleurisy at Nagetsu Camp at the age of 28.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/salute/community/eddison-brothers>

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/pamela-yonge-joins-a-new-crop-remembering-the-fallen-in-eddison-park-20140409-36ds0.html>

<https://www.archives.act.gov.au/repatandrabbits/walter-eddison>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/127230955>