

from the sea, Jenkins worked as a marine surveyor and became a Mayor of the Borough of St Leonards between 1886 and 1889.

Robert Thomson

Robert Thomson came to live in the house with his wife Mary in the late 1850s. He was prominent in the establishment of the insurance industry in Australia and was instrumental in the drawing up of the A.M.P. Act. Their first child, Anna, was born in the house.

Without historical evidence it is difficult to piece more together about the lives of the people who lived at Don Bank. It is apparent that most of the men who lived there were either professionals, public servants or businessmen. The women residents were listed as domestics or housewives and much less is known about their working lives except for their domestic chores and responsibilities.

FROM COTTAGE TO MUSEUM

After the death of Mrs White in 1974, negotiations began with the family to purchase Don Bank and open it to the public. In 1977, following a public meeting, the Don Bank Trust was formed. Combined with the efforts of the North Shore Historical Society and the Don Bank Trust, North Sydney Council set out to purchase Don Bank and preserve it as one of North Sydney's earliest surviving buildings. In the initial stages of the discussions on the best way to save Don Bank, there was talk of re-erecting it at another site in North Sydney due to the pressure on the site for redevelopment. However, this proposal did not proceed and North Sydney Council purchased the whole site and conserved the building with assistance from the newly formed Heritage Council of NSW (1977) and the North Shore Historical Society. The Council's purchase of the site was made possible by the sale of air space rights above Don Bank being transferred to other sites in the central business district. The site is listed on North Sydney Council's Heritage Inventory and is classified by the National Trust.

DON BANK MUSEUM

Don Bank is a community museum managed by North Sydney Council's Historical Services Department. Apart from the material fabric display telling the story of the construction of the house and its period styles and furnishings, the Museum features changing exhibitions and displays of photography, art and social history.

Volunteers assist with guiding and other tasks associated with the management and promotion of Don Bank and its activities. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer please contact the Historical Services Department at Stanton Library.

OPENING HOURS

Sundays and Wednesdays: 1pm - 4pm
The garden is open 7 days a week from 7am - 7pm
Appointments outside these hours can be made for group tours and class visits.

ADMISSION

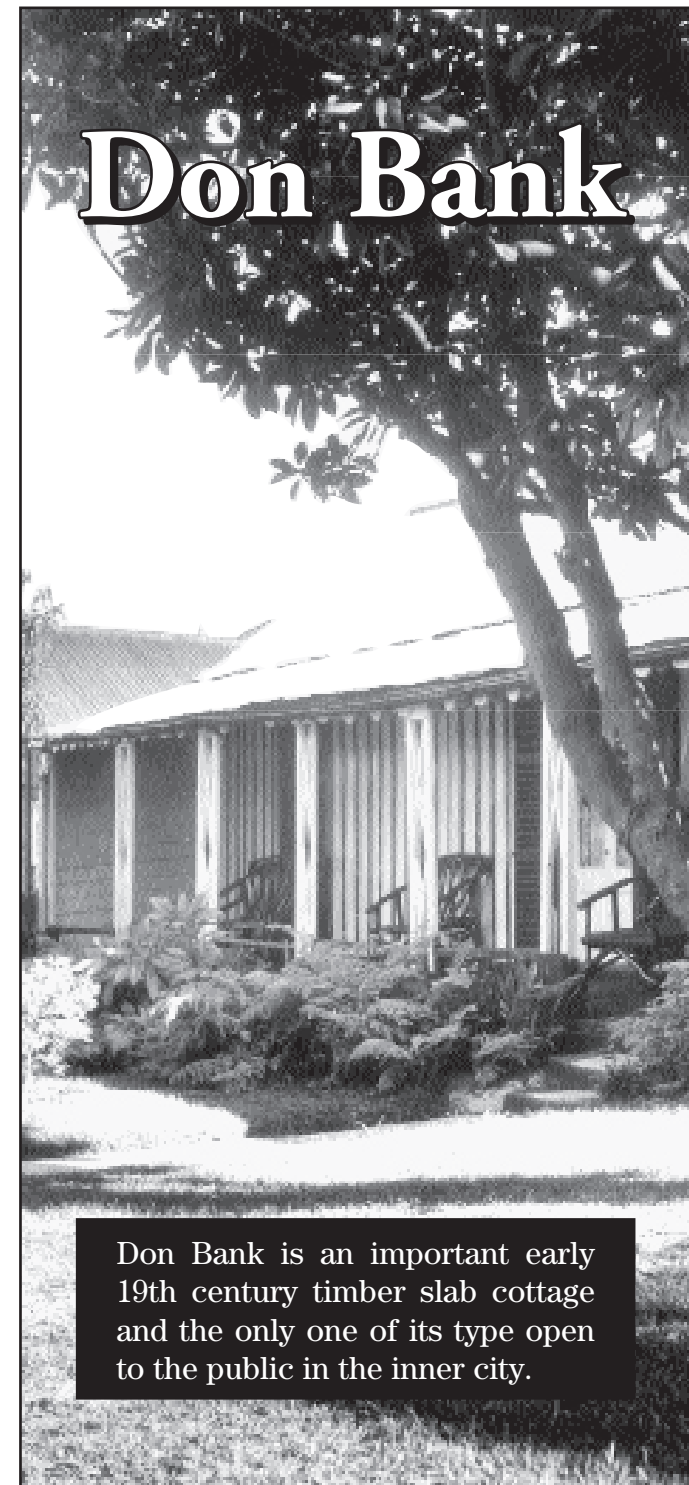
Minimal fee and concession prices available.

DON BANK MUSEUM

6 Napier Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Telephone: 02 9955 6279 (answer phone)

HISTORICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

STANTON LIBRARY
234 Miller Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Telephone: 02 9936 8400



Don Bank is an important early 19th century timber slab cottage and the only one of its type open to the public in the inner city.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Don Bank is an early 19th century vernacular timber slab cottage and the only one of its type open to the public in the inner city.

Originally a four-room cottage, it is not known when the oldest parts of the house were first built. However, there is some evidence which suggests that a house may have existed on the site before 1854. Records do reveal that by 1854 the land was occupied by a four-roomed cottage with detached iron outbuildings, known as "St Leonards Cottage". It was located on a new subdivision of the Wollstonecraft estate, a large area of land granted to Edward Wollstonecraft in 1825, which extended from what is now the suburb of St Leonards to the harbour foreshores.

From 1854 until the early 20th century the house underwent many extensions and renovations. The iron buildings were incorporated into the house and later removed. An iron roof was placed over the timber shingles. Rooms were added on either side of the older four roomed cottage. The cottage was transformed through these changes into a substantial house and by the turn of the 20th century it had acquired a form similar to the one it has today.

DON BANK'S INTERIOR

Interior decoration and building fabric also changed as the house expanded during the 19th and 20th centuries. These changes, determined by the needs and tastes of its different owners and residents, used several period styles ranging from the late Victorian to the Edwardian to the 1930s. Through its changing history the house reflected the growing prosperity of the region and its inhabitants, and the development of the north shore as a rural retreat from Sydney to a distinctive suburban area.

The name of the house also changed over time from St Leonards to Don Bank. It appears this change took

place sometime around the turn of the 20th century for reasons which remain unclear, but may relate to the White family's time of ownership.

The changing styles and fabrics of the house are illustrated in the permanent display panel in the Don Bank room. In other parts of the house, particularly the two rear bedrooms and the hallway, they are evidenced by the original floors, and by interior fittings such as windows and fireplaces.

The light fittings throughout were chosen to match the rooms they illuminate. In the drawing and dining rooms the lights are replicas of gaslight fittings. During the process of electrification of lighting in the early 1920s many homes economised and used their gas fittings to house the new electric light. The lower level of light from these pendants reflect the way homes used to be lit as opposed to our brighter approach today. In the hallway, paint scrape evidence revealed the original colour on the walls and the colour is based on this evidence. The kitchen features traditional colours complete with a dado line and lime wash around the old fuel stove.

THE GARDEN

In an advertisement appearing in 1854, St Leonards Cottage is described as having "grounds in front of the cottage which are delightfully laid out and planted with the choicest fruit and shrubs". During the 19th century the garden was extended from the area in front of the house to include the ground next door on the southern boundary. The garden now occupies the site in front of the house and the southern side has been built over with a modern office complex and car park.

Only a few of the original plantings survive today. The most outstanding feature is the fine magnolia grandiflora which dominates the garden directly in front of the house. Due to the surrounding large-scale developments the garden is constantly under pressure,

but with careful tending and plant selection we have maintained it as a Victorian-style garden. The grounds are open daily from 7am to 7pm and used regularly as a place of rest and relaxation in an otherwise busy and crowded central business district.

WHO LIVED IN THE HOUSE

The White Family

A house's history cannot be told without telling the story of who lived within its walls. Don Bank has been home to mainly middle class and working class people since the mid-19th century. Some of its residents only lived in the house for a year or two; others spent most of their lives at Don Bank. It is due to the long ownership and occupation by the White family that Don Bank remains standing and not another redeveloped site. According to Mrs Helen (Nell) McDermott (granddaughter to James White, who bought the property in 1903) "before James White married Joanne Grotty they used to walk around North Sydney and go past Don Bank... Grandmother really loved the place and Grandfather said when we are married I am going to save up and buy that place for you". James White did eventually purchase Don Bank, but at that stage Mrs Joanne White felt she was too old and frail to move from their James Street address. Mr James White let the house until 1914 when his son, Thomas and his wife, Catherine, took up residence. The Whites raised three daughters at Don Bank. After Thomas died, and after two of the daughters, Gwendoline and Helen (Nell) subsequently married, Catherine and her other daughter, Kathleen, lived at Don Bank until Catherine's death in 1974.

Captain Benjamin Jenkins

Captain Jenkins bought the house after he retired from sea life in the 1870s. For a short time he lived in the house with his wife; but after her death he shared the house with his niece, Ethel, and her husband, Albert Lester, a dentist. Following his retirement