

Concord Repatriation General Hospital Redevelopment (Concept & Stage 1)

Background to my submission

For a great many years, I have been a resident of The Astor, an apartment building on Macquarie Street in Sydney completed in 1923.

Several past residents of The Astor were connected to the hospital:

- Dame Eadith Campbell Walker spent her final years there.
- Fred James did important voluntary work for disfigured service men and women at the Hospital during World War 2. He had moved into Dame Eadith's unit at The Astor after her death in 1937. He was an extremely skilled cosmetician who had been personally trained by Max Factor and who had made-up many Hollywood "greats" for films, including Marlene Dietrich.
- Jean Garling (1907–1998), who I knew, was an Australian author, dancer, and supporter of dance and the performing arts. She left her whole estate to the Library. She studied physiotherapy at the University of Sydney. She worked as a masseuse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital before serving as a physiotherapist in the Australian Army Medical Women's Service in Darwin during 1941 – 1942, holding the rank of Lieutenant. As a civilian she subsequently worked at the Concord Repatriation General Hospital.
- Several other residents of The Astor worked at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital during the time it was managing the Dame Eadith Campbell Walker Hospital.

I am researching the extraordinary life work of Fred James (successively a chiropractor, singer, actor, cosmetician, and businessman), and my research to date leads me to some comments on the proposals.

Buildings and construction work at Concord

From reading the Historical Heritage Assessment, it seems that there has been no check of the records in the National Archive. In relation to the design and construction of facilities, the records are extensive, though I have not sighted them.

I also note that there is no reference to Zeny Edwards' recent book on John Sulman.¹ It contains a chapter on Sulman's work on the Thomas Walker Convalescent Hospital along with references.

I request a thorough check of these records before any work commences so that there can be the best possible interpretation and photographic record.

¹ Zeny Edwards, 2017, *A Life of Purpose: a Biography of John Sulman*, Longueville Media.

Museum

In my opinion the proposed museum is a great idea and important, especially in relation to the years leading up to, and including, World War II. One of the items that I would like to see in the museum is a copy of the oral record of Fred James, which the National Film and Sound Archive holds. In part of the 1977 interview, Fred talks about his work at Concord and the subsequent request by the Max Factor company for him to travel to Los Angeles (during the war) to continue this work with American disfigured service men and women, and his description of this war work.

Another subject to which I want to see a museum commitment is a celebration of the philanthropy and public service that created the hospital and made it succeed. In my opinion hospitals today suffer from government “crowding out” (this is important economics jargon, please look up in Wikipedia). In the past The Astor was full of philanthropists and persons dedicated to public service, but today we seem to fall far short of the values of our predecessors.

I request consideration of an expanded museum focussing on the development of the site, architectural innovation, philanthropy, the hospital’s war work, and the contributions of volunteers.

John Freeman

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