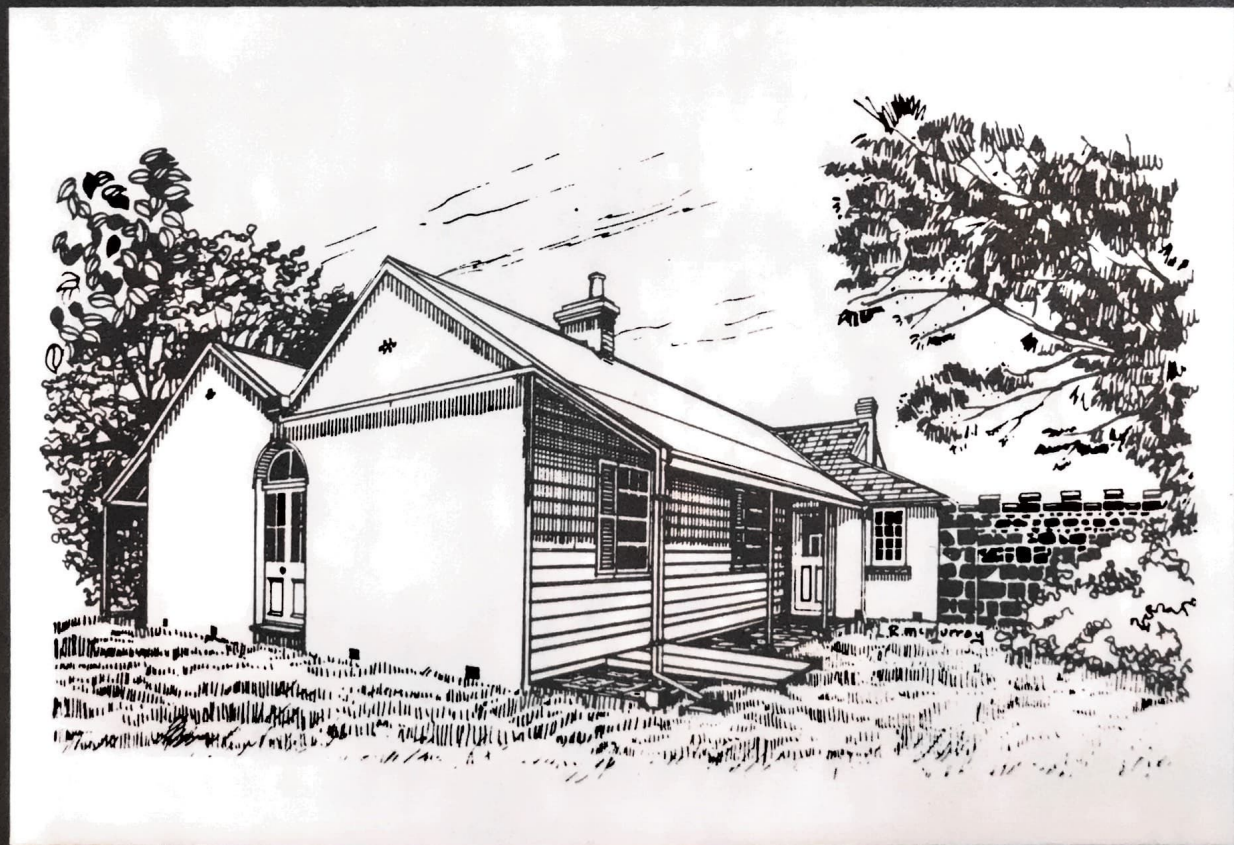


# THE SANDRINGHAM HISTORICAL SERIES

No. 2

## BLACK ROCK HOUSE

Built for Charles Ebden in 1856



PRICE:



*CHARLES HOTSON EBDEN  
1811-1867*

# **BLACK ROCK HOUSE**

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### *Other publications in Sandringham Historical Series:*

**"The First People of Black Rock  
– The Bunurong Tribe of Aborigines" – No. 1**

**"HMVS Cerberus" – No. 3**

## THE TIMES AND THE LOCALITY

When Black Rock House was being built in 1856 for Charles Hotson Ebden, Victorian parliamentarian and leading citizen, the settlement on the Yarra River known as Melbourne was only twenty one years old, the State of Victoria five years old and it was five years since gold was discovered in the colony.

By this time (1856) settlers had spread through the country to the south-east of Melbourne with their livestock and occupied large tracts of land as far down as the Mornington Peninsula.

The earliest white settler in the near vicinity of Black Rock House was J. B. Moysey, who in the mid-1840s obtained a government lease over five square miles (eight sq. kilometres) of land. He called his "run" Beaumaris. Following Port Phillip's severance from New South Wales there was a termination of leases and the land was divided into "portions" of sizes averaging under a hundred acres (about forty hectares) and was auctioned by the government. Two of these portions and a part of a third totalling 122 acres (or about fifty hectares) were eventually acquired by Ebden.

Ebden's few white neighbours were mostly market gardeners who had cleared modest sized areas for growing their vegetables and there still remained wide tracts of virgin soil and heathland. Other people in the locality were the peaceable Bunurong tribe of natives based at Mordialloc who visited farms in the area.

## C. H. EBDEN

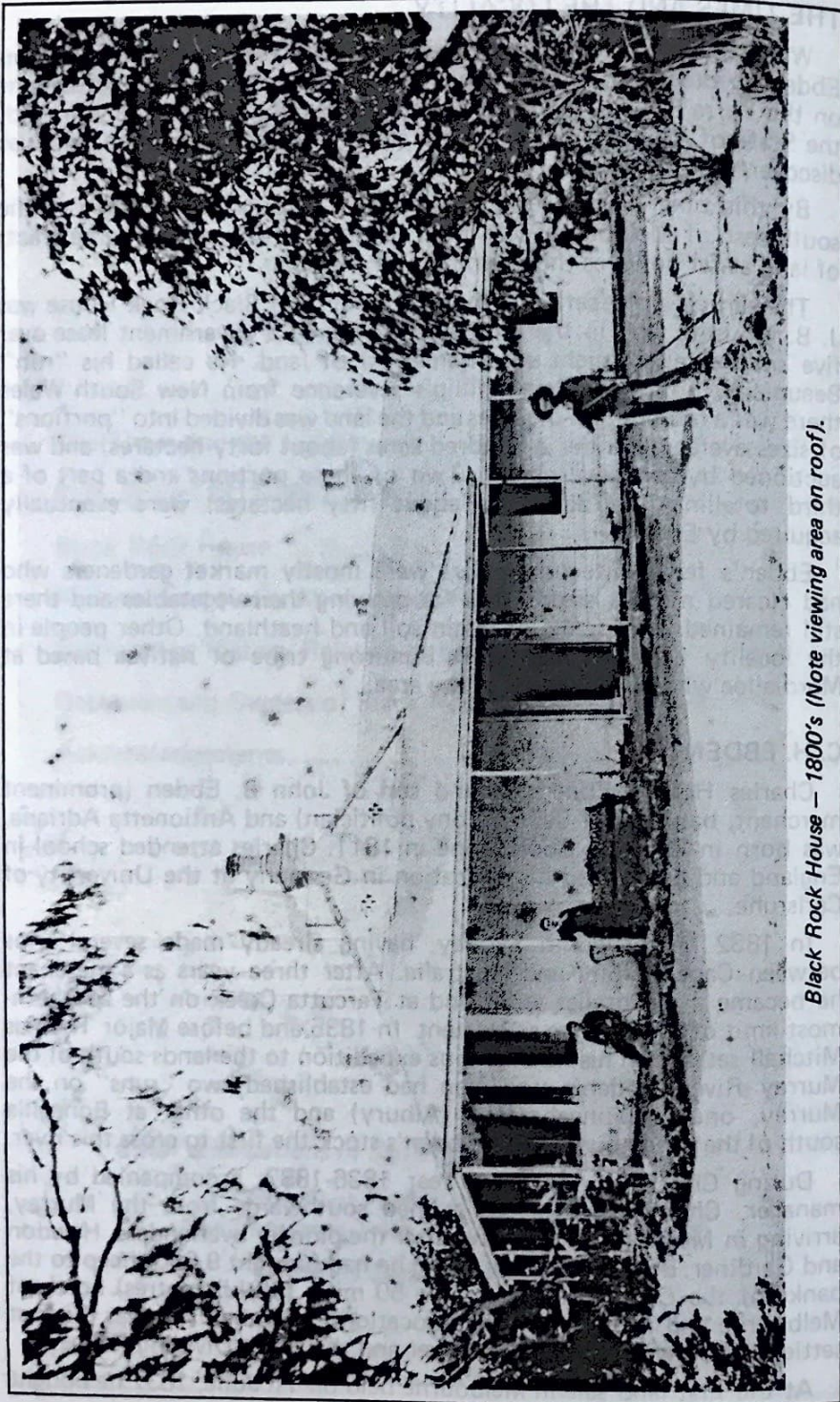
Charles Hotson Ebden, second son of John B. Ebden (prominent merchant, banker and Cape Colony politician) and Antionetta Adriana, was born in Cape of Good Hope in 1811. Charles attended school in England and completed his education in Germany at the University of Carlsruhe.

In 1832 he settled in Sydney, having already made several trips between Cape Colony and Australia. After three years as a merchant he became a pastoralist with land at Tarcutta Creek on the southern-most limit of the existing settlement. In 1835 and before Major Thomas Mitchell set out on his now famous expedition to the lands south of the Murray River, Ebden's stockmen had established two "runs" on the Murray, one at Mungabareena (Albury) and the other at Bonegilla south of the river, thus making Ebden's stock the first to cross this river.

During Christmas and New Year 1836-1837, accompanied by his manager, Charles Bonney, he pushed southwards from the Murray, arriving in Melbourne a few days after the pioneer overlanders, Hawdon and Gardiner. By the following spring he had brought 9,000 sheep to the banks of the Campaspe River some 50 miles (80 kilometres) north of Melbourne and named his chosen location Carlsruhe. This was the first settlement between the Murray River and the Great Dividing Range.

At the first land sale in Melbourne held on 1st June, 1837 he bought





*Black Rock House — 1800's (Note viewing area on roof).*

for a total price of 136 pounds, three blocks of land on the west end of the newly surveyed Collins Street. These were located between Queen and William Streets and each extended to a "back lane" subsequently called Little Collins Street. Two years later he sold the blocks for 10,244 pounds.

He sold Mungabareena in 1837, Carlsruhe in 1840 and Bonegilla in 1851 and lived in Melbourne, eventually in a mansion at the east end of Collins Street described as a Graeco-Egyptian building with a two storey portico, later the home of Dr. L. L. Smith, well-known in Victorian Melbourne. Although by 1851 he had sold his earlier pastoral holdings, he maintained interests in this direction. Between 1854 and 1861 he controlled 500,000 acres (about 200,000 hectares) in northern Victoria. He married Tamar, daughter of Archdeacon Harding of County Cork, Ireland in the 1840's.

Ebden's political career extended over eighteen years. Three times, 1843, 1848 and 1850, he was elected as a Port Phillip district representative in the Legislative Council of New South Wales. With the establishment of Victoria as a separate colony he was elected to the first parliament in 1851, became Auditor-General, but resigned in 1852 through disagreement on policy. After a visit to England between 1854 and 1856, he stood for election to the first Legislative Assembly but was unsuccessful. Next year, however, he was elected as member for Brighton and was Treasurer in the Haines Ministry. During this period he negotiated with Baring's Bank for a seven million pound loan to build railways, but just prior to the final stages other arrangements to obtain the money were made. Following the 1859 elections, he declined on policy grounds to join the Nicholson Ministry.

In the middle of 1861 he resigned from parliament and departed overseas. He spent the next six years in London and Cape Colony. According to Mrs. Mary Cullinane (see next section on Black Rock House) the reason for departure overseas was education of his children.

While in London Ebden suffered severely from asthma, in 1867 he returned to Melbourne and died on the 28th October at the Melbourne Club. He was survived by his wife, son and two daughters, one other son and a daughter having died at birth.

Not having been endowed with the type of eloquence and quickness of thought which score points in the parliamentary arena, he was nevertheless a man of clear and logical thought. His steadfastness to principles obliged him on a number of occasions to resign from his positions. He had been active in the separation and anti-transportation movements, in votes for pastoral tenants, in helping William Westgarth introduce German immigrants and was a founder of the Melbourne Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum, the Constitutional Association and at different times president and secretary of the Melbourne Club. He was chairman of directors of the St. Kilda and Brighton Railway Company and a local director of the Bank of New South Wales and was associated

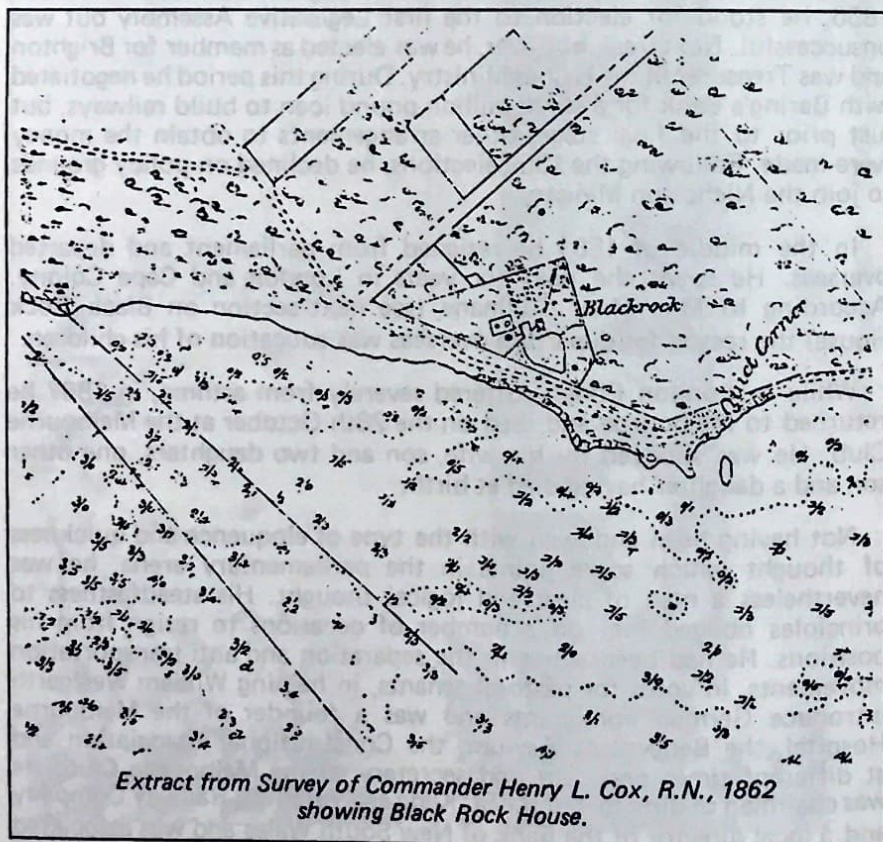


with several commercial failures – the Melbourne, Mt. Alexander and Murray River Railway and also the Port Phillip Bank.

An affected and pompous form of dandyism was embodied in the person of Charles Ebden. He was widely mocked for his affectation of manner and speech. His complacent lament, *"I fear I am become disgustingly rich"* created notoriety. Ebden had something of the ripe vulgarity of the Regency, something of the heavy Victorian swell. He too had a black servant, who mimicked his master and diverted contemporaries by declaring, *"I'm going home to England, directly."* Ebden rather fancied his epigrammatic powers, and when a stranger asked if he was related to the great Mr. Ebden he replied *"I am myself that happy individual."* He was considered by one of his contemporaries, George Arden, to be exceptionally gentlemanly in personal appearance. However, when occupied with his country activities, he grew a beard and dressed informally in direct contrast with his reputation of dandyism.

– Extracts from *"Port Phillip Gentlemen"* (Paul de Serville).

At his funeral more than 100 carriages followed the hearse, reflecting the esteem in which he was held by his many fellow citizens with whom he worked in so many diverse activities.



Extract from Survey of Commander Henry L. Cox, R.N., 1862 showing Black Rock House.

## BLACK ROCK HOUSE

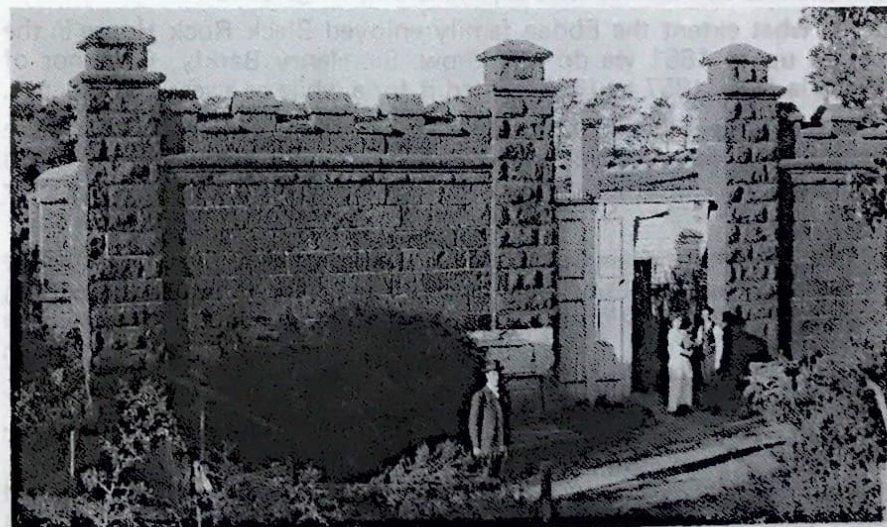
In April 1854, Ebden bought two lots of land totalling 112 acres (about 50 hectares) adjoining the eastern shore of Port Phillip Bay, in the southern part of Brighton, in the locality already described. Later in 1856 a start was made to build, on Crown portion number 29 of 38 acres (about 16 hectares), which adjoined Crown portion number 30 of 74 acres (about 30 hectares), a house for holidays and recreation at some distance but not unduly far from Melbourne.

Although the names of Clausen and Becker have been noted by journalists as having "carried out the work" or as being the architects it has not been possible to authenticate these assertions. Probably there was no recognised architect. The origins of the designs for the T-shaped living quarters and the rectangular courtyard with stables, farrier's area and the possible dining-ballroom area (marked caretakers quarters in plan) have been subjects for conjecture.

The living quarters of six rooms and long wide hallway were built with brick and timber walls and slate roof. Underneath the two northernmost rooms is a large cellar, while a verandah surrounds the house on three sides.

The courtyard is located some 40 feet (about 12 metres) west of the living quarters and a wall extending across this distance may have supported a pergola or roof for a walk-way between the two buildings. The rock for the high courtyard walls was quarried on the beach at nearby Quiet Corner. The tradesmen for the various operations have been named as –

- |             |   |                         |
|-------------|---|-------------------------|
| Rock miner  | – | John Harty              |
| Stonemasons | – | John and Patrick Barrow |
| Carpenter   | – | James Horan             |



Courtyard Gates – early 1900's.





*Black Rock House. Believed to be early 1900's.*

These names were passed down by Mrs. Mary Cullinane (who, as Mary O'Neil, was in 1856 the fifteen-year old daughter of Ebden's steward, John Lawrence O'Neil) to her daughter, Eillie Cullinane and recorded by the journalist, Donald Macdonald. O'Neil the steward is said to have lived with his family on the site from about 1856 with some sort of supervisory responsibility in one of the many tents erected as temporary dwellings for the workmen.

It is unlikely that both buildings were substantially completed before 1858, but the living quarters may have been. The gardens around the house and extensive driveways were probably designed, formed and planted by John Canterbury, a Melbourne gardener.

To what extent the Ebden family enjoyed Black Rock House in the period up to 1861 we do not know. Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of Victoria from 1857 to 1863, rented it for a while as a seaside residence.

While some of the surrounding land was sold, Black Rock House remained in the possession of the Ebden family until 1919, when it was bought by Mr. G. Stubbs of Hawthorn, who used it as a guest house for some years.

In 1927 Sandringham Council, despite a report from the City Inspector recommending demolition through its being unfit for human habitation, decided in favour of preservation because of its historical value. The owner from 1931-37, Professor (later Sir) Peter MacCallum, did much to restore the buildings.

From 1942-1972 Black Rock House was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Nutting.

In 1974 the property was purchased by the City of Sandringham Council for \$66,000, of which two-thirds was provided by a grant from the Victorian Government. By 1974 the land area of the estate had

been reduced to about 20,000 square feet (approximately 2,000 square metres) and it had lost the frontage to Beach Road, with its handsome gateway and extended driveway. Council has acquired, with its handsome gateway and extended driveway. Council has acquired, however, one of the two adjoining properties, and may acquire others as opportunities offer in the future. Thus, in years to come, the unique outlines of Black Rock House may be seen again in an environment more closely resembling its original one, surrounded by pleasant gardens. The Council has been fortunate to have had two outstanding architects supervising the restoration, Peter Staughton, M. Arch., F.R.A.I.A. and Miles Lewis, B. Arch. (Hon.), B.A., Ph.D., F.R.A.I.A., F.R.S.A.

## ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ABOUT BLACK ROCK HOUSE

### EXTERIOR

The cast iron verandah columns are believed to be unique in the State of Victoria. Some of these were replaced during restoration.

Visitors will observe the sand finish applied to some of the exterior walls. This is an alternative form of finish used at an early stage of the history of the house.

The roof has been fully replaced in slate consistent with the original roof.

The paving slabs under the verandahs are of red Scottish sandstone. Many enquiries were made to procure more slabs from Scotland but this was unsuccessful. The slabs under the bedroom verandahs have therefore been replaced in slate approximating the colour of the original sandstone and an interesting comparison of the two types of material can be made where they join at the front door.

### INTERIOR

The elegant main rooms of the house consist of . . .

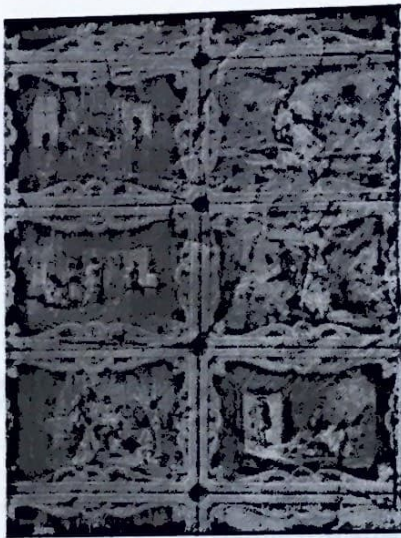
**Drawing Room:** The original window joinery and original shutters are exceptionally fine. The marble fireplace could be of original construction but may have been replaced when the chimney breast was widened at a later time to accommodate the bell wires, part of the mechanism of which is still located behind the wall.

**Main Hall:** Original research revealed the graining of the doors off the main hall as displayed.

**Dining Room:** This room is the sister to the drawing room and is notable again for the original windows and shutter joinery. On display is one of the early columns. The black marble fireplace is to be restored.

For all rooms the visitor will appreciate that the house was wall and ceiling papered throughout. The timber stud walls were boarded and then hessian was laid over the base paper which you see adhered to the hessian. Much research has been done into the papers actually used and researchers have extended enquiries overseas for patterns. The





Sample of original wallpaper.  
Scenes from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'.



Red flocked wallpaper originally  
used in dining room.

house is being papered room by room in patterns closely following the originals from Ebden's time.

The widths of the Baltic floor boards are noteworthy and are finished in a floor wax which would have been consistent with the original. Carpets were of separate pieces and not wall to wall type. Replacement pieces will ultimately be selected when the extent to which the house is to be furnished has been decided.

The four original bedrooms open off the second entrance passageway. The end rooms have had the fire places replaced to the original pattern as exist in the first two bedrooms.

The cellar is of special interest noting that the walls were built of iron sandstone which was also used in the stable wing and the linking wall. The lath and plaster construction to the cellar ceiling can be observed.

The small room opposite the north end of the main hall was once a closet bathroom and is now used as a storeroom for duty staff.

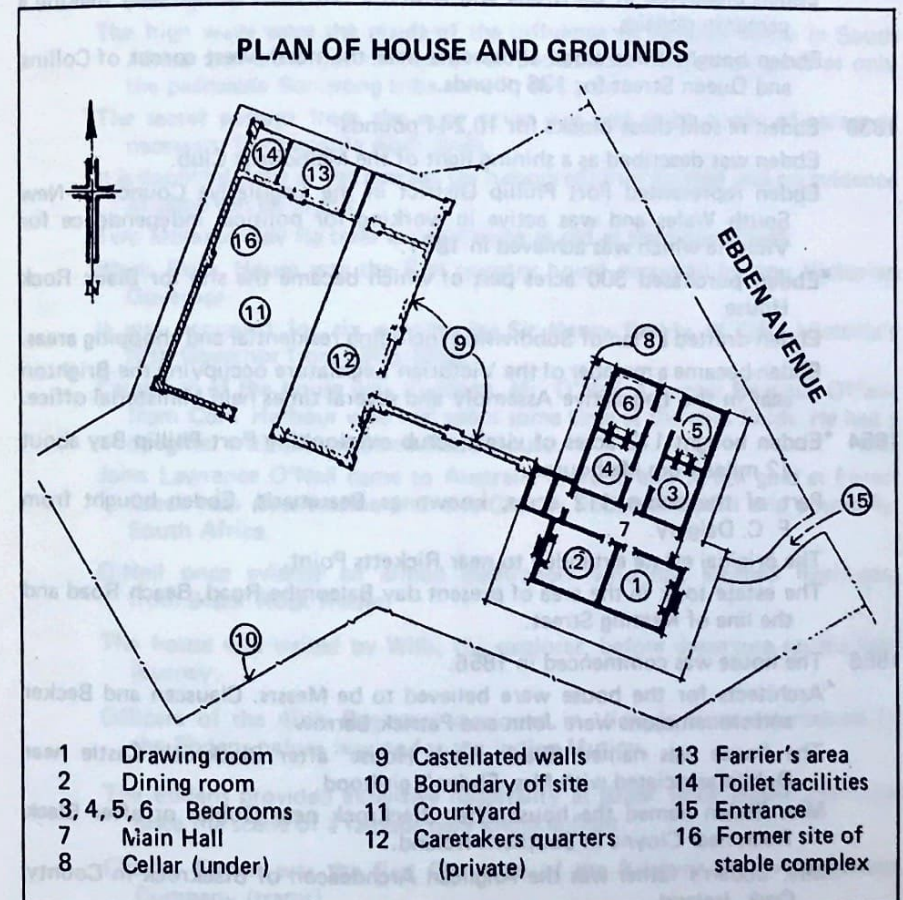
## GARDEN

Near the southern corner of the site at the frontage visitors will see the Moreton Bay fig tree. This was planted by Charles Ebden and it is located on a projection of the axis line of the main house.

The grounds surrounding the house have been severely curtailed by subsequent subdivision. The garden would have had aromatic plants and herb type species as well as the ever popular Moreton Bay fig tree previously mentioned. Visitors will appreciate that originally there was no front fence, however, the wide junction at the intersection of Second Street and Ebden Avenue shows the house off to great advantage.



Black Rock House, 1983.





## SUMMARISED HISTORY RELATING TO BLACK ROCK HOUSE

*The authenticity of some of the statements in the references is open to question. Particular doubt applies to items below marked with an asterisk.*

- 1832 Ebden arrived in Sydney aged 21 years.  
or  
1833 Ebden's father was a member of the Legislature of the Cape of Good Hope. After two or three years in business in Sydney, Ebden became a pastoralist specialising in sheep.
- 1836 Major Mitchell reported on the 'Australia Felix'.
- 1837 Ebden set out with his flocks only months behind Hawdon, Gardiner and Hepburn to blaze the trail to the Port Phillip District.  
\*After fording the Murray River (the Hume) Ebden settled at Sugarloaf Creek near Broadford.  
\*About two years later, Ebden selected an area on the Campaspe River near Kyneton and named it Carlsruhe after the University he had attended in Germany.  
Ebden prospered at Carlsruhe and within a few years he was busy making a career in politics.  
Ebden bought three small allotments near the north west corner of Collins and Queen Street for 136 pounds.
- 1839 Ebden re-sold these blocks for 10,244 pounds.  
Ebden was described as a shining light of the Melbourne Club.  
Ebden represented Port Phillip District in the Legislative Council of New South Wales and was active in working for political independence for Victoria which was achieved in 1851.  
\*Ebden purchased 300 acres part of which became the site for Black Rock House.  
Ebden drafted a Plan of Subdivision including residential and shopping areas. Ebden became a member of the Victorian Legislature occupying the Brighton seat in the Legislative Assembly and several times held Ministerial office.
- 1854 \*Ebden bought 112 acres of virgin scrub overlooking Port Phillip Bay about 12 miles from Melbourne.  
Part of the above 112 acres, known as Beaumaris, Ebden bought from F. C. Dalgety.  
The original estate extended to near Ricketts Point.  
The estate took in the area of present day Balcombe Road, Beach Road and the line of Keating Street.
- 1856 The house was commenced in 1856.  
\*Architects for the house were believed to be Messrs. Clausen and Becker and stonemasons were John and Patrick Barrow.  
The house was named 'Black Rock House' after Blackrock Castle near Dublin associated with Mrs. Ebden's girlhood.  
Mrs. Ebden named the house after Blackrock near Dublin or after Black Rock near Cloyne in Southern Ireland.  
Mrs. Ebden's father was the Anglican Archdeacon of Blackrock in County Cork, Ireland.

The house name was given to the bayside district surrounding the estate. Brown stone ramparts and steel spiked gates were modelled on Mr. Ebden's former home in South Africa.

Ebden brought some of his architectural ideas from South Africa where he had lived.

The foundation stone of Black Rock House was formally laid in September. Construction completed in 1858 using labourers at one pound per day due to the lure of gold fields.

40 workmen lived in 30 tents on the site.

Mr. Horan was one of these workmen and his son, Tom Horan, was later a member of Australia's first cricket team to tour England and subsequently wrote cricket articles for the 'Australasian' under the pen name 'Felix'.

Due to shortage of skilled stonemasons caused by gold strikes, the house could not be completed using locally hewn sandstone blocks but had to be completed using imported red pine timber.

\*The house was built by convicts.

The suggestion that the house was built by convicts is simply a legend.

\*The 20 feet high walls were for protection against possible attacks from Aborigines.

The high walls were the result of the influence of Ebden's house in South Africa and were not necessary for protection from Aborigines as only the peaceable Bunurong tribe were in this area.

\*The secret passage from the wine cellar was said to be a way of escape if necessary from hostile Aborigines.

It is doubtful if the secret passage (as rumoured) ever existed and no evidence of same can be found.

Two Moreton Bay fig trees are said to be as old as the house itself.

Black Rock House was the first country house occupied by any Victorian Governor.

It was occupied for six months by Sir Henry Barkly, K.C.B., Victoria's fifth Governor from 1856-1863.

Caretaker of the house was Irishman, Mr. O'Neil, a former Revenue Officer from Cork Harbour who had spent some time at the gold fields. He had a daughter with him at Black Rock House.

John Lawrence O'Neil came to Australia in 1850 and struck gold at Forest Creek near Castlemaine and met Charles Ebden on board ship bound for South Africa.

O'Neil once evicted an armed bushranger who had escaped from gaol from Black Rock House.

The house was visited by Wills, the explorer, before departure on his fatal journey.

Officers of the 40th Regiment stationed in Victoria were entertained by the Ebdens before leaving for the Indian Mutiny.

The Ebdens provided extensive hospitality at Black Rock House and it was once the scene of a famous bare knuckle fight.

Charles Ebden was the first Chairman of the Brighton-St. Kilda Railway Company (trams).



- 1861 Ebden resigned from the Victorian Parliament and was replaced by George Higinbotham (a future Chief Justice) who was later defeated in elections by Thomas Bent.
- 1867 After six years abroad, Ebden died within a few days of returning to Melbourne and was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery after a large funeral of over 100 carriages through the City streets.  
The house remained in Ebden's family for about 50 years after his death.
- 1919 Mr. G. Stubbs of Riversdale Road, Hawthorn, bought Black Rock House and used it for a guest house for some years.  
During the season, some 60 to 70 people were accommodated at Black Rock House.
- 1927 At its meeting on 23rd June, Sandringham Council favoured preservation of Black Rock House because of its historic value despite a report by the City Inspector recommending demolition because it was unfit for human habitation.
- 1929 Black Rock House empty and unfit for habitation.
- 1931 Professor (later Sir) Peter MacCallum of Melbourne University purchased the house in a very run down condition and immediately set men to work digging, weeding and generally reinstating the property.
- 1942 Black Rock House purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Nutting both of whom were aware of its history and keen to preserve it.  
Mrs. Eunice Nutting became Foundation President of the Black Rock Branch of the C.W.A.
- 1972 The ownership of Black Rock House was transferred from Mr. and Mrs. Nutting to a company formed of members of their family.
- 1973 The owners of Black Rock House applied to Sandringham City Council for a permit to demolish the building. However the building was purchased by the Council after negotiations with the owners.
- 1974- Restoration and renovation works being carried out by the City of Sandringham.
- Note:** The above history is not considered to be exhaustive.



## OCCUPIERS AND OWNERS OF BLACK ROCK HOUSE, 1856-1974

*Compiled by Mr. Terry Sawyer of the Department of Architecture and Building, University of Melbourne, from Moorabbin Rate Books (until 1917) and from that date from Sandringham - Black Rock Ward Rate books.*

PERIOD	OCCUPIER	OWNER
1856 - 1867	C.H. Ebden	C.H. Ebden
1868	Hogg	" "
1869 - 1870	Not recorded	Ebden Estate
1871	William Taylor	" Executors
1872 - 1873	Not recorded	" "
1874	Finley Campbell	" Trustees
1875 - 1879	John Mudie	" Estate
1880	J.D. Robertson	" "
1881 - 1882	Mark B. Mayhew	" "
1883 - 1889	John P. Brown	" " (John P. Brown?)
1890 - 1896	Not recorded	C.J. Ebden
1897 - 1899	Caroline Robertson	" "
1899	Robert James Oliver	" "
1900 - 1902	Anna Everell	" "
1902 - 1905	Mary Linacre	" "
1906 - 1911	Not recorded	Kennedy, Johnson & Thomson, Auctioneers
1911 - 1919	Muriel Ellen Russell	M.E. Russell
1919 - 1921	Emily Stubbs	Emily Stubbs
1921 - 1922	Dr. Denton Fethers	" "
1922 - 1923	Not recorded	" "
1923 - 1924	Caroline Wilson	" "
1924 - 1926	Not recorded	" "
1926 - 1927	James Kennedy Walker	Emily Stubbs
1927 - 1928	Not recorded	" "
1928 - 1931	Alfred Edgar Rumbold	" "
1931 - 1937	Prof. Peter MacCallum	Ursula MacCallum
1937 - 1939	Not recorded	" " Estate
1939 - 1940	" "	Russell Alan Hornby
1940 - 1941	" "	Gladys Bastow
1942 - 1952	" "	Arthur Clive Nutting
1952 - 1956	A.C. Nutting	" " "
1962 - 1972	4 flats, various occupants one of whom was Graeme O'Toole who has remained as honorary caretaker.	" " "
1973	" "	Nutting Family Company
1974	Graeme O'Toole	City of Sandringham



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Council gratefully acknowledges the preceding contributions by the following current and past members of the Black Rock House Sub-committee, and by Mr. P. S. Staughton, supervising architect for the restoration and renovation works. Comments by Mr. T. Sheehy on the draft of the First Edition are also acknowledged.

Mrs. Mildred Fowler — *"The Times and the Locality"*

Mrs. Honor Champion and Mr. Max Wilkinson — *"C. H. Ebden"*

Mr. Max Wilkinson — *"Black Rock House"*

Mr. P. S. Staughton, M.Arch., F.R.A.I.A. — *Architectural Notes about Black Rock House.*

## LOCATION

