

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

BARRACLUFF'S OSTRICH FARM



Images from top:

Mr and Mrs J. Barracluff with ostriches, undated.

Portrait of Joseph Barracluff, Alderman of Waverley Council 1907-1918, Mayor of Waverley 1914-1916.

A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet

Waverley was a remote and sparsely developed area in the late 19th century, particularly along the coastline. Diamond Bay on Old South Head Rd was mostly scrub and agricultural land, with Peel's Dairy being the major feature. By 1889 there was a new kind of livestock in town when Joseph and Jane Barracluff purchased property at South Head to start their ostrich feather business.

THE BARRACLUFF'S

Joseph Barracluff was born in Grantham, Lincolnshire in 1861 and died at his ostrich farm on 23 November, 1918 at the age of 57. He is buried in Waverley Cemetery, section 11, grave 667. On his death he was survived by his wife Jane Barracluff (née Kibbler) and sons Joseph Jnr and William Robert.

There is little detail about

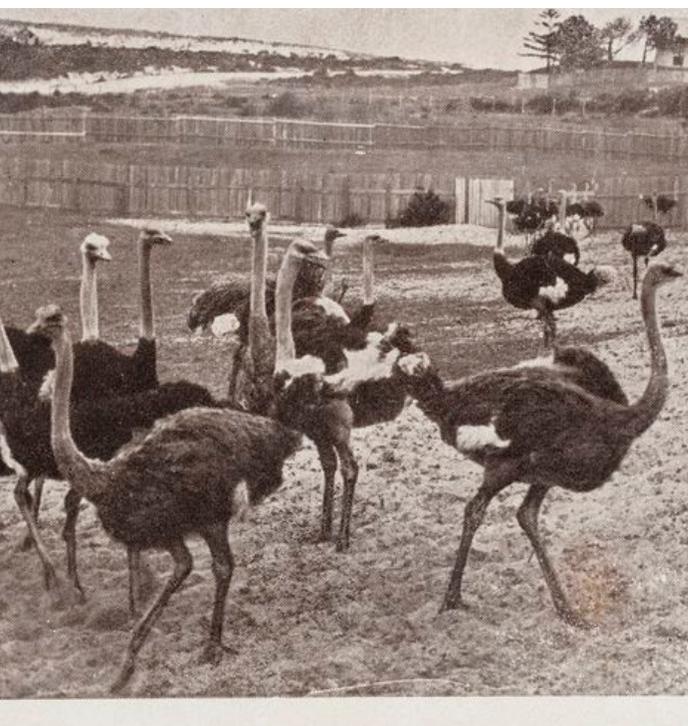
Barracluff's early life, though there is a romantic family history tale about his birth in Southern Russia. In 1884 he and his wife immigrated to Australia, arriving and settling in Sydney. Little is known about Jane Barracluff, however some reports describe her as being South African. He established himself in business, selling feathers in a small shop in Elizabeth Street Sydney opposite the old Devonshire Street Cemetery, now Central Railway Station.

In 1889 Joseph and Jane Barracluff purchased a property at South Head to start their own feather business, one of the earliest in Australia. Sometimes described as the first, that honour instead goes to Mr Officer's ostrich farm at Murray Downs, Victoria, established in 1875. Despite this, Barracluff's



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Images from top:

Waverley Rifle Club, Joseph Barracluff centre front, undated.

'A view of the Farm'. Postcard advertising Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, Sydney, c. 1900. Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum.

Ostrich Farm was for many years Australia's show ostrich farm, with a high profile in business circles and in the media.

Joseph Barracluff had a long career in local government, serving as an Alderman on Waverley Council from 21 October 1907 until his death in 1918. He was elected as Mayor of Waverley between 1914-1916. Prior to his election to Waverley Council he was an Alderman for Watson's Bay, which fell under Woollahra Council. He was also the founder and captain of the Waverley Rifle Club.

THE BIGGEST BIRD IN THE WORLD

There are conflicting reports of where the Barracluffs sourced their ostriches. One story claims that the ostriches were imported from Port Elizabeth, South Africa. As the business developed Joseph Jnr reportedly travelled to South Africa to select birds to replenish the stock, and to pick ostrich eggs for hatching locally.

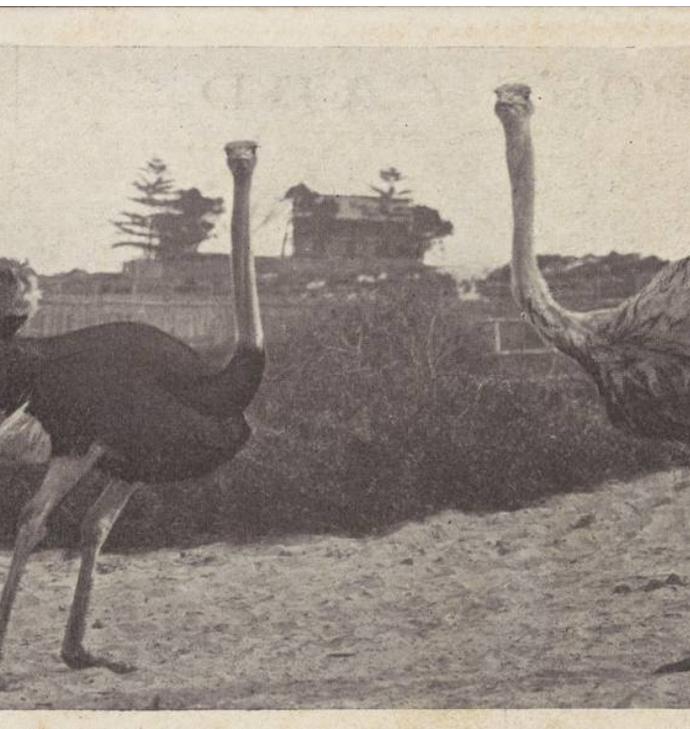
Other reports have the birds coming from Morocco and Egypt, being two distinct pure ostrich strains, which were crossed on the farm to make a more vigorous hybrid bird. By 1902 the farm had a flock of approximately 100 ostriches, the largest living species of bird.

In 1906 a runaway ostrich caused quite a stir at the farm. Newspaper reports describe a male ostrich becoming agitated by calves throughout the morning. At about 11am it bolted from the farm, knocking down the galvanized iron fencing and leading the pursuers on a merry chase through Dover Heights. With all the men, boys and dogs of Barracluff's Farm in hot pursuit, the bird ran itself to a standstill at 3.30pm when it collapsed at the Royal Sydney Golf Course in Rose Bay. Exhausted and injured, it took four men to lift the ostrich into a cart to carry it back to the farm.

After examination the bird was pronounced to be fine although in need of stiches and cooling down. Barracluff himself

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Images from top:

The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, 1901. Image courtesy of The Auckland Weekly News.

The Duke and Duchess, Postcard advertising Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, Sydney, c. 1900s. Image courtesy of the National Museum of Australia.

performed the field surgery, putting several stitches into the cut on its neck and believed that "with a little rest it would recover."

UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE

The business's high profile meant it attracted a lot of attention and interest, culminating in a visit to the farm in 1901 from His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cornwall and York, (later King George V) and Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall and York (later Queen Mary). The Duchess was presented with an ostrich feather fan with a gold base, containing feathers 68 cm long and 38 cm wide.

After that visit Barracluff's Ostrich Farm was permitted to use the words 'Under Royal Patronage' and this appears on their stationery from this date. In honour of their visit two of the pride of the flock were renamed, with Mike becoming 'Duke' and his mate becoming 'Duchess'. Photos of these two ostriches appear on the farm's promotional postcards.

Barracluff's Ostrich Farm also carried the insignia of the Commonwealth of Australia and the words 'By Special Appointment to His Excellency the Governor-General and His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales' on its letterhead. The farm's slogan was 'Fine Feathers for Fine Ladies'.

LOCATION, LOCATION

There are a number of theories about the 10-acre ostrich farm's exact location. At Joseph Barracluff's death his home address was listed as 'Ostrich Farm, South Head, Watson's Bay'. A park on the corner of Old South Head Road and Warners Avenue is named in his memory, however, this was not the location of the ostrich farm as is sometimes assumed.

According to a 1926 Water Board map, the farm was bounded by Kimberley Street in the north, County Street in the east and Kobada Street in the south. Other references have the farm located between Elvina Street and Norton Avenue, or between Military

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Images from top:

Ostrich feather fan ca. 1880-1920, Mrs Christian Rowe Thornett collection. Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum.

Ostrich egg ewer, undated. Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum.

Road, Old South Head Road and Ocean View Avenue running down to the cliff edge. Another reference has the entrance to the farm at the south end of Norton Avenue, on the left-hand side of the road.

During its operation locals often referred to the farm's location as 'Barracluff's Hill', however the farm was located in the suburb now known as Dover Heights.

OSTRICH FARM PRODUCTS

The farm appears to have been commercially successful, catering to the high demand for extravagant feathers for ladies hats, boas, fans and necklets. A small number of female staff were employed at the farm, under the direction of Jane Barracluff, to create the feather products. Joseph Barracluff was also very skilled, with a newspaper reporting that "To demonstrate the speed with which they could be treated, Mr. Barracluff once plucked three feathers, dyed them pale blue, curled and fastened them fan shape in 61 seconds."

The ostrich eggs, because of

their size and beauty, were prized as ornaments and were finely carved in great detail; the most elaborate of these were mounted in silver settings and proudly displayed as household decorative pieces.

The farm was open 7 days per week, including public holidays and it was possible to purchase ostrich feathers directly from them, with some advertisements claiming that patrons could even pluck their own feathers.

Patrons were advised to take a Watson's Bay tram to Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, but if they were unable to visit the farm would post or deliver feathers for free.

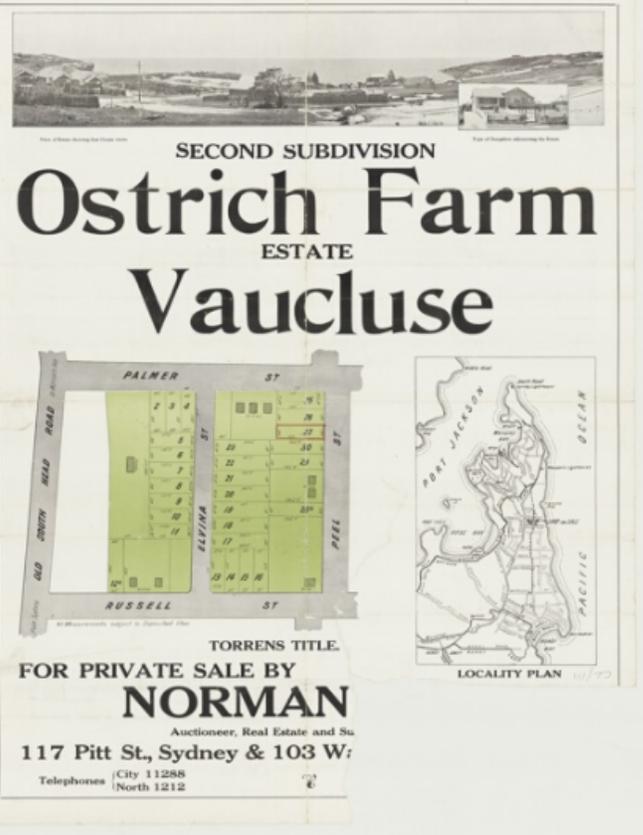
The farm advertised that it had 'the most beautiful feathers in the world, at the lowest cost, for sale at the farm only'. An ad for the farm appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald 10 January 1919

"We grow our own feathers, we pluck the plumes, dry, curl, finish them on the farm and trade direct with the public."

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In later years Joseph and Jane Barracluff set up a retail outlet for their feathers on the second floor of the Strand Arcade Sydney. Following Joseph Barracluff's death in 1918 the ostrich farm folded, with the land subdivided and sold in 1925.



Subdivision map of Barracluff's Ostrich Farm. Image courtesy of the SLNSW.