

Rock Lily Hotel

Named for the lilies, *dendrobium speciosum*, which once grew here.

Leon Houreux, a Frenchman, described as hotelkeeper, purchased the land at Mona Vale in 1886.

The hotel, which was built from yellow bricks, manufactured locally at Bayview, had two bay windows with a veranda between. It was operating as a hotel from 1886.

Leon Houreux, the first proprietor, covered the walls with murals, including one of Napoleon.

Situated close to the crossroad between the routes to Manly, Bayview/ Church Point, Newport/Barrenjoey and the route inland to Gordon, the hotel became a coaching inn where horses were changed.

Traffic recorded passing the hotel during one week in 1889: 59 passenger coaches, 125 private vehicles and 123 people on foot.

In 1913 hotel licence was terminated and since then the building has had a variety of uses including a butcher's shop, a nightclub and has been recently restored as a restaurant.

Memories

...'Many of those dining at this road house are completely unaware of its early history and as they eat, and drink wine and unconsciously gaze at the white walls around them, and see through the windows their shiny new cars parked on good paved roads outside, they never sense the shades of the past that must loom unseen all about them so that a faint ghostly jingle of coach harness must displace the purr of the 20th century motor car and the planes that soar above.

...Let us turn the leaves back 80 years to meet Leon Hereux in his early 30's still speaking English with the accent of his native France. Young, ambitious and energetic, we see him as a timber cutter in the scrub surrounding Mona Vale. He had a sideline – an illicit still which he worked on the banks of a scrub-covered creek.

From this activity he earned much more than from timber cutting. It provided him with the wherewithal to build the original Rock Lily Hotel, first of timber and then later of brick – as it stands today.

...Then Leon turned to the murals which were to bring world-wide fame to himself and his hotel for many years to come....Three of the largest were battle scene murals, depicting all the movement and violence of war....In the bar-room was a host of pictures, witty and Rabelaisian, which must have been amusing to the patrons of that era.It is a shame that the walls did not outlast the paintings which today would have been a valuable relic of the past.

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Within ten or twelve years so successful did Leon Hereux become that he ran his own line of coaches from Manly, where he set up livery stables on the Corso. Often on a Sunday he would don his white breeches and size 12 top boots to handle his best five-horse team himself. He was an awe-inspiring figure as he set them to an enthusiastic gallop up the hills, thrusting his beard into the wind and waving his long whip with Gallic abandon and throaty cries of "Yup yup" into the bush.

The peaceful somnolent air of the weekdays was dispelled at the weekend when it became the thing to do for the haute monde of Sydney to drive out and lunch and dine at the Rock Lily....The Rock Lily was more than a hotel, it was a landmark.

...The new owners, Mr and Mrs Roy Darly have remodelled the Rock Lily and have converted it into a road house.

Perhaps yet another generation may get the chance to look back that way; to look back with a twinkle in an eye to the old Rock Lily."

H C Chippindall, *Mona Vale: Its history and progress.*, 1952.

Reading

Timetable of coaches to Rock Lily, Bayview and Newport 1907

Monday to Friday

Leave Manly 10.15am, 11.15am, 4.15pm
Leave Bayview & Newport 6.45am, 3.15pm
Leave Rock Lily 7.15am, 2.15pm, 3.45pm

Saturday

Leave Manly 10.15am, 11.15am, 3.15pm
Leave Bayview & Newport 6.45am, 3.15pm, 6.15pm

Sunday

Leave Manly 10am, 10.45am, 11.15am
Leave Bayview 3.15pm
Leave Newport 4pm

"We feel quite prepared on reaching Rock Lily to do justice to the good things provided for us by the burly host of the Rock Lily Hotel. The menu is extensive and varied, quite equal to the best of our metropolitan cafes, and after luncheon there are quoits, skittles, swings and other aids to the digestion in the recreation ground over the road to which many of the visitors make their way. But we are bound for Bayview, and Harry the driver's "all aboard" shortly summons us to mount the smaller coach, which has been put on to convey us to our destination. The hotel is built on flat low-lying ground with a background to the westward of dark forest-covered hills. The landlord and his wife hail from La Belle France. He is somewhat expert in the use of the brush and visitors to the hotel cannot fail to notice the evidence of his skill in the numerous sketches which ornament the walls of the rooms"

George Ellis on visiting the Rock Lily Hotel c.1895

Further reading

P Gledhill, Manly and Pittwater, its beauty & progress, 1946.
History of the Rock Lily Hotel

Guy & Joan Jennings, Mona Vale Stories, 2007.
History of Mona Vale

Clive Lucas Stapleton & Partners, Rock Lily Hotel...Conservation analysis and guidelines,
1998.

History and significance.

D Jadwiga Mider, Archaeological investigations & recording at the Rock Lily Hotel, Mona
Vale, 1998.

Records excavations undertaken before site was redeveloped.

John Morcombe, "Victory of Vision over Venality", Manly Daily, 3/3/1999.

History and preservation

G Searl, Northern Beaches Journal, Vol. 3.

History and social significance

JSN Wheeler, "The Old Rock Lily Hotel", Manly Warringah Journal of Local History, Vol 2,
No.1, 1989. Article originally published in 1948.

Early history.