

*AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY - ONLINE EDITION***Hall, Eliza Rowdon (1847 - 1916)**

HALL, WALTER RUSSELL (1831-1911), businessman, and ELIZA ROWDON (1847-1916), philanthropist, were husband and wife. Walter was born on 22 February 1831 at Kington, Herefordshire, England, eldest son of Walter Hall, glover and later miller, and his wife Elizabeth Carleton, née Skarratt. Educated at Kington and Taunton, Somerset, he arrived in Sydney in 1852 with very little money. For a short time he was employed by David Jones, retailer, but soon left for the Victorian goldfields. At Ballarat at the time of the Eureka rebellion in 1854, he was said not to have been within the stockade, as was his brother Thomas. Walter moved on to Bendigo and the Ovens goldfields but had little success. For a time he ran a carrying service between Ballarat and Melbourne, became agent for Cobb & Co. at Woods Point and, in 1861, with James Rutherford and others, formed a partnership to take over that firm. Later Hall acted as its Sydney agent. He travelled extensively in New South Wales and Queensland to open new lines and on inspections. He left the firm in the mid-1880s.



Eliza Rowdon Hall (1847 - 1916), by George William Perry, c1867, courtesy of La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria. H18003. Image Details

Hall was already wealthy when his brother Thomas, who was manager of the Rockhampton branch of the Queensland National Bank, invited him to join the syndicate formed to develop the Mount Morgan mine. The Halls and their associates resisted nine attempts to jump their claim, two of which reached the Privy Council. On 1 October 1886 the Mount Morgan Gold Mining Co. Ltd, with capital of £1 million, was registered in Queensland. The mine yielded gold and copper worth over £19 million and paid £8,079,166 in dividends by 1913. Hall was a major shareholder, a director of the company and chairman of the Sydney board. He was also a director of the Mercantile Mutual Insurance Co. Ltd, and the Sydney Meat Preserving Co. Ltd, and engaged briefly with associates in unprofitable railway contracting.

Hall never attempted to make a splash in Sydney society, did not entertain lavishly, and was regarded as rather mean in this regard, but he liked 'to give the boys a good time' on his annual visits to Mount Morgan (which he continued until 1910). Irrespective of rank he welcomed employees at dinners and convivial gatherings and also entertained the Mount Morgan children, in whom he took a great interest. He gave generously to the town's educational and other institutions.

When in Sydney Hall seldom missed a race meeting. He was a committee-member of the Australian Jockey Club in 1873-1911; his horses included the Sydney winners: Garfield (Sires' Produce Stakes, 1884), Delaware (Doncaster, 1895) and Reviver (Champagne Stakes, 1899). When Reviver won the Metropolitan in 1900, Hall anonymously gave £1000 to charities. He also engaged in coursing. Benevolent and generous, he made large donations to public institutions and also helped individuals; many of his benefactions were anonymous, but not the £5000 he contributed to the Patriotic Fund during the South African War and the £10,000 which he gave to the Dreadnought Fund.

At St Paul's Anglican Church, Melbourne, Hall had married Eliza Rowdon Kirk on 15 April 1874. She was born on 26 November 1847 in Melbourne, eldest daughter of George Kirk, a Yorkshire-born butcher, and his wife Elizabeth, née Wippell, from Devon. George Kirk, after engaging in various pursuits, had acquired large pastoral interests in partnership with Richard Goldsbrough and represented East Bourke in the Legislative Assembly of Victoria in 1861-64. In 1887 Walter

and Eliza Hall visited England and remained away for over a year.

Wildfell, their home at Potts Point, Sydney, was a large two-storeyed house with the garden extending to the water. Eliza, who loved good jewellery, filled the house and her Melbourne residence with pictures—among them landscapes by Bernard Evans and Alfred Breanski and portraits by Hoppner, Romney and, reputedly, Gainsborough—bronzes, marble statues, china and glass. In the large entrance hall lived an enormous, colourful Brazilian macaw and a chatty cockatoo. Mrs Hall took daily 'carriage exercise'. Childless, she undertook the care of two young orphaned cousins, sending them to boarding schools and in the holidays making them feel that Wildfell was their home.

Walter Hall died at Wildfell on 13 October 1911 and was buried in Melbourne general cemetery with Anglican rites. His estate was valued for probate at £2,915,513 in three States, his principal beneficiary being his wife. Soon after his death she set aside £1 million in order to commemorate him and to do something for the benefit of the community and was finally persuaded that her own name should be linked with her husband's. On her instructions, the trust deed of the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust was drawn with Richard Gardiner Casey, (Sir) John French, (Sir) George Kelso King, and (Sir) Adrian Knox as the original trustees. Its terms were made public on Empire Day (24 May) 1912 and it came into operation on 1 January 1913: half of the income was to be spent in New South Wales, the State in which Hall had first made his wealth, one quarter in Queensland, where he had greatly increased it, and one quarter in Victoria, his widow's home State. It was to be used for the relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the advancement of religion in accordance with the tenets of the Church of England, and for the general benefit of the community not falling under the preceding heads. As far as was practicable, one third of the income in each State was to be used for the benefit of women and children.

Many individuals have benefited from the trust, not least those who obtained post-graduate travelling and research fellowships—some have had distinguished careers and made valuable contributions to the Australian community. A large part of Victoria's share of trust funds was spent in establishing in 1916 the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Research in Pathology and Medicine in Melbourne. Bequests and donations from other sources greatly enlarged this institute which over the years has made notable contributions to medical knowledge.

A diabetic, Eliza Hall died of cancer at Wildfell on 14 February 1916 and like her husband was buried in Melbourne general cemetery with Anglican rites. Her estate in three States was valued for probate at £1,180,059; in her detailed will she left generous bequests and annuities to her own and to her husband's numerous relations, to friends and to servants. Her large collection of jewellery was divided among her female relatives, and she left some pictures and statues to the Melbourne and Sydney art galleries.

There is a tablet in memory of Walter and Eliza Hall in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne. Their portraits by F. McCubbin are on loan to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research; another portrait of Mrs Walter Hall by McCubbin is held by the National Gallery of Victoria; and marble busts of both by Bertram MacKenna were given to the institute by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

## Select Bibliography

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