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Bro. FRED WALKER (1884 - 1935)

THE VEGEMITE STORY

The merchant and industrialist responsible for the introduction of BONOX and VEGEMITE, Fred Walker was born in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn on 5 January 1884.

He was educated at Caulfield Grammar School and in 1899 he joined the produce and export merchants J. Bartram and Sons where he quickly acquired a knowledge of canning and refrigeration.

In January 1903, Fred Walker, just 19 years of age, travelled to Hong Kong where he began his own import and export business. He returned to Melbourne in 1908 to establish a local import and export business, which concentrated primarily on food products.

He began to can meat, butter, dripping and cheese which he branded Red Feather and these products were successfully exported to Asia and South Africa.

Although prior to the First World War, Fred Walker had served in the volunteer Australian Garrison Artillery and as a Captain in the 13th Infantry Brigade, his canned foods, which were exported to England, were considered essential and Walker, as a consequence did not join the AIF.

In 1918, Walker began manufacturing BONOX. It created the slogan 'Coffee, Tea or Bonox' and it was a favourite with a dash of rum.

Walker extended his business to Sydney in 1918 and to Adelaide and New Zealand the following year.

World trade arrangements following the war left Walker's business floundering and he faced heavy financial losses. His foresight and flair for technology were not matched by his business skills and he became indebted for £80,000.

Nevertheless, he convinced his bankers and creditors to support the formation of a new company, Fred Walker and Co, and with his creditors accepting debentures to the value of his debts and with a Board of Directors chaired by Sir Edwin Nixon, Fred Walker as managing director, set about re-building his business.

Walker realised that if the business was to succeed, he would need professional help and, in 1923, with the business still struggling, he decided to develop a yeast extract for retail sale.

He then employed Cyril Percy Callister M.Sc. (1893-1949) to develop the product

