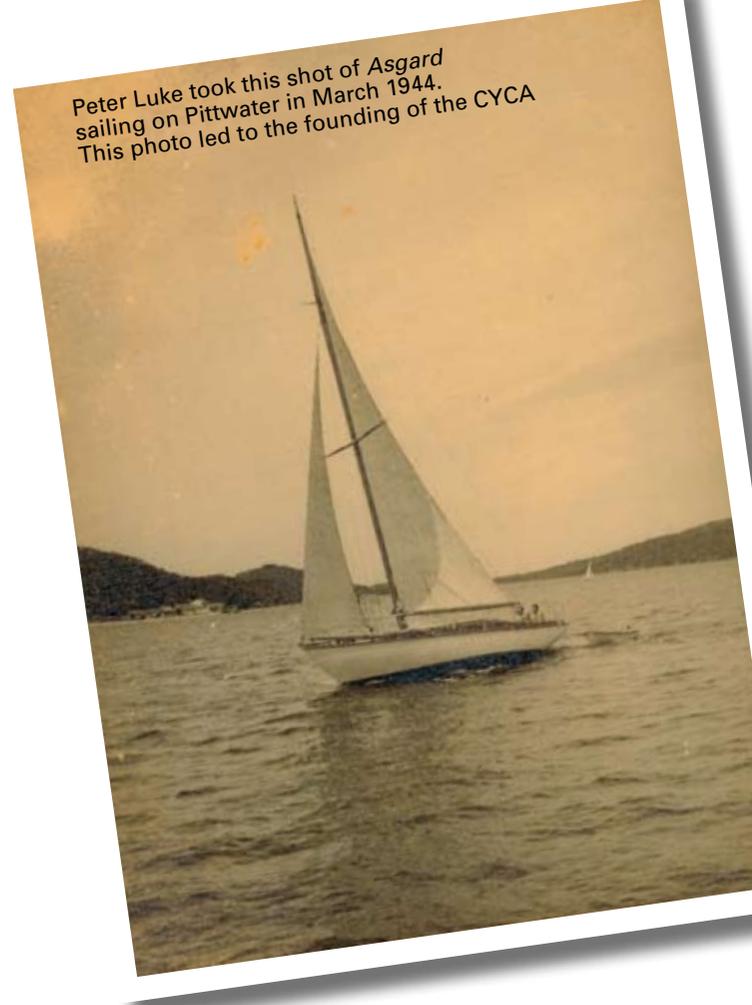




Peter Luke aboard his beloved *Wayfarer*



# Peter Montague Luke

## CYCA CO-FOUNDER

PETER LUKE WAS A MAN OF MANY PARTS. ACCOMPLISHED PHOTOGRAPHER, BUSINESSMAN, YACHTSMAN, YACHTING WRITER, CO-FOUNDER OF THE CRUISING YACHT CLUB OF AUSTRALIA, HUSBAND, FATHER AND HOLDER OF A SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE RECORD, HE WAS A MAN WHO STOOD BY HIS PRINCIPLES THROUGH WEATHER FAIR AND FOUL.

*By David Colfelt*

Peter Luke, co-founder of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, died on 23 September 2007 at the age of 92. At that time he still held a race record that he set in the very first Sydney Hobart Yacht Race in 1945—the longest-ever time to finish the course, 11 days, six hours, 20 minutes. With a twinkle in his eye, he used to call it “a record not even broken by the all-girl crew”. It says something about the man who disliked all things commercial, who worked for 35 years in his father’s business which he detested, and who resigned his life membership to the club he founded in 1976 when the CYCA took on the first sponsor with naming rights for the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. He loved everything to do with boats and the sea, but he wasn’t particularly competitive. He had an outgoing, friendly nature that served him well when recruiting new members to the newly-formed club in 1944, after he and Charlie Cooper had hatched the idea of creating a club to cater for cruising as opposed to racing.

Peter finished his schooling in 1931 at The King’s School, Parramatta, and the very next day went to work in the darkroom of his father’s photographic studio at 62 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. He had learned something about photography at school, and although he very much enjoyed taking pictures off his own bat, he disliked the commercial aspect of the business. Peter’s father, Monte Luke, was an extremely successful

Photo by Peter Luke of yachts on the beach at Bayview, 1950, taken with the unmistakable eye of the photographer who loved boats of any size or description.



Sydney photographer who specialized in portraits, particularly of brides, and weddings. Monte had a career of some ten years in the theatre before establishing his photography business; he was well spoken and handsome and could charm the birds out of the trees. His grandfather, Edmund Luke, was *The Age's* first press photographer. Photography may have been in Peter's blood, but he hated being outside St Mark's Church in Darling Point on a Saturday afternoon photographing a wedding, knowing that all his mates were out on the harbour and that he would be in the darkroom till midnight processing film. Nevertheless, as an only son he felt duty-bound to continue in the firm.

### EARLY SAILING DAYS

The family had a home in Mosman overlooking Taylor's Bay, and at a reasonably early age Peter's parents gave him a 2.5 metre dinghy with a one-horsepower outboard motor. It wasn't long before he converted it to sail, hanging a sugar bag on a broomstick, sailing downwind, motoring back upwind, and exploring every inch of Taylor's Bay. As he grew older, he read everything about boats and the sea that he could get his hands on. He acquired a number of small yachts during his first ten years with the photographic studio and on them explored the NSW coast between Sydney and Newcastle. Then, in 1940, he acquired the ship that he would sail for

the rest of his life: the Alden-designed yawl, *Wayfarer*, launched in January of that year. The name expressed Luke's desire to roam around out-of-the-way places; it evoked dreams of waving palm trees and hula girls.

### WAYFARER

*Wayfarer* was built by well-known Sydney shipwright, Charlie Larsen, from the moulds with which he created the 35-foot *Moonbi*, aboard which early CYCA member Hal Evans would win the 1955 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. The moulds represented a significant potential financial saving, and with the permission of John Alden they were extended to make a 40-footer. Flush decks had always appealed to Peter, and to obtain headroom below, the plans called for the original sheerline to be raised 11 inches amidships. Well, they looked so ugly that Larsen refused to build the boat until the design was modified to include a wooden sponson (rubbing rail) around the outside of the hull and six portholes along the original deck line to break up the bare expanse of the topsides. Charlie completed building *Wayfarer* up to the deck, but Peter ran out of money finishing her off, and the sponson and portholes were never added. *Wayfarer* was very dark down below, with no skylights or ports, and Luke became known as "the batman of Mosman Bay". She was designed as a yawl, and because the mizzen mast was right on the waterline, as was the rudder post, Luke



BELOW: Peter Luke's daughter Lindy Boyd took this picture of her father looking at *Wayfarer* on his 92nd birthday



ABOVE: The crew of *Wayfarer* in the 1945 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: (Left to right) Geoff Ruggles, Len Willsford, Brigadier A.G. Mills, Peter Luke (at rear), Bill Lieberman, Fred Harris. Many of these men knew each other from harbour patrol duties during World War II with the NAP and VCP. Geoff Ruggles, the only crew member surviving today, was the youngest (age 16); he was with the Mosman Sea Scouts on the night the Japanese mini-submarines attacked Sydney Harbour in 1942.

constructed a tiller with a 'U' in it to get from the rudder stock around the mizzen to the cockpit. "It raised a lot of funny questions before the mizzen was put in," he mused.

During the war Peter had joined the Volunteer Coastal Patrol where he learned much about seamanship and all that goes with it. His tasks included patrol duty in *Wayfarer*, standing watch over troop carriers and warships and guarding strategic sites such as fuel storage facilities and the munitions depot at Bantry Bay. *Wayfarer* eventually got a doghouse, which some say resembled a telephone box, an after-thought resulting from countless days and nights doing harbour patrol duty in rain, hail or shine. The doghouse turned out to be a nice thing to have in the nasty weather encountered in the first Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

When sailing *Wayfarer* on Pittwater in about March 1944, another Alden design, *Asgard*, caught Peter's eye. He snapped several photographs and later found out who owned the yacht and sent him several photos. The owner was Charlie Cooper, whose parents operated a wholesale fruit business. Charlie, too, had reluctantly joined his father's business, being much more interested in radio but not wanting to disappoint his father. Charlie sent Peter a box of fruit by way of thanks, and a relationship was established. Some weeks later Charlie rang Peter and suggested they form a cruising club for like-minded yachtsmen with similar boats who weren't interested in racing, and Peter agreed. Charlie and Peter and six other yachtsmen met at the Monte Luke Studio, 62 Castlereagh Street, in June that year and decided to form a cruising club. And that's how it all began.

### HOW THE ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE CAME ABOUT

In about April 1945 an early CYCA member, Sydney artist Jack Earl, was anchored at Quarantine not far from where the Tasmanian yacht *Saltair* was also anchored. Earl and his family were planning a cruise to Hobart at Christmas time, and Jack rowed over to *Saltair*, owned by two other early CYCA members, the experienced Tasmanian yachtsmen Bert and Russ Walker, to look at their charts. The Walkers asked if they might join the cruise. Later, Peter Luke got wind of it and said he'd like to go along, too.

In May 1945 Luke invited the well-known British ocean-racing yachtsman, Commander John Illingworth, who was stationed at Garden Island, to address a meeting of the CYCA. That evening Luke told Illingworth that three of them were planning a cruise to Hobart, and would he care to join them. Illingworth is alleged to have said, "why don't we make a race of it?"

Charlie Cooper, whose brother was a wing commander with the RAAF, managed to arrange air cover for the upcoming Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. A fleet of nine yachts took the starter's gun on December 26th. One day later they ran into winds of 50 knots accompanied by blinding rain and rising seas. Many sought shelter along the NSW coast. Peter Luke and his crew on *Wayfarer* sought refuge behind Broulee Island (23 miles north of Montague Island), went ashore to phone home to say they were okay, then got back aboard and cooked up their 12 pounds of fresh beef (before it spoiled—they had no refrigeration in those days) and had a hearty





*Wayfarer* makes her way up the Derwent, 11 days, six hours and 20 minutes after the start of the 1945 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, a record for the longest-ever time to complete the course, which stands today. The person in the kayak was a relative of Luke's first wife who lived in Hobart. *Wayfarer* acquired her bowsprit in 1945 to better balance her. John Illingworth designed the headsail rig on the back of a paper napkin during dinner at Usher's Hotel in May when he uttered the famous "why don't we make a race of it" reply to the invitation to cruise with Peter Luke, Jack Earl and Bert and Russ Walker to Hobart.



stew before going to bed for the night. They may have been racing in the ocean, but they were not yet 'ocean racers'. The RAAF plane following the fleet reported not sighting several yachts. For the next several days the race made front-page headlines, with yachts feared missing. The drama captured the imagination of post-war yachtsmen in Australia, and from that point onwards the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race and other ocean races became the main focus of the newly-formed "cruising" club.

### LUKE DRIFTS AWAY FROM THE CYCA

Peter Luke served in the early years as Secretary, Vice-Commodore and Commodore of the club. But as the years went on and the racing became much more competitive, he felt unable to keep up with the cost of equipping a yacht to be competitive, and it wasn't really in his nature anyway. He remained an active member, contributing many articles on nautical matters to the club's early magazine *Seacall* in the 1950s but gradually drifted away. He was one of four who were the first 'life members' elected in 1957, an honour he renounced along with his club membership when Hitachi was appointed the major commercial sponsor in 1976. "I wrote a letter to the Committee saying 'Gentlemen, you have committed the unpardonable crime; here is my life membership card. Thank you. Good bye'". Peter was always a staunch Corinthian, and he also had vivid memories of the Japanese attacks on Sydney in May 1942. He felt that the sponsorship completely killed the spirit in which the club was started. But he was persuaded to re-accept his life membership at the time of the 50th anniversary Sydney Hobart Yacht Race in 1994, when he sailed to Hobart at age 79 aboard *Charisma*.

Peter quit the photography business in the late 1960s and took a number of jobs behind the counter of various nautical outlets before retiring in 1973 with his second wife, Mornette, to Port Stephens (along with *Wayfarer*, which he was sailing right up until the time of his death). His first marriage in 1938 was to Betty Anderson with whom he had a daughter, Lindy (now 62), and two sons, Roland (now 60) and Barry (who died after a tragic accident at a young age). Peter and Betty's first abode was a houseboat moored in Cabbage Tree Bay east of the Spit Bridge. They were divorced in the mid-1950s. He met Mornette in 1955 and they, too, had a water-borne lifestyle, living aboard *Wayfarer* on the harbour.

### A LEGACY

The Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race has become Australia's first real carnival, with the largest live audience of any single sporting event anywhere in the world, attracting some 300,000-400,000 spectators to Sydney's foreshores on Boxing Day. In January 1960, a friend of Luke's wrote him a letter penning these lines of appreciation: "Should you never have the opportunity to give Australia any more gifts such as this Festival [the start of the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race], it will not matter, as you have cast the traditional die of celebration on the sea and brought to fruition a thousand sail of the line." Peter would have been the first to put Charlie Cooper's name ahead of his own as a partner in this venture, for he always felt that Cooper never received the recognition he deserved for his role in the early days of the CYCA. ○