

Vale Keva North 1934–2026

Dennis McManus PSM and John Stowar

Keva North was a remarkable woman. She was a powerhouse: energetic, entrepreneurial and very smart.

She started out studying typing and shorthand, then moved into nursing but was still not satisfied with her career trajectory. Having a good eye for real estate, she approached a lady agent who was happy to offer her two years' training. In no time, Keva was earning more than from nursing.

And so she met Tim North, who was looking for an inner-city dwelling in the Paddington/Woolahra area. There he attended an open house, recalling in his book, *Garden Cuttings*:

I met with the greatest stroke of good fortune of my whole life, for I met a beautiful real estate agent who not only found me a house but later married me [in 1979] and has been my beloved companion ever since.

Keva and Tim became early pioneers in serious garden journalism. Tim was a passionate horticulturist. Keva started out not knowing a rose from a daisy but, with her organisational and management skills, they formed the team that launched a monthly newsletter in 1982 called *Garden Cuttings*. Within a year that morphed into *The Australian Garden Journal*, a publication for serious gardeners. Keva took up photography, finding she had a special flair, so could take the shots essential for their work.

In the June 1983 editorial of *The Australian Garden Journal*, Tim wrote: '...this is a very special issue. We become and are honoured to become, the official journal of the Australian Garden History Society; and so we welcome some six or seven hundred new readers'. (In 1989, AGHS started its own journal, *Australian Garden History*.)

The couple also ran garden tours in England and America as well as in Australia. In 1983, upon returning from a tour overseas, Tim announced he needed a REAL garden. They soon found Yarrabin in Bowral, a then neglected property that they revamped with gusto.

In December 1994, Tim and Keva moved to Canberra. The last issue of *The Australian Garden Journal* was published in autumn 1996. Tim (David Arthur Guy North) died in 2011. Keva stayed in Canberra, now a gardener in her own right, working on a delightful quarter acre where

pink roses underplanted with pink and white Japanese wind flowers produced a mass of flowers from summer through to autumn. Drawing you in to the garden was a silver-foliaged olive tree shaped to a gigantic globe.

In 2020 Keva provided documentation to save Yarrabin from demolition. The property was largely saved through its purchase by Justin Hutchinson and John Bowers who became friends to Keva. It is now heritage listed. Importantly, this effort was the catalyst for a major review of heritage items in the local shire and, as at 2026, a further 400 items and seven new conservation areas are being listed.

The information about Yarrabin was easily at hand because Keva had already been thinking of how best to find a permanent home for her well organised journals, papers, letters, photographs and clippings. In 2020 she entrusted these to Bud Townsing who lodged them as the Keva North Collection in the Caroline Simpson Library in Sydney.

Speaking at the 40th anniversary of AGHS at the Southern Highlands Botanic Garden in October 2020, Keva said, 'the AGHS was a huge interest and part of our life'. She in turn was a huge part of the Society.



Keva North and Brigid Treloar unveiling the plaque next to the *Carpinus betulus*, a gift from the AGHS branch to the Southern Highlands Botanic Garden, photo Francesca Beddie