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Elizabeth Macarthur, the wife of John Macarthur, army officer, pastoralist and public figure, was a courageous woman. Born in 1766 in Devon, England, Elizabeth was the daughter of R. Veale, a farmer who died when she was six. She received private tutoring at the Kingston vicarage at Bridgerule, and in 1788 she married John Macarthur. As it was difficult to support a family on his lieutenant’s half-pay, Macarthur volunteered for the New South Wales Corps, and 14 months later the couple and their infant son Edward, sailed for Sydney on the Second Fleet, arriving there in June 1790.

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Elizabeth Macarthur can be classed among the great pioneer women on her own merits. As a devoted wife, mother and home-maker, as well as a pastoralist and a sheep breeder, and a gracious “first lady” in the society of her day, she was a role model of Christian character for those who came after her.

Mrs Macarthur was the first educated white woman to arrive in Australia. She also possessed a natural charm and beauty, with a touch of aristocracy, that brought the elegance and gentility that was lacking in the harsh male-dominated convict settlement.

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