

## Canberra The National Capital

**[The following is a transcript of a handwritten document given to me [Ann Gugler] by Lorna Marriott. Her father Charles Francis was Controller of Stores and a member of the Australian Natives Association, FCT Branch. It was written around 1930 and the original is now kept in the ACT Heritage Library. The title is the same as above and it continues: ]**

A few facts regarding the Capital of Australia compiled for the information of Australians by the Canberra Branch of the Australian Natives Association.

A limelight of press publicity recently thrown on Canberra, has realised in the minds of many Australians the question, of whether or not Canberra, as a National city should be scrapped; whether it is too great a drain on Australia's resources, and whether the seat of Government of the Commonwealth should not be located in or near a State Capital, whether to be truly great it should not be a centre of commerce rather than an administrative city only.

The Australian public has been kept well informed up to now the "facts" which go to support the claim that Canberra has been a costly mistake, which should be rectified at the earliest possible moment.

Fortunately the barrage campaign of misrepresentation has died down but an impression has been formed by many people unacquainted with the true facts which is sadly detrimental to the national sentiment and high national ideals as embodied in a Federal Capital City.

We feel that the Australian Natives Association, which played so important a part in the establishment of a Federal sentiment and in the adoption by the people of the Federal Constitution in which was incorporated the establishment of a National Capital City.

The first step has been taken and whatever objections may have existed to the selection of Canberra as the Federal Capital, when the sites were being considered.

It is now too late to revive them and Canberra must be accepted as an established fact. It will no doubt surprise many who have not had an opportunity to visit the Capital, to learn that Canberra already gives evidence of realising to the fullest the ideal of the master town planner who designed it, viz Walter Burley Griffin, and has already the appearance of a well established city at the same time showing clearly the well defined plans for its future expansion.

Before considering the questions outlined at the beginning we will first consider what is the ideal of a National Capital of Australia.

Briefly the founders of the Federal Constitution visualised a beautiful garden city which would rank amongst the most beautiful cities in the world; they saw it in a setting which

typified the spaciousness of this young island confined and the broad ideals and high aspirations of a young and virile nation destined to play no insignificant a part in the councils of the nations of the world.

They desired that the setting for our future national parliaments should be such as would assist our legislators in realising their ideals of a glorious future for our country, far removed from the influence and distractions of a commercial city.

Does Canberra realise that vision? Most emphatically – yes. It now rests with our legislators to play their part.

And now to consider the first question – should Canberra be scrapped?

It is the embodiment of the principle laid down in the Federal Constitution that the Nation should own without any State dominance an area of land sufficiently large to enable all the services of the Federal Capital to be wholly controlled by the people through its National Parliament. A place where jealousy is unknown.

What is called the great cost of building Canberra is not so great when it is considered what is involved in the creation of a city with its various services and the establishment of a complete code of laws for the government of a area that a few years ago was wholly employed in grazing sheep and cattle and if the citizen will pause and think for a moment what the cost of the complete services for a modern town is, he will realise that a very large outlay is required at the outset and when it is considered that the services of the City which is to be the nations ideal are not for the present generation but for the generations of unborn Australians the problem becomes greater and the difficulties more acute.

In order to consider the problem in its proper perspective one must know the local conditions. A few statistics are therefore appended.

The area of the Territory is 576000 acres and the amount paid by the Commonwealth for this area was 882033 pounds.

A great portion of the Territory is in mountainous country and is set aside for a catchment area to provide the city with pure water for all time.

Approximately 429000 acres are subdivided into allotments varying from 50 acres to 2000 acres principally devoted to sheep raising, mixed farming and orchards. The annual revenue derived from the rural area is 40,000 pounds per year.

The City area is approximately 2,700 acres and is sub-divided and laid out in accordance with the plan drawn by Walter Burley Griffin who as everybody knows was the successful designer in the world wide competition instituted by the Commonwealth Government to find an ideal plant for a national city.

The plan is most comprehensive and provides for the development of the city as the population of the Nation grows. It preserves the zoning of various Government activities so that in years to come it will not be necessary to have Government Departments scattered over the city as we know them today in our State Capitals.

This causes some criticism that the city is spread over too wide an area, but Canberra is the third city in the world to be built to a set plan and the average citizen had only experience of the towns of which he knows which have developed into the cities because of their natural position to create trade and commerce.

Canberra is planned to develop a set ideal in the same way that an architect plans the building of a Cathedral. Although only portion may be built at a time the design remains the same and as each part is added the structure comes nearer to the completion but it is not possible to materially amend the design and preserve the ideal.

1350 acres of the 27000 comprising the city area are reserved for Parliamentary and other public purposes and the balance less provision for roads and footpaths is for residential and business purposes.

The whole of the land is held by the Commonwealth and leased on a 99 year lease, the lessee paying 5% on the appraised value as rental.

The roads of the City have total length of 80 miles and in addition roads extend throughout the rural area making a total of 190 miles all maintained and controlled by the Civic Authority.

The Public Parks are not developed except the reserve around Parliament House but the main thoroughfares are planted with various types of trees, Acacias, Eucalypts and silver Poplars predominating. The work done in this direction is undoubtedly a credit to the Director of Parks and Gardens who has controlled the work which is so thoroughly organised that the history of every tree planted by his Department is recorded thereby enabling trees to be selected for the most suitable positions for their growth consistent with the aesthetic requirements of the city beautiful.

The citizens are encouraged to beautify their homes with shrubs and flowers and it must be said that the response is good and there are many houses with very beautiful and well kept gardens wholly cared for and planted by the residents themselves and not by a benevolent government as has been erroneously stated in some quarters.

The water supply is derived from the Cotter River which has a daily flow of approximately 53,000,000 gallons. A dam has been thrown across this river with a storage capacity of 380,000,000 Gallons.

From the Cotter Dam pipes pass through a tunnel of a total length of 2,000 feet. They are then taken down and continue under the Murrumbidgee River to the Pumping Station where electrically driven pumps lift the water at the rate of 100,000 gallons per hour to a reservoir of a capacity of 3000000 gallons at Mt Stromlo a distance of 17900

feet with a rise of 800 feet above the Pumping Station; from Mt Stromlo it gravitates to Red Hill Reservoir to supply the capital in the South Side of the Molonglo River. To supply the North Side of the river the water is carried to Mt Russell from miles away where there is a Storage tank with a capacity of 1,00,000 gallons.

As to the buildings they are principally of bricks manufactured in the Territory faced with white cement or rough cast. The first idea was to create a white city but this idea was not proceeded with in its entirety. Some building remains the natural colour of the brick. The main building in the City is Parliament House. Architecturally it is ornate, but is a solid structure that will serve the Parliament until the Nation is in a position to build an ornate structure in keeping with the Houses of Parliament of other Nations. It is flanked by other buildings which house the Departments that have been transferred with some exceptions, which are housed temporarily in the Civic Centre of the City, in buildings erected by private enterprise.



Above: The opening of Civic Centre in 1927.

The permanent offices will occupy positions in the Parliamentary group. One of these buildings has had its foundations laid, but no further work has been proceeded with. Other public buildings are the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research which are specially designed laboratories and research work in Botany, Entomology, Vetenary Science and Agriculture. Also there is the Australian School of Forestry which has a number of students drawn from all parts of Australia. The School of Anatomy which house the collection of specimens of the Australian Aborigines, Marsupials and animals peculiar to Australia as collected by Sir Colin McKenzie and donated by him to the Australian Nation. Sir Colin is in residence in Canberra and retains the Directorship of this research work. In addition there is the Prime Minister's House and Government House. Temporary wooden buildings house the officers of the Administration and the Department of Works. The hospital is a wooden structure with up to date equipment and the residence for the workmen is also of wood. The main business centre is designed on the north side of the river, and is built to a plan which is signed by each lessee. The buildings are of two storey surrounded by a colonnade, and is striking in its

appearance. The banks are housed in this area. There are two other business centres, one at Kingston and the other at Manuka. At present the main shopping centre is at Kingston. The picture Theatre erected by private enterprise is at Manuka.

The residential area is on both sides of the Molonglo and as far as numbers are concerned they are about equally divided. The South side of the river has the greater number of more expensive houses. The Government has erected 750 houses each occupying about one-third of an acre and private enterprise has erected 168 houses which are practically all occupied by the owners. The Capital value of the residences erected by the Government is approximately 990,000 pounds and the annual rent received is 98,500 pounds which covers interest, maintenance and rates and depreciation. Rates have been struck and the annual return from this source is 10,000 pounds.

The education of the children is provided by two public schools and three Denominational Schools. On the north side of the River is a Primary School capable of housing --- children is placed in a playground of --- acres, laid out with trees, shrubs and flowers. [Ainslie Primary School] Children of this class are educated to sixth grade. On the south side of the River is a combined primary, secondary, and High-school together with a Junior Technical School [Telopea Park]. Students here can obtain their Leaving Certificate and enter the University. Trade classes can be taken for mechanical turners and fitters and the plumbing and carpentering trades are taught. Arrangements have also been made with the University of Sydney for certain subjects to be taken by students studying for University degrees. University extension lectures are given. the school is also surrounded by shrubs, trees and flowers and has an excellent playing ground. The Denominational Schools are the Church of England Grammar School for boys and St Gabriel's for girls. The Roman Catholic Church has St Christophers for boys and girls.

A bus service is established throughout the city area and conveys the children to the various schools at concession rates [1d each way], and connects both sides of the City. This service has been made necessary because of the present scattered nature of the various districts. They are not self-supporting and cannot be expected to be with the small population, at present in the City area.

Accommodation is provided for Civil Servants in five Hotels, two girls' hostels, one Guest House and two Bachelors Quarters. At present some of these buildings are unoccupied as they were primarily built for the housing of Civil Servants, for which residences were not available; but as the transfer of Departments has not been pushed on with some of these buildings are at present vacant, because of Government policy.

Recreation reserves have been provided for by permanent cricket grounds and football ovals on each side of the River. Public tennis courts are leased to Clubs in each locality. A Bowling Green is provided for on the North and South side. An up-to-date Swimming Pool has recently been constructed and there are numerous reserves in various parts

of the City that are used for the playing of Cricket, Hockey and the various codes of football.

From the foregoing the reader will have gathered that much has been done for the National Capital, and the foundation for the development of an ideal city have been set out. He will have recognised that the change of the area from a sheep run to a City with the amenities of modern life is no small accomplishment to have been carried out in the space of approximately ten years. He will recognise that this cannot be, without the expenditure of money.

Unfortunately the public are informed of the mistakes that are made but not of the successes. The policy of the Government of pressing on with the establishment of the City at a given date caused the Capital to function at an earlier period than it otherwise would have, but it also made necessary expenditure that might not have been incurred if the work had been proceeded by easier stages.

However that is past history and what is done cannot be undone. There are certain activities that return a very handsome profit on the outlay.

Various sums have been given from time to time, as to the cost of Canberra, but the actual capital expenditure has been approximately 8,000,000 pounds. The balance of 4,000,000 is made up of interest and compound interest and at the present policy of the Nation's development of the City is proceeded with this interest must necessarily grow. It can be said with a fair degree of accuracy that the civil activities of the Capital will be reproductive at a very early stage. The population is approximately 8,000. It cannot be said to be inconsiderable but the main expenditure on Canberra has been in connection with the activities that are clearly national in their character.

If the Government proceeds with the full transfer of the whole administrative staffs it can be said that the civil side of the National City will be practically on a reproductive basis. Interest, maintenance, depreciation and general charges in regard to those works which have been purely national in their construction or erected for the convenience of the National, will be charged on the people as a whole for some considerable time, but when this is worked out to a percentage per head of the population it becomes almost infinitesimal, approximately one shilling per head will be the Nation's contribution to the payments of interest and depreciation on the expenditure on national buildings.

Canberra's climate is on the whole pleasant and equable in the winter months although cold and frosty at night consist mainly of bright sunny days and the summer months seldom reach a temperature of 100 degrees the heat is dry and pleasant and however hot the day the night is invariably cool and pleasant: the only drawback being the cold and searching winds which pervade the city in the spring months.

The visitor to Canberra need not worry about selecting any particular time of the year to make a visit. Canberra extends a welcome at any time; however the best time, and there is always a time when any city can present an appearance which outdoes its

efforts at any other time of the year, is the autumn. Then the Territory is an artist's Paradise, a riot of color, sunsets and sunrises defy description. Poplars bathed in the glory of the departing summer, the tints and colours of hill, plains, gullies and the far distant dividing range defying analysis. No nature lover can fail to be impressed with the transcendent beauty of this his national capital.

If the visitor comes by car he is fortunate for he will find good roads almost anywhere within the Territory where it is possible for him to travel and he is advised not to leave until he has explored the Territory thoroughly.

He will be amply repaid by a trip to the Cotter Dam, the charming village of Tharwa on the Murrumbidgee, Naas a few miles further along a picturesque and well made road. A trip may be taken in almost any direction out from the city and the rewards in the shape of variety and charm of scenery coupled with the pleasure of travelling good roads is manifold.

The residents of Canberra and the Rural portions of the Territory in spite of the deprivation of their civic rights and privileges which loss is felt keenly as has been evidenced on numerous occasions have developed a strong and civic pride and are enthusiastic and vigorous in their efforts to assist the development of the National Capital.

Private enterprise has shown its faith in the future of the capital to the extent of investments in building and other enterprises amounts in over 1,000,000 pounds on the North side of the City alone.

Now that the Federal Capital is an established fact it is feared that the enthusiasm which brought it into being has faded somewhat and one is led to suspect that it was not so much National sentiment as a desire to sever the National Parliament from its temporary home since Federation that was the determining factor in hastening the building of the Federal Capital for those enthusiasts who pressed so strongly for the building of Canberra are not so ready to rise in defence when malignant misrepresentation is abroad.

Washington suffered for seventy years from the same blight on its development. Now let any stranger or any American speak ill of Washington.

Australia does not want to allow its National Capital to suffer the same want of appreciation. Remember Canberra is designed as a garden city, not as a great commercial centre, however, commercial interest necessarily exist to some extent showing that some people have faith in the future of the Capital.

But large industrial or other similar commercial interest are not needed to make Canberra great - all that is needed is sufficient national pride in our people to realise that here is some tangible evidence of our nationhood, something to be developed until it earns the recognition and esteem of the rest of the world.

We are not ashamed to be distinguished as Australians when "Anzac" is spoken of we don't shy as their designation when the Australian Eleven proves the superiority of the Australian best, then why not in all things present the same united face to the world and allay the suspicion that we are still a group of jealous states each fearful that the others should have the impudence to question its priority in status and importance.

Here is a subject in our National Capital for the finest expression of our unity as a nation. Nothing to be ashamed of it is on the contrary a city already to be proud of expressing the most modern and scientific principles of town planning and already maintaining itself in all but the interest on and repayment of the capital outlay.

Finally, Australians need not fear that Canberra is too great a drain on the pockets of the people. The city was built in time of prosperity, the capital outlay could then be spared. It was built quite naturally with an eye to the future its services were planned at the outset for a city of more than 20,000 inhabitants in order to save additional expense in the future as the city grew, therefore all that has to be met now is the interest on the capital outlay and repayments of principal if Canberra were scrapped tomorrow that liability would still remain and would still have to be met. Whereas the capital as it grows will return more and more revenue and will eventually be able to assume some portion of the burden.

It is not desired to weary readers with figures when an obvious fact such as the foregoing is sufficient argument to show that it is to the advantage of the country to hasten the development of Canberra in order that it may be able to take some portion of the burden of its cost rather than to destroy it and increase the burden.

A population of 8,000 cannot of course pay for the whole cost of services provided for 50,000 such as water conservation, electric lighting, road construction most of which services pass through undeveloped land which with the growth of the city cannot be spoiled for that and as it is the revenue return for some services is already adequate and in the aggregate has already passed the 200,000 pounds mark annually a quite respectable contribution from such a small population.

**After reading the foregoing it is hoped that citizens will be in a better position to answer the question would it ever be raised again by little Australian - Should Canberra be scrapped - the answer will be most assuredly NO.**