

The Great Depression in the FCT (Canberra), Unemployment
Relief Committee and Other Documents

Molonglo
Settlement
Julyth 26. 1922

To Sir John Butters

Dear Sir

I am writing to you to see
if it would be possible for you
to find employment for one
of my sons I have eleven
in family and only my husband
support my eldest boy is 21 and
been out of work since last
Xmas when the first lot of single
men were put off the other boy
is 18 he has also been out of
work for some months if I
could only get one of the boys on
I would be satisfied as it hard
to manage on my husbands
earnings alone Hoping you
~~will~~ I will treat this urgent

I am yours

Faithfully
Ellen Harrington

The Great Depression commenced in the Federal Capital Territory shortly after the opening of the Provisional Parliament House on 9th May, 1927. Reference to the threat of mass sackings is found in the report written in the June 1927 issue of the Canberra Community News by a representative of the White City Camp . The writer mentioned the rumour and how hard it was for men to *Hump the Matilda* in the winter months. By 1929 many men had lost their jobs. Some, particularly single men, left the territory in search of work. The unemployed who stayed had to ask for relief assistance and got behind in the rent.

Two mess caterers who went broke at this time were Bill Mitchell of White City Camp and Mrs Stanley of Capitol Hill. On the next page is a letter written by Mrs Stanley in 1929 when she decided that she may save her business by turning it into a private boarding house. This measure failed and by the end of 1930 or early 1931 she was out of business. Bill Mitchell walked out of his business around the same time. Both she and Bill Mitchell provided meals for men who could not pay. Below: 1929 view from City Hill looking towards Capital Hill – On right is Albert Hall and left Westblock. Red Hill dominates the background. Photograph loaned by J Gibbs daughter of AE Gibbs, second Superintendent of Parks & Gardens.



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It is my hope that you will be able to grant me an interview as I feel sure if explained to you, you could do something for me. It will mean a great loss to me if the place is closed down. The Chief Engineer gave me to understand that the Commission would be favourably inclined to lease me this place for a private boarding house. Hoping you can grant me this interview.

Capitol Hill
Canberra
13th June 1929

Dear Sir

In reference to the closing of Capitol Hill mess. If you could possibly grant me an interview. I feel sure if explained to you, you could do something for me. It will mean a great loss to me if the place is closed down. The Chief Engineer gave me to understand that the Commission would be favourably inclined to lease me this place for a private boarding house. Hoping you can grant me this interview.

I remain
Yours truly
A. H. Stanley.

Sir John Butters
Canberra House
Canberra.

In Canberra two camps were set up for unemployed men coming into the Territory in search of work -one for single men and the other for married.¹ Single men were given a couple of weeks free accommodation and relief in the form of food packages before being moved on out of the territory. To obtain work in the territory the men had to be residents whose names (if over 21) were recorded on electoral roll. Archival documents contain the letters of many men pleading for work. One such letter was from a US citizen who had lived in the New Zealand and Australia area for 25 years and was an ANZAC. Because he was not a citizen he did not gain employment in the territory.

Selwyn Walk whose father was a foreman in charge of construction of roads such as Limestone Avenue recalled that there were bits of camps all through the territory during the Great Depression. Hence it should be kept in mind that the two camps mentioned below were the two official camps in use at this time.

The single men's camp was Parkes Barracks situated on the southern bank of the Molonglo River in front of the Provisional Parliament House. This was the original No 4 Sewer Camp converted in late 1927 for the Tradesmen from Westlake. It was officially closed in July 1929. The camp reopened for use as a relief camp.² The following letter dated 24th February, 1931 from H Martin Camp Supervisor to The Property Officer (Australian Archives A/1 34/4662) outlines the history of Parkes Barracks following its closure in Part of the letter reads as follows:

1. This Camp was made available for Canberra unemployed; later it was made available for travellers in search of employment with the approval of the Hon the Minister for Home Affairs. No period has been fixed as to the time a man may stay in Camp [Other documents I have read mention a two week period] and no charge is made for camping facilities. Any camper who may get permanent work or relief work must move to one of the other camps, where he is expected to pay for his accommodation.

The occupants of the camp are responsible for its cleanliness and sanitation, through a Camp Committee, under the direct supervision of the Camp Supervisor, who is responsible for the equipment and camp property, and in conjunction with the Police for the general order of the Camp.

2. The approximate average number of occupants over the last three months has been 135... Married men set up camp at the old Tradesmen's Camp on Mount Ainslie. This camp too had officially closed in late 1928 or early 1929. This camp was in poor condition at the time it was used in the 1930s. A Memorandum dated 23rd February, 1931 for the Property Officer Department of Home Affairs from H Martin Camp Supervisor re the Mt Ainslie Camp has the following to say about the Mount Ainslie Camp:

With reference to the attached memorandum from the Hon the Minister regarding Ainslie Camp, I have to report having interviewed the Camp Caretaker Murray re ordering Price, junr, to leave the Camp. Murray states that he did not order him out, but threatened to have him ejected if he did not conform to Camp conditions.

A general instruction was given that no single men were to be allowed in camp at Ainslie, but the Price youths were not included as they are only 14 and 16 years of age respectively.

Regarding the two single men referred to later; these men the Murray brothers were personally instructed by me to vacate the Camp on the 19th February, 1931 and they stated they would do so. On visiting the Camp this morning I found that they had not yet moved, but I interviewed Sergeant Cook of the Police Department, and the necessary action will be taken to have these men shifted at once.

Regarding the general condition of this Camp, no proper facilities have been installed for the housing of families as it has been regarded as a temporary expedient only, to allow married men with their families who are travelling through Canberra by road to camp there for a night or two while they get their Rations.

¹ This statement is not quite accurate – Parkes Barracks was set up for single men. Mt Ainslie Camp was used without permission by married men with families and they were allowed to stay.

² How long this camp operated is not certain. It appears that Capitol Hill and perhaps Causeway Camps were later used (1930s & 1940s) for pensioners and unemployed.

However, several families have been there since Christmas owing to requiring Hospital treatment, and at the present moment eight families are congregated there. As I have already stated, except that separate lavatory accommodation has been provided for males and females, and the provision of one water tap and disinfectants, no other provision has been made.

The old cubicles which are mostly occupied by families at present, are in a very unsatisfactory condition and should be burnt down as they are no longer fit for habitation.

Furthermore, if these families are to be allowed to stay anytime proper bathing facilities and also a copper and wash tubs must be installed. The sheds etc, are already on the site for wash-house, baths, etc but the wash tubs, coppers and showers were removed when the camp closed 2 years ago.

It will cost approximately 12 pounds to reinstate these facilities. Garbage has been incinerated at the Camp to date by the Caretaker.

A Memorandum to Secretary Dept of Home Affairs, Canberra FCT in Australian Archives on Federal Capital Territory letterhead, dated 24th May, 1930 (A/1 34/4662) outlines the details of the camp at Parkes for unemployed single men. It reads as follows:

Further to my letter of 17th May, 1930 to the Honourable the Minister and our recent discussion with respect to the establishment of a Camp for the unemployed the following additional particulars are submitted so that the proposal may be fully and finally considered. From the analysis which has been made of all men registered for employment to 20th May 1930 (details attached) it will be seen that the maximum number to be provided for in a camp is 152, but I have no doubt it will be found the many of these have left, and I would suggest that initial arrangements be made for 80 which is the capacity of the permanent accommodation at Parkes Barracks, additional numbers, if required, can be housed in tents.

The weekly ration scale adopted in New South Wales for single men for relief is:-

Bread - 3 loaves, 12 lbs (or 7lb bread, 5 lb potatoes)
Meat - 3 lb
Tea - 4 oz
Sugar - 1 lb
Jam - 12 oz
Condensed milk - 1lb (or Powdered Milk)
Butter - quarter lb (or margarine)
Soap - 1 bar

On this scale to cost for rations would be between 7/- and 8/- per man per week.

If it is decided that a camp is to be established and rations supplied I would suggest the following arrangements:-

Bedsteads, trestle tables and forms to be provided from stock.
Electric light to be connected and operated by a time switch from half an hour before dark to 10 pm.
Firewood to be cut in the bush by the men and carted to our camp by our lorries.
Bread and meat to be delivered twice weekly by our transport.
Groceries to be delivered twice weekly by our transport.
The men to select 3 as Committee to whom rations, equipment etc will be handled and be responsible for distribution and safety, also orderliness, etc of the camp.
Men to provide their own bedding, eating and cooking utensils. (There are no cooking utensils in stock.)...

Many of the unemployed married men lived in the workmen's suburbs of Westlake, Causeway, Acton, Westridge and Russell Hill. Following is an example of a letter written by the men of the Russell Hill Settlement in 1929 (Australian Archives A6270/1 E2/28/1859) that draws attention to their concerns. It reads as follows:

DEPUTATION ON BEHALF OF UNEMPLOYED RESIDENTS

RUSSELL HILL SETTLEMENT, CANBERRA

We the undersigned married residents of Russell Hill respectfully implore your audience to this deputation on the deplorable condition arising through the continued unemployment existing within the Territory.

The object of this Deputation we desire to emphasize is Employment and not Charity.

There are still a number of Single men employed by the Commission in various works which could be filled by married men and the term "married men" we desire particularly are those who have established homes and are supporting their wives and families within this Territory, and as such, consider we should receive preference to married men resident in Queanbeyan and New South Wales.

Furthermore, through the medium of the Press we learn that every State in Australia, has provided grants for her unemployed, so we would ask what does the Federal Capital Territory intend doing for her unemployed? Practically every district in New South Wales has received a Main Roads Board's grant to relieve local unemployment and distress.

As residents living under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government we consider it imperative on the part of the Commission to provide work for us. We want you to understand that within this Settlement families have been and are still on the verge of starvation and relief has only been enforced in the way of benefits derived from local dances, and we cannot say what would have happened to some of the poor children had not the various Committees combined their efforts on behalf of the distressed. How can a man leave here to seek work in other districts – leave his wife and children penniless, not knowing where to go to seek same? Who is going to support his family while he is away seeking work?

(Signed)

List of Unemployed

Name	Occupation	Children
C Huntingford	Labourer	2
F Morton	Carpenter	4
A Venerables	Labourer	2
A Sheppard	Labourer	2
K Dwyer	Labourer	1
E Armfield	Labourer	-
H Gaylard	Carpenter	-
E Docker	Plumber	2
L Geary	Carpenter	1
F Williams	Labourer	9
W Shumack	Labourer	4
W Brash	Labourer	4
M Dunn	Drayman	-
G Hyde	Labourer	1
J Smith	Labourer & Lorry Driver	3
G Marshall	Labourer & Lorry Driver	8
W J Dayle	Lorry Owner	4
J Kennedy	Labourer	2
N Brown	Labourer	-
A M Phipp	Labourer	1
A Ross	Painter	5
NC Tillyard	Lorry Driver	1
A J Miles	Labourer	3
C Ginns	Labourer	1
J Johnson	Horse & Dray	4
F Pitney	Labourer	2
- Holmes	Labourer	1

<i>J Burr</i>	<i>Engine Driver</i>	-
<i>SW Noble</i>	<i>Labourer</i>	2
<i>H Bateson</i>	<i>Carpenter</i>	1

A total of 30 Families and 70 children, Australia's best form of IMMIGRANT.

Furthermore we would point out that Motor Lorries are employed on Commission Work which are not even registered within the Territory while men who have registered their Lorries within the Territory are unemployed and their names included in the above list.

It should not be overlooked that we married men have hitherto done our bit towards supporting and maintaining the Storekeepers of the Territory.

This Deputation calls for immediate action on the part of the Commission, and we would urge your kind attention to the aforesaid facts.

(handwritten note on bottom – all those who registered got work.)

Another document in the same file noted the period of unemployment of each - it ranged from one week to four months. Against E Docker's name the note stated *Only had 8 weeks work since Xmas; travelled 300 miles looking for work.* F Morton had been off for 4 months and A Venerables was out of work for five weeks but at time of writing he was out rabbiting.

The Unemployment Relief Committee in FCT & Other Documents

Following is a document from Australian Archives A430/1 G180 which helps to explain the purpose and work of the Unemployment Relief Committee formed in the Federal Capital Territory to assist those in need.

NOTES FOR THE USE OF THE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS IN AN ADDRESS TO THE CANBERRA UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF COMMITTEE ON 12th JUNE, 1931

1. The Committee was formed in June, 1930, following a deputation to myself from a public meeting which recommended the formation of the Canberra Unemployment Relief Fund. Its composition as eventually determined represented the Government Departments involved in the execution of work – namely, the Departments of Home Affairs and Works – the industrial organisations, members of whom have been employed at Canberra; and private enterprise.

2. The basis of operations decided upon was a grant of a subsidy of pound for pound by the Government in relation to collections from the whole community which were to be organised by the Committee. The collections have been sustained for twelve months under admittedly difficult circumstances, and although I believe the rate of contributions per head is lower than the prescribed per capita tax in certain of the States, what has been done by the people appears to me to be a creditable voluntary effort. The contributions by the community for the year's operations ending 11th June is indicated to be 3,863 pounds, 8 shillings and 6 pence.

3. The programme of works initiated in June last year, based upon the initial arrangement of the Government with the Committee, enabled the employment of local workmen on a broken time basis in 55 full-time positions. The Government decided to provide funds, apart from the pound for pound subsidy, to provide material, transport, supervision and incidental charges associated with the works which were executed under the programme.

The total authorisations of works (vide attached schedule for details of projects) were 32,340 pounds, 17 shillings and 4 pence. Of this amount 3,863 pounds 8 shillings and 6 pence has been provided by voluntary contribution; thus the Government has actually provided 28,477 pounds, 8 shillings and 10 pence. These authorisations cover the period 27th June, 1930 to 11th June, 1931.

It was found that, owing to various causes, the contributions were reduced somewhat late in 1930. The initial basis of 55 full-time positions, was, however, maintained by an increased Government subsidy. The Committee interviewed me early this year and I was able to arrange for the provision of additional funds by the Government not only to maintain the volume of relief employment offering, but in fact to increase it as from early this year to maintain 75 full-time positions – with, of course, funds to cover additional material, transport, supervision, etc.

4. The number of unemployed whose needs have been considered increased from 100 married and 90 single men in June last to 150 married and 150 single men early this year, following the closure of the Royal Military College. The number at present is approximately 220 married and 200 single men.

The Government, has, through its industrial organisations, allotted the work in accordance with the principles adopted by the Committee, namely from the period June to December, 1930 on the basis of 60% and 40% for married and single men respectively, as to numbers, and 5 days in 3 to 4 weeks, and 3 days in 7 to 7 weeks respectively as to working periods. This proportion was amended by the committee in January, 1931 to 60 positions for single men. The reason for this amendment I understand, was in fact that the Government had been able, as a special matter to provide more work for both married and single men prior to last Christmas.

The present system of allotment operated by the Committee and consequently by the Government, is 55 positions for married and 20 positions for single men.

Another document in Australian Archives A430/1 G180 signed by Waterman, Chief Clerk and dated 8th July, 1931 notes some official problems re pays. It follows:

*MEMORANDUM for-
Mr Temby*

Will you please prepare and see me as soon as possible - before the week-end - with a draft statement of the financial effect on the following proposal -

That married and single residents in receipt of unemployment relief to be given full time work at award rates, from which their rents would be deducted, and which would dispense with the necessity for the issue of ration relief.

The schedule will necessitate your ascertaining from the Industrial Officer a list of the categories of occupations and the number therein of all unemployed relief workers, the point being that the scheme under consideration would entail employment of tradesmen, if possible, in their own occupation and not as labourers, but I would like also an alternative worked out assuming that, whether artisans or labourers, the men would be employed on the basic rate. Do not overlook a proportionate allowance for zone payment, and for payment as a higher grade labourer.

Your calculations will also entail securing from the Accountant a schedule of the rentals payable by the men. It will also be necessary to use a summary of the families of the recipients of ration relief, e.g. 10 families with 10 children, 20 families with 8 children, etc, etc.

The objective of the schedule is to compare the present cost of underemployment relief and rations and rental losses (all rent is at present lost so far as unemployment relief workers are concerned) with the cost of an alternative scheme providing full time work, eliminating rations and securing the payment of rent.

Subject to the consideration of the details, my conclusion is that the Government would need to spend at least double on public works, but would secure assets to the value thereof and cash revenue in rentals, and would save the cost of rations.

**Memorandum for the Chief Clerk dated 10th July, 1931 from FCC Department of Home Affairs
FCT Branch. (Australian Archives A430/1/8 G180)**

In accordance with your directions for a statement showing the financial effect of a proposal to provide full time employment at award rates to married and single residents, taking into consideration the additional revenue to be derived from rentals and consequent saving in ration relief, I desire to submit the following statements:

- a. Employment of married residents according to trade.*
- b. Employment of all married residents at labouring rates.*
- c. Employment of single residents at labouring rates.*

At the present time there are 286 married and 200 single men registered for employment. The numbers according to trades are:-

<i>Married Labourers</i>	<i>224</i>
<i>Horse & Dray drivers</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Plasterers</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Bricklayers</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Carpenters</i>	<i>30</i>

Single - Generally all single men are employed on labouring work.

The award rates for the various trades are:

Labourers - 5 pounds, 6 shillings, 5 pounds 12 shillings per week according to grade.

Horse & dray drivers - 6 pounds 12 shilling per week

Plasters - 7 pounds, 6 shillings & 8 pence per week

Carpenters - 7 pounds, 1 shilling & 2 pence per week.

The majority of labourers are employed at the 5 pound 6 shilling rates, and in taking zone allowance into consideration, the Industrial Officer estimates that the average wage of a labourer is 5 pounds, 6 shillings. The statements are therefore based on this rate. The amount allowed for material, supervision etc, is calculated at five sixths the cost of wages.

An Accountant estimates, that under existing conditions, the following rentals will be lost during this financial year in respect of unemployment and relief workmen tenants:-

<i>Tenements -</i>	<i>3,500 pounds</i>
<i>Cottages -</i>	<i>3,500 pounds</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>7,000 pounds</i>

There are 62 single residents occupying cubicles at the Capitol Hill Camp, for which a charge of 3 shillings per week has been fixed. This represents the whole of the rental due to the Administration in respect of single residents.

The cost of rations has been calculated on average issues made during the last five weeks.

The current approval for unemployment relief provides for 75 full time positions, which are allotted as follows:

<i>55 to married men</i>
<i>20 to single men</i>

This enables the Unemployment Relief Committee to provide the following work:

Married men - 5 days work each 2 - 3 weeks.

Single men - 3 days work each 6 weeks.

The statements have not provided for any possible reduction in wages.

The sizes of the families of married residents are:-

No children	48
1 child	65
2 children	45
3 children	32
4 children	29
5 children	15
6 children	7
7 children	1
8 children	1
9 children	1

Statement "A" additional cost involved in providing full time work for married residents according to trade -

224 Labourers @ 5 pounds 6/- per week	1187 pounds 4/-
24 Horse & Dray Drivers @ 6 pounds 12/- per week	158 pounds 8/-
3 Plasterers @ 7 pounds 6/8 per week	22 pounds
5 Bricklayers @ 7 pounds 6/8 per week	36 pounds 13/4
30 Carpenters @ 7 pounds 1/2 per week	211 pounds 15/-
	286
	1616 pounds 4d
	= 84,032 pounds per annum
Materials, supervision etc.	70,000 pounds
	154,032 pounds
Less deduction for rentals	70,000 pounds
Cost of proposed scheme	147,032 pounds.

Present Scheme - 55 men @ 5 pounds 6/- per week	15,158 pounds
Material, supervision etc	12,400 pounds
	27,558 pounds
Cost of rations	1,400 pounds
	28,958 pounds

Net Additional cost - 118,074 pounds

	Expenditure	Assets
Comparison Present Scheme	28,958 pounds	27,558 pounds
Proposed	137,506 pounds	144,507 pounds

A number of requests for assistance and work carried out are in the Australian Archives in the Unemployment Relief files. Some examples are:

5th June, 1930

Mr H Temby, Hon Sec of the FC Cricket Association wrote to the Civic Commission with a request that in part reads:

In connection with any relief moneys which may be made available by the Civic Commissioner for the purpose of assisting the unemployed in the Territory I am directed to suggest that consideration be given to the question of ear-marking portion of such moneys for improvement of playing areas in Canberra.

14th June, 1930

Mr Helson, Secretary of the Canberra Unemployment Relief Committee informed the Hon A Blakeley, MP, Minister for Home Affairs that 80 pounds was available from the fund for use to spend over the next two weeks. He wanted the money to be confined for use to pay married men domiciled in the Territory and went to suggest the following projects:

- *Causeway Settlement - improvement of roads and footpaths (pencil note said out).
- * Mothercraft Clinic - cleaning ground and formation plantations (pencil note - Mr Prince)
- * Gardens and Sports Grounds, Reid. cleaning preparation in planting Dirrawan - 6 men for take on my portion..
- * Manuka, Northbourne and Kingston Sports Grounds formation and gravelling of path of access to latrines (6 men look out both sides of gardens)
- * York Park paths across.

17th June, 1930

Canberra Unemployment Relief Committee to Civic Administrator suggesting the following:

*Walking track for pedestrians to be constructed to the summit of Mt Ainslie and rustic seats provided at vantage points. Such a track to start at nearest practical point near the War Memorial site and not to follow the surveyed road. Upon completion recommend that the road to the summit of Red Hill be repaired and that the track to the summit be cleared.

18th June, 1930

Unemployment Relief Committee to Civic Administrator recommended:

- *Mothercraft Clinic - clean allotment and plant shrubs
- * Gardens and Sports Ground Reid - grading, preparation of planting Reid Park.
- *Dirrawan Gardens - cleaning area, erecting rockery - rocks already on ground – and planting. This job should occupy 6 men for two weeks.

This report continued with the information that the Causeway Settlement was only temporary [it is now a permanent suburb of Canberra] - therefore nothing would be done. Also said that access to latrines at Manuka, Northbourne and Kingston Sports Grounds was adequate. The report also noted that York Park was used as a shortcut by people living in the area and that in wet weather they could go via National Circuit where there is a concrete surface.

20th June, 1930

From PE Deane, Hon Sec of Unemployment Relief Committee to Civic Administrator - suggesting and noting following:

- *Mothercraft Clinic work commenced 23.6.1930
- * Dirrawan Gardens work commenced 26.6.1930

26th June, 1930

Letter from Civic Administrator to Secretary for Home Affairs noted that the sum provided for works in the Territory Relief of unemployment since 1.1.1930 totalled 31,989 pounds covering:

Adelaide Avenue improvements	7,475 pounds
Retreading Canberra/Queanbeyan road	5,514 pounds
Gravelling Federal Highway	12,000 pounds
Construction of Duntroon/Canberra road	7,000 pounds

Number of men employed:

Adelaide Avenue	30
Retreading Canberra/Queanbeyan road	16
Gravelling Federal Highway	30
Construction Duntroon/Canberra road	60

Also ten cottages put in hand at earlier date than would otherwise be the case.

10th July, 1930

To Civic Administrator from PE Deane, Secretary Department of Home Affairs noted:

Causeway footpaths and Red Hill improvements of existing vehicle track approved. Not approved was York Park pathway and gravelling of paths to latrines at Manuka, Northbourne and Kingston Sports Grounds. Canberra Unemployment Relief Fund had fences contracted by Government.

20th August, 1930

Canberra Unemployment Relief Committee suggested the following additional to the Civic Administrator.

- * Concrete wicket at Ainslie Cricket Ground.
- * Improvement to approach Motorist Camping area at Commonwealth Avenue Bridge
- * Painting of bus shelters at Westridge and Westlake
- * Provision of a recreation hall at Westridge
- * Additional planting at Braddon Bowling Green
- * Filling in subsidence of track at York Park
- * External painting of Acton hall.

Approved 25th September 1930

1. Work at Braddon Bowling Green
2. Painting of bus shelters at Westridge and Westlake.
3. Improved motor access to motorists' camping area near Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

25th September, 1930

Suggested by Canberra Unemployment Relief Committee

1. Improvement of access to Red Hill Vehicle track where it crosses the stormwater drain.
2. Preparation and sowing of Reid Sports' Ground.
3. Planting of features at Murray's Crescent, Griffith.
4. Audit work at the fish hatchery comprising the alternate proposal to total completion at an estimated cost of 162 pounds.

7th October, 1930

CURC suggested the following works:

- * Canberra City Band Stands
- * Northbourne Sports Grounds - outer fence and gates
- * Belmore Gardens - improvements
- * Boys' Club hall
- * Oaks Estate ford
- * Canberra Queanbeyan Road - tree planting and extension
- * Gorman House tennis courts
- * Kingston footpaths
- * Manuka Sports Ground - pavilion
- * Molonglo Tennis Courts
- * St Gabriel's tree planting etc
- * Telopea park Baths - tree planting
- * Oaks Estate water supply
- * Barton proposed temporary hall

27th October, 1930

Administration to Mr HL Pollard, Hon Secretary FCT Cricket Club, Young Street, Barton - Completion of new ground of the Ainslie District Cricket Club at Yass Road, and regrading of the pavilion reserve and gravelling of the vehicular entrances at Northbourne Sports Ground.

13th December, 1930 (this year needs to be checked - may be 1931?)

Commonwealth of Australia J O'Callaghan for Secretary Civic Administrator: The Minister approved the following unemployment relief work:

1. Improvement to Canberra Rifle Range.
2. Chipping in connection with fire breaks in the City area.
3. Preparation for street planting in Acton sub-division and in the vicinity of the Institute of Anatomy (now Film and Sound Archives).

13th March, 1931

President of Public Service Association and Secretary of Clerical Assistants – reconsideration of continuance of voluntary subscription for unemployment relief. Funds were also collected from Canberra residents.

Jobs underway in 1931 included:

- * Planting of Murray Crescent, Griffith*
- * Planting Hospital grounds*
- * Planting Corroboree Park*
- * Planting parking area Pine Island*
- * Planting Belmore Gardens*
- * Planting Forrest*
- * Planting Ainslie*
- * Planting public school, Braddon, hedges and trees*
- * Planting Federal Highway*
- * Planting the Swimming Pool [Manuka]*
- * Planting Hotel Acton*
- * Planting Forrest and Braddon Bowling Greens*

For how long the Unemployment Relief Committee continued I am not certain as I did not follow through into the period of the mid to late 1930s. The advent of World War 2 in 1939 did not remove all traces of the Great Depression. It continued into the early 1940s.

Parkes Barracks was closed sometime in the 1930s and the men moved to other camps including Capitol Hill and Causeway. Mrs Stanley, Mess Caterer at Capitol Hill left around 1931. However information about this camp is found in a number of documents including Truth newspaper dated Sunday, December 27 1936. It reads as follows:

*SCANDAL OF CANBERRA RELIEF CAMP
Capitol Hill Site a Disgrace to Federal Capital
(from "Truth's" Canberra representative)*

The paying off last week of the Canberra relief workers before the Christmas holidays, once again raised the scandal of Capitol Hill Camp, to which "Truth" has previously directed attention.

These single relief workers normally receive from the Commonwealth Government one week's work in five, but before Christmas they have four weeks of continuous employment. To offset this liberality they will have no further work until February.

The sudden acquisition of comparative wealth has been too much for some of the men, with the result that this week scenes in the Capitol Hill camp and in its vicinity have been witnessed which would be tolerated in no other town in Australia.

The camp is less than half a mile from Parliament House [Provisional – modern Parliament House sits on the site of the camp] and while visitors admire the public buildings the neat homes with gardens, the parks and tree lined streets, the Capitol Hill camp is mercifully hidden.

It consists of about 80 cubicles, housing that number of men. Each cubicle is 8 feet by 6 feet and is built of unlined pine.

*THE SYSTEM OF PUTTING UNEMPLOYED MEN INTO CAMPS IS A FEATURE
OF GERMAN ADMINISTRATION, BUT IS ABHORRENT TO AUSTRALIAN IDEALS.*

For years these men have lived together in the same surroundings. Sometimes one dies and another homeless man takes his place. Some of them are old-age or military pensioners.

It is well-known that men isolated socially in such surroundings for any length of time quarrel among themselves. The result here is, therefore a camp divided into several rival camps, denouncing each other

as "pimps", "shelves", or "crooks". Every man regards his neighbour with distrust. Fights and drunken brawls are numerous and among these submerged citizens of the Commonwealth, "metho" parties are frequent.

CONDEMNED

Some months ago one man at such a party was covered with methylated spirit, and a match applied to him. For months he was in hospital in a serious condition, but no police action was taken. Within weeks another man was shot with a rifle in the camp. As soon as the shot was fired the camp appeared to empty, so that when the police made inquiries nobody knew anything and even the injured man suddenly suffered from loss of memory. Many a man there has tried to keep a dog for company but it is always poisoned.

The cubicles themselves are infested with vermin. They have been condemned by the health Department, and are not in conformity with the housing regulations laid down for the national capital.

Not only does the Commonwealth Government ignore its own laws in allowing such a camp to exist, but it actually makes a profit from the camp. A charge of three shillings is made for each cubicle, and the rent is deducted from the pay envelope. During the worst of the depression when there were no pay envelopes for months, the men fell into arrears of rent. These arrears are not being deducted from the pay at the rate of six shillings per week.

It is safe to assert that the capital cost of the camp has been paid by those poor workers over and over again.

Another letter dated 16th April, 1937 with the heading Commonwealth of Australia, Commonwealth Police sent as a Memorandum to the Secretary Department of Interior adds further information to Capitol Hill Camp and the closure of Parkes Barracks.

The sub-heading is *CAPITAL HILL CAMP* and the text is as follows:

I would be glad if you could cause early consideration to be given to the erection of a notice board at the above camp, drawing attention to the Trespass on Commonwealth Lands ordinance 1922-1928, to enable the police to be in a position to move on from Canberra certain undesirable persons who make this camp their temporary headquarters.

I am informed by a member of the police force that there are more cubicles in this camp than are required for the housing of local single men who are registered for employment. The result is that travelling unemployed force an entry into the unoccupied cubicles and remain in Canberra for lengthy periods. These individuals canvass the city from door to door, either begging or seeking employment, and numerous complaints have been received from local residents to effect that a number of these men, if unsuccessful, use insulting words, and, generally stealing, are a source of annoyance to housewives in various parts of the city. In addition these men frequent the hotels and become intoxicated.

The position at present is that the police are powerless to force these undesirables to move on.

It will be recalled that when the No 4 [Parkes Barracks -former No 4 Sewer Camp] was occupied, your Department issued a notice in the following form [in handwriting - 1932]:

Commonwealth of Australia

Department of Interior

Trespass on Commonwealth Lands Ordinance 1922-1928

Trespass on lands within the precincts of this camp is prohibited and any person entering or remaining in the camp without the authority of the Officer-in-Charge of the Commonwealth Police ...will be prosecuted.

A list of men owing money for occupation of a cubicle at Capitol Hill on 25th May, 1931 and outstanding amounts to 19th August 1931 was in the Australian Archives in file A627/2/1 E308.

These files were returned to the ACT Administration. Most men on the list owed 1 pound 17 shillings and 4d. Beach's weekly rental was 3 shillings. Following is a list of the men.

W Dawes, E Cole, A Anderson, F Grant, A McLeod, W Senior, M Rush, A Bogovich, M Coogan, J Fitzpatrick, A Shanks, C Wright, A Bell, R Bissett, J Mearns, J Clues, A Ploog, N Hile, J Elliott, K Hile, WJ Mills, N Scholes, J Haville, J Small, WT Webb, M McKinnon (vacated 5.6.31), CW Graham, G McManus, T Nelson, WJ Wright, T Whittle(vacated 7.6.31), G R Teasdale, JF Wade, J Brown, J Smith, S Balfour, FJ Kelly, JH Flood, W Dale (15.6.31 vacated), C Coggins, V Callaghan, HJ Hodgson, M Cowan, M McKee, WG Lynch, C Forster, F Wheatley, G Murray, G Mathieson, G O'Donnell, W Harrigan, M Ryan (14/- pw - caretaker's quarters), H McKenna, J Wilson (vacated 25.6.31), D Gray, JS Drummond, WH Wilson, P Fogerty, AE Jones, W Harrigan, G Kerr, T Synott, G Medland, J Worthingham, L Doyle, J Stephen, J Wilson, F Mair, AW Helsham, LW Dawson, EE Dawson, W Dale.

A430/1 G1241 Australian Archives - A document entitled

*STATEMENT SHOWING SCOPE OF EMPLOYMENT OFFERED IN CANBERRA BY ESTIMATES 31/32
FCT BRANCH*

<i>Duration</i>	<i>Tradesmen</i>	<i>Labourers</i>	<i>Transport</i>	<i>Firemen</i>	<i>Watchmen</i>	<i>Cleaners</i>	<i>Caretakers</i>
<i>Full time</i>	-	120	-	12	5		
<i>46 weeks</i>	-	3	44	-	-		
<i>40 weeks</i>							<i>1 female</i>
<i>36 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		
<i>31 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	1		
<i>26 weeks</i>	-	42	2	-	3		
<i>18 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		
<i>16 weeks</i>	1	17	-	-	-		
<i>15 weeks</i>	-	-	2	-	-		
<i>14 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		
<i>13 weeks</i>	-	184	-	-	1		
<i>10 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		
<i>9 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		
<i>5 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-		

Works Department

[This file should sit next to the above- Total eg means the total of all Full Time both departments etc. The remarks also refer to all.]

<i>Duration</i>	<i>Building Trades</i>	<i>Engineering Trades</i>	<i>Labourers</i>	<i>Watchmen</i>	<i>Cleaners/Caretakers</i>	<i>Total –all men & Remarks</i>
<i>Full Time</i>	36	24	94	36		322 - 75 Additional weekly positions on Unemployment Relief Work
<i>46 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	47	40
<i>weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	1	
<i>36 weeks</i>	-	3	-	-	3	
<i>31 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>26 weeks</i>	-	-	12	-	59	
<i>18 weeks</i>	-	-	16	-	18	
<i>16 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	17	
<i>15 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	2	
<i>14 weeks</i>	-	-	4	-	4	
<i>13 weeks</i>	-	-	-	-	185	
<i>10 weeks</i>	-	-	12	-	12	

9 weeks	-	-	14	-	14
5 weeks	-	2	-	-	2

Total: 687

Another document in the same file Department of Home Affairs, Federal Capital Territory Branch dated 19th August, 1931 in part reads:

3. Paragraph 4 of my memorandum above-mentioned, dated 19th August, 1931, explained the circumstances which at that date had enabled the allotment of one week in two for the 250 married men of the total of 450 men on the Unemployed Register. It forecasted a reduction of the allocation to one week in three in early September, and indicated that the allocation would improve throughout the financial year occasionally according to the incidence of works activities under the Estimates.

My memorandum concluded by indicating that a more detailed treatment of the Estimates proposals was not possible at that stage, nor am I yet in a position to offer more explicitly advice, but the problem is the subject of close study in touch with the Department of Works, and I hope shortly to elaborate the position.

At present pending the initiation of certain road works and stormwater drainage proposals ex Estimates 1931/32, the quota for married men is reduced to one week in three, but this position will improve within a few days.

It should be mentioned in this connection that I am in receipt of a report from the Chief Clerk that the Industrial members of the Unemployment Relief Committee complained that this circumstance is prejudicial to the interests of the married men, and that views expressed by them by the Minister are not borne out by the works programme. I have no record of Ministerial assurance to that effect unless the remarks of the Minister in connection with the Departmental Estimates, which appear on page 4571 of Hansard dated 29th July last, may be construed as such an assurance. The position in regard to married men, as I understand it, is that they receive one week's work in three weeks, but that this proportion at times may, at times, be improved.

4. The Chief Clerk reports also that the industrial members of the Unemployment Relief Committee have complained of the action of the Forester in rejecting for forestry operations a number of the men dispatched for his purpose among those on the Unemployed Register.

Practically all the forestry work for some months to come will be axe-work, and it would be erroneous to conclude that every man offering is capable of doing this work. There have already been narrow escapes from fatal accidents, and inexperienced axemen are a continual source of anxiety. It is necessary, therefore, to exercise certain selection in the employees to be allotted to this class of work.

Upon full consideration, I am unable to recommend that any altered policy be introduced. It would be not only uneconomical, but fraught with considerable risk of accident and financial liability in workmen's compensation...

Plantings of Canberra forests and streets took place throughout the 1930s. This work was labour intensive and required comparatively little capital. Extermination of rabbits was another occupation that employed men for little cost other than labour.

A few major buildings were built during the time of the Great Depression including The Swimming Pool at Manuka, Institute of Anatomy [now the Film and Sound Archives], Civic Picture Theatre, St Christopher's Roman Catholic Cathedral, the War Memorial, Hotel Civic and the Canberra High School - but it was not until 1957 with the formation of the National Capital Development Commission that work again began in earnest on the city. Lake Burley Griffin filled in 1963 and with it Walter Burley Griffin's vision and

concept for the national capital began to take shape. Today the skeleton of Canberra has filled out to form present city that has expanded from the old Canberra to the areas of Woden, Tuggeranong and so on.

The trees planted by the men of the Unemployment Relief Committee and others have grown old. These and subsequent plantings on the open windswept paddocks of the Limestone Plains provided the settings for the buildings that followed. Many of the trees in the plantations were planted for one penny per hole.³ The time of the Great Depression in Australia was one of hardship for many and those living in the Federal Capital Territory were not better off than others in Australia. Many in work or who lived on farms helped those in need. Many Public Servants took a cut in pay and gave to the Unemployment Relief Fund. Many gave food and supplies to the men on the road. They were hard times.

³ The Superintendent of Parks and Gardens who took over from TC Weston in 1926 or 1927 until the late 1930s was Alexander Bruce. He was also responsible for the design and planting of the rose gardens in the grounds of the Provisional Parliament House.