

"Not like any other city in the world": The continuing resonance of the archives of town planning in community dialogue about the design of Australia's national capital.

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Abstract

Canberra, Australia's national capital, had its genesis in ideals of the Australian landscape. Site choice in 1909, the Griffin winning design in the 1911 international competition, and subsequent development have focussed on the concept of the city in the landscape. Symbolically fundamental to the city's image is its overall landscape setting and how the surrounding landscape flows into the city to create a green skeleton which articulates the city's form. It is the city's landscape setting from the surrounding hills through the open space system of the city right down to individual street-tree plantings that form a tangible physical framework. But it is a framework that has distinctive intangible values where culture and nature meet.

The paper outlines the history of ideas and events through time that have created this unique city in the landscape with special reference to the richness of public records available.

Background

Canberra is a remarkable city. In the true sense of the word it is a unique city, for there is no other city like it in the world. Walter Burley Griffin declared in 1912 that 'I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any governmental authorities would accept. I have planned the ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future'.¹ These were prophetic words for the development of the city over the years has maintained its status of being unlike any other. Why is this? There are roads, houses, offices, schools, shops, parks – all the components we associate with urban development – as in any other city.

The underlying reason lies in the way landscape defines and articulates the city plan. Changes over the years to the form of the city and hence to the Griffin ideal have taken place, nevertheless the landscape basis which binds form and content remains vividly coherent in the city plan. The form of the physical landscape – natural and created – is a palpable, tangible presence defining the city; but equally so is its content or intangible, symbolic meaning. Underlying the city's spatial structure therefore is the fundamental premise that Canberra is a city in the landscape.² Its spatial structure has been progressively and incrementally planned from the beginning³ to maintain continuity with existing design elements, in particular the hills, ridges, and valleys.⁴

The significance of the city therefore from the site choice and first ground-breaking plan by Griffin (1911) and his tenure as Director of Design 1913-1921, Charles Weston's innovative planting 1912-1926 then planning by Sulman (1921-26) and then by the National Capital Development Commission (1958-1988) has involved engagement with the community. Documentation involved in the site choice, planning and design of the city are held in the public records giving a remarkable body of knowledge and history available to the public as well as experts. Knowledge and celebration of this record held in repositories such as the National Archives of Australia (NAA), National Library of

¹ Walter Burley Griffin, (1912), *New York Times*, 2 June 1912.

² Taylor K (2006), *Canberra: City in the Landscape*, Halstead Press, Ultimo

³ See original Walter B Griffin plans and drawings in NAA (AA MS12) and NLA

⁴ National Capital Development Commission, (1970), *Tomorrow's Canberra. Planning for Growth and Change*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.

Australia (NLA), ACT (Australian Capital territory) Heritage Library, and the National Capital Authority (NCA) Collection is of ongoing relevance and resonates with the community. It informs debate on the form the city should take from an urban design perspective, particularly as change in the form of increased urban densities and high development in the centre of the city take place. Inevitably debate re-engages with the city in the landscape idea which continues as a powerful *genius loci* for the city.

The new art and science of town planning

The twentieth century was notable in the field of town planning in that it saw a remarkable expansion in the practice of public planning in almost all democratic societies. It was given life by the international zeal in the first decade of the century for the new art and science of town planning. International town planning conferences took place in 1910 in London and Berlin; the first conference on city planning in Australia was held in 1901 ('Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors, and Others Interested in the Building of the Federal Capital of Australia'); the First Australian Town Planning and Housing Conference and Exhibition was held in Adelaide in 1917; textbooks were written and journals published. Coincidental was an emerging interest in the building of national capitals.

The art and science of planning had social as well as physical underpinnings; in particular the encouragement of a healthy citizenry educated in the role of civics. This would be manifested through a utopian approach to the layout of towns where residential areas, parks and democratic open space, shopping municipal/government buildings etc would be carefully zoned and sited. Controlled physical planning with monumental public buildings in a discontinuous pattern, space and greenery, distinct residential zones according to economic status etc would have desirable social outcomes in contrast to the overcrowded industrial cities throughout the world – east and west. Cleanliness and hygiene were paramount considerations as was efficient traffic circulation.

It was against this background, as the new century dawned, that the idea took shape for a new federal (national) capital city for Australia. It was to be an ideal city for a new nation. From the outset therefore the concept of a federal capital, choice of site, and initial planning of Canberra from the 1911 international design competition were seen as a public undertaking. At the beginning of the process there were public finances for the competition to decide on a winning design and the intention of a federal public body to oversee development. The public were even invited to submit suggestions for naming the city in 1913.⁵ Public planning has therefore been a cornerstone of Canberra's development from the start.

The development of the city went through a number of starts and stops from 1912 to the mid-1950s when the city's population had limped to just 28,000 inhabitants. The Senate Select Committee Inquiry of 1955 into *The Development of Canberra*⁶ saw the initiation of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in 1958. Since then the population has grown to 320,000 even though the NCDC was abolished in 1988. That year Canberra was forced into self-government, marking the end of commonwealth responsibility or the development of the city, an arrangement that had been in place since 1912.

5 These included bizarre concoctions such as Cooeoomoo, Kookemuroo, Kangaremu, Marsupiala, Boomerang City, Gonebroke, Federalia and even Syd-Mel-Ad-Per-Bris-Ho. See Wigmore L, (1963), *The Long View. Australia's National Capital*, F W Cheshire, Melbourne; pp.62-63.

6 Senate Select Committee Report on The Development of Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1955.

As the city has grown and matured post-1958 there has been an ever growing public interest in the planning history and visions through time for Griffin's city not like any other. This interest has been extensively and intimately informed by the publicly available archival material and records in national institutions and agencies in the city. The idea that the city represents a series of layers through time reflecting public history that can be verified by archival material enthuses people. As the city approaches the centenary of its naming in 2013 it is timely to reflect on this remarkable community building project based on the use of architectural, urban and landscape records.

Landscape and national identity

A recurrent theme in community regard for the city is that of the leafy nature of the city, its open spaces, and landscape setting. Whilst the landscape ideal was critical to Walter Burley Griffin's winning 1912 competition design, it had its genesis before the competition was inaugurated setting the stage for acceptance of the Griffin plan.

The fascination with picturesque idealism in renditions of the Australian landscape in writing and painting in the nineteenth century reaching a high mark – but not an ending – in the Heidelberg school of painting. Here artists captured the beauty and colour of the Australian bush and also presented images of the ordinary person on the land. The democratic ideal of the relationship between people and land became firmly established. Notable in connection with the idea of a national capital is Helen Topliss' proposition that 'the optimistic landscapes of the Heidelberg School became the reference point for a resurgent utopianism in the 1880s.'⁷ The conflation of utopian visions for the ideal Australian city with the nationalist concept of picturesque landscape was inevitable.⁸ The clarity of light in both rural and city paintings and the sense of optimism for a strong, healthy, democratic nation took on the role of an Australian exemplar for future national development. Examples of these paintings are readily accessible in the national institutions in Canberra, with a comprehensive collection in the National Gallery of Australia.

This landscape idealism was incorporated inevitably into the site selection for the capital city. The 1901 Congress advised the need to secure for the federal capital 'abundant Water Supply... For necessary water and sanitary services... For creation of artificial lakes, maintenance of public gardens, fountains etc.' Charles Bogue Luffman, an English horticulturist who was principal of the Burnley School of Horticulture in Melbourne, advocated a city where landscape was central to its design. With great foresight and vision Luffman outlined his list of essentials for the ideal site and for the subsequent shape of the city. These included:

true botanic garden, representing Australian flora... preservation of natural, and creation of new forests and woodlands,... treatment of such hills, knolls, banks, gullies, valleys and natural lawns as may give affect to the landscape when viewed from central points, main thoroughfares and approaches,... creation of lakes, the widening, diverting and beautifying of streams, arranging of falls, cataracts, pools and fountains, ... the laying out of gardens around Federal buildings and in public spaces ... adaptation of streets and architecture to the natural contour and position of the landscape.

⁷ Topliss H, (1992), *The Artists' Camps. 'Plein Air' Painting in Australia*, Hedley Publications, Melbourne.

⁸ Taylor K (1999), 'Picturesque Visions of a Nation: Capital City in the Garden', *The New Federalist*, No 3, June 1999; 74-80.

Landscape vision

The Act of 1 January 1901 which established the constitution for the Commonwealth of Australia includes a notable section relating to a federal capital, even though the site at that date was not determined. Section 125 (originally in the 1891 draft bill for the colonies to form a commonwealth) provides that the Seat of Government shall be determined by Parliament, shall be in New South Wales on land granted to or acquired by the Commonwealth, and be distant not less than one hundred miles from Sydney. In September 1902 a report on various sites in New South Wales was issued: *Proposed Federal Capital Sites (Summary of Information Respecting and Photographic Views of)*. The sites included Albury, Bathurst, Bombala-Eden (the only site to include a coastal area), Braidwood, Carcoar, Cootamundra, Forest Reefs and Calvert (Milnthorpe), Goulburn, Orange or Canobolas, Queanbeyan, Tumut, Wagga Wagga, Wellington, Yass and Lake George. The report includes a comprehensive series of charming photographs showing the characteristics of each site to its picturesque advantage. Water in the form of rivers, lakes, and waterfalls features repeatedly. These images of water in the landscape reflect then current planning orthodoxy on the primal role of water in an ideal, planned city. In a complementary role, panoramic effects are a clear photographic favourite. These encompass distant hilly horizons and treed prospects, often with a pastoral touch, as with the shots around Yass, Cootamundra, Goulburn or Queanbeyan. Most of the latter are in fact Canberra and the treeless Limestone Plains - as the site for Canberra was known - including views around St John's Church, the old Post Office (which was near Blundell's Cottage) and Duntroon (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Illustration from 1902 Report of the sites of Queanbeyan (Limestone Plains). The Queanbeyan site is the present location of central Canberra (NLA).

The history of the decision to have a capital city separate from Sydney and Melbourne, and the long drawn-out process of selecting a site for the Federal Capital are well documented. What is significant is that the geographical landscape features of an ideal site were regarded as no less important than its location.

The year 1908 when the Burnham and Bennett plan for Chicago was produced was also momentous in Australian town planning history. It was in November of that year that the Australian federal government's Seat of Government Act saw the Yass-Canberra district finally designated as the location for the new federal capital of Australia. A New South Wales surveyor, Charles Scrivener, was given the task of recommending a specific site in November with the instruction that

... the Federal Capital should be a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position, with extensive views and embracing distinctive features which will lend themselves to the evolution of a design worthy of the object, not only for the present but for all time; consequently the potentialities of the site will demand most careful consideration from an hygienic standpoint, with a view to securing picturesqueness, and also with the object of beautification and expansion.⁹

On 25 February, 1909, Charles Scrivener recommended, even though by no means ideal, that

A city could be located at Canberra that would be visible on approach for many miles ... The capital would probably lie in an amphitheatre of hills with an outlook towards the north and north-east, well sheltered from westerly winds ... I regard the Canberra site as the best that can be obtained ... being prominently situated and yet sheltered, while facilities are afforded for storing water for ornamental purposes at a reasonable cost.¹⁰

Griffin and city in the landscape

In entering the winning design in the Federal Capital Competition in 1911 Griffin declared:

I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any government authorities in the world would accept. I have planned the ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the future.

Griffin saw the new city as an opportunity to combine current civic design principles of a beautiful city within a landscape structure with civic and social reform ideals, including creating a setting likely to foster civic pride and promote the health of its citizens. For Griffin existing large cities with overcrowding and lack of green space were not an exemplar. He remarked that:

it must be admitted that the civilised nations of the world offer only pathological examples for civic study, that modern cities everywhere are abnormal, cancerous growths on the landscape, intolerable community homes for a nature and liberty loving, to say nothing of art aspiring, people.¹¹

That Griffin's city met the ideals current in Australia was no accident. The international competition was not the beginning of Canberra as so often portrayed. The competition and the Griffin scheme were the culmination of the utopian visions for a new Australian city that would lead the world. The Griffin plan - so exquisitely illustrated by Marion Mahoney Griffin's water colour prospects (Figure 2) - was beautiful in design context and physical presentation. It was the City Beautiful with Garden City overtones *par excellence* and matched Australian visions of the ideal city. Here was inspiration for the creation of a grand capital that grasped the idea of landscape as the structure for a city where social reform and civic pride through healthy living were integral to the structure and life of the city. The plans and drawings are held in the NAA.

⁹ Dept of Home Affairs, Information, Conditions, and Particulars for Guidance in the Preparation of Competitive Designs for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 30.4.1911, p26. See also NAA:110, FC1911/738 Part 1 Yass-Canberra Site for Federal Capital General (1908-1909).

¹⁰ Quoted in Frederick Watson, (1927), *A Brief History of Canberra, the capital city of Australia*, Federal Capital Press, Canberra, p.129.

¹¹ Griffin letter to King O'Malley, 21.1.1913. Australian Archives FC16/186.

From the outset Canberra was envisaged as a city in the landscape and of the landscape. The Griffin design admirably suited the natural amphitheatre qualities of the site where



Figure 2 Panorama by Marion Mahoney Griffin from Mount Ainslie (NAA)

‘the setting [was used] as a theatrical whole’ to give a design that ‘was rich in symbolism’¹² by its use of radiating avenues with the hills as focal points and the use of dramatic views out of the city to the magnificent hill- landscape surrounds. Its geometrical major and minor axes created impressive vistas. Within the city, parks, play-areas, avenues, street-trees, botanical gardens, farmland and the lake formed a green skeleton for the city form.

The iconic status of the Griffin plan with its enduring legacy of the vision for a landscape city is captured in the inscription on the Australian Memory of the World Register:

On 23 May 1912 entry number 29, by Walter Burley Griffin, landscape architect, of Chicago, Illinois, USA, was declared the winner of the competition to design Australia's new federal capital. The winning design incorporated elements of the leading international ideas of the day in the science of town planning, such as the City Beautiful movement and the Garden City movement. It also contained references to other notable city planning models such as the plan of Washington, Daniel Burnham's 1908 plan for Chicago and the "White City" of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Griffin's design was beautifully rendered by his wife and creative partner, Marion Mahony Griffin, who used a muted palette with gold highlights in a style that contains elements of Japanese artistic practice. Their combined efforts also articulated a city form with high symbolic values, and placed democratic ideals at the apex of the monumental structures of the group of parliamentary buildings. The design also integrated the natural and built environments to create a "bush capital".

There are twelve Walter Burley Griffin (WBG) Canberra design drawings held by the National Archives of Australia, together with other numerous other design drawings that were unsuccessfully submitted as entries to the design competition. Standard size is 760 x 1525 mm. The drawings are mostly on cotton cloth and are executed in inks and watercolours. The drawings were created by WBG and his wife Marion Mahony Griffin in 1912 for entry into the Australian Federal Capital Design Competition. The quality of the design as well as the beauty of the drawings resulted in WBG winning the competition. Griffin was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction in October 1913 and utilized the winning design as the basis for the new city. The design is considered an outstanding example of landscape design, utilising the natural topography and investing

¹² Freestone, R. (1986), Canberra as a Garden City 1901-1930, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 19; 3 - 20.

the city with ideas prevalent in the City Beautiful and Garden City movements which dominated town planning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The documents are also central to the development, both physical and conceptual, of Australia's national capital. The Griffin design drawings were inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register in 2003.

Sulman and garden city.

The English architect and planner, John Sulman, came to Australia in 1885 and was highly influential in shaping Australian ideas on town planning in the years leading to the inception of Canberra. Later he became Chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) which directed development in Canberra 1921-1924 post-Walter Burley Griffin. He lectured in Architecture (1887-1912) and Town Planning (1919) at the University of Sydney. His ideas on planning were brought together in 1921 in his book *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*.¹³ He advised on the layout of a number of garden suburb developments in Sydney and New South Wales. He believed that the garden city approach was particularly suitable for Australia and was influenced by Unwin and Parker's layouts at Letchworth and Hampstead.

In 1909 before the competition for the Federal Capital design was announced Sulman wrote a series of articles in the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁴ In one article he stressed the need for parkways, playgrounds, vistas, and a hierarchy of streets going from wide to narrow. He advised incorporating into the plan a central area with Parliament at the hub surrounded by public buildings, shops, and hotels set within a diagrammatic radial-concentric plan

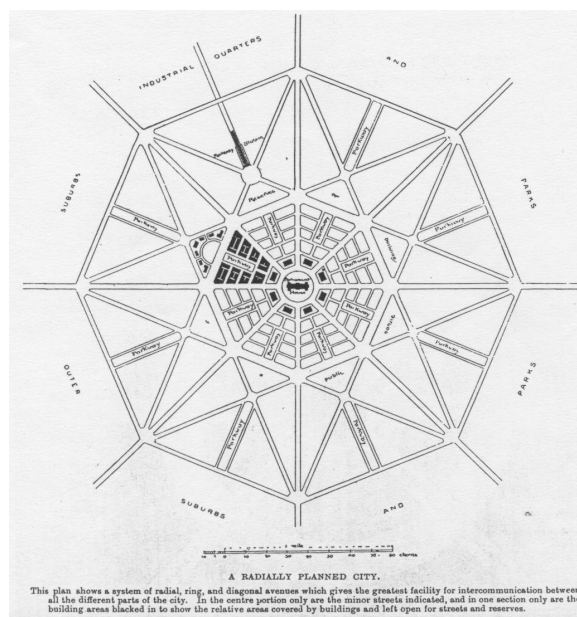


Figure 3 Sulman's schematic spiderweb plan for a Federal Capital (after Sulman).

with radiating avenues which he likened to a spiderweb pattern¹⁵ (Figure 3). It was essentially a city beautiful plan with a central layout not unlike the later 1911 competition

¹³ Sulman, J. (1921), *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*, William Applegate Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney.

¹⁴ These were published later together as one monograph: John Sulman (1909), *The Federal Capital*, J Sands, Sydney. See also John Sulman, (1909), 'The Federal Capital', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 28 August 1909.

¹⁵ Sulman, (1909), p.682.

entry submitted by Walter Burley Griffin, a concept which he repeatedly used in various publications.¹⁶ Sulman believed that:

Such a chance as we now have of showing the world what we can do has rarely been vouchsafed to a young nation. My aim ... is primarily to direct public attention to our unequalled opportunity, and to arouse patriotic interest and justifiable pride in the future capital of our Commonwealth ... It is surely well that we should enshrine all that we hold most dear in the preservation of our liberties and our rights in a fitting setting.¹⁷

Notwithstanding John Sulman's support for the Griffin plan it was he as Chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee 1921-24 (FCAC) who instituted changes when Griffin resigned in 1921. The FCAC reflected Sulman's influential ideas as a leading town planner and educator, in particular his advocacy of the garden city and garden suburb. The FCAC therefore declared that in the first stage Canberra was to be 'a garden town, with simple, pleasing, but unpretentious buildings'; it saw houses as single storey cottages standing in their own garden. Sulman in 1910 had suggested that Australians preferred the single storey house; evidence from various developments in Australian cities pointed to this phenomenon.¹⁸ In 1909 before the competition for the Federal Capital design was announced Sulman wrote a series of articles in the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁹ In one article he stressed the need for parkways, playgrounds, vistas, and a hierarchy of streets going from wide to narrow. He advised incorporating into the plan a central area with Parliament at the hub surrounded by public buildings, shops, and hotels set within a diagrammatic radial-concentric plan with radiating avenues which he likened to a spiderweb pattern.²⁰

Sulman as FCAC Director also conceived of major public buildings and national institutions as separate buildings standing in a park-like setting: an urban picturesque personified. This is the current pattern for Canberra's national buildings and institutions in the central National Triangle. The Federal Capital Commission (FCC) under John Butters continued the garden city concept in residential areas, domestic FCC style of architecture – unique to Canberra – with its Arts and Crafts Movement genre and public buildings like Old Parliament House. Detached houses in 1920s inner suburbs such as Reid, Barton, Forrest dating from the FCAC and FCC days reflect the enduring attraction of the early garden suburb idea. Indeed Canberra has what may be regarded as the best collection of early Australian garden suburbs.

Planting the city

Whilst it was one thing for the idealists and the planners to plan and design their ideal layouts based on prevalent planning and social theories and their own experience, someone had to undertake the landscape architectural planning, design, and planting. In the case of Canberra two figures in the landscape stand out: Charles Weston and Lindsay Pryor.

It was Charles Weston who, from 1913 to 1926, laid down the innovative and visionary landscape planning framework for the city with his tree planting schemes. He set up

¹⁶ For example John Sulman, (1909); – (1911), 'The Federal Capital of Australia', *Town Planning Conference London 10-15 October 1910, Transactions*, Royal British Institute of Architects, London; – (1919), *Town Planning. A Sketch in Outline*, William Applegate Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney;

¹⁷ Repeated as Appendix C No VII, p240 in John Sulman, (1921).

¹⁸ Sulman, (1921).

¹⁹ These were published later together as one monograph: John Sulman (1909), *The Federal Capital*, J Sands, Sydney. See also John Sulman, (1909), 'The Federal Capital', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 28 August 1909.

²⁰ Sulman, (1909), p.682.

experimental nurseries to raise the necessary tree stock; some indication of Weston's achievement can be seen from the fact that between 1921 to 1924 1,162,942 trees were planted in what is now the inner city suburbs in the streets and small parks. Weston also realised the urgency of revegetating the inner hills of the city site such as Black Mountain, Mount Ainslie, Stromlo. 820,000 trees and shrubs were planted on the hills in the period 1912 to 1920. These and the subsequent regeneration of local eucalypt after withdrawal of grazing species formed the foundation for the wooded and forested inner hills of Canberra now so much valued by the present population and are home to countless native birds and animals including the iconic kangaroo.

It is a lasting testimony to Weston's foresight that many of the trees and shrubs still used in Canberra in public planting are species found to be successful by Weston's meticulous testing: for example *Eucalyptus mannifera*, *E. cinerea*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Quercus palustris*. He experimented with exotic plants and with indigenous species, including a range of eucalypts. One of the problems Weston encountered was the dearth of Australian data on performance of indigenous species in the Canberra region. He was helped by Richard Cambage's 1911/1912 survey of the natural landscape of the ACT in which Cambage tried to explain the treeless nature of the Limestone Plains²¹ (see photograph). He was President of the Linnean Society of New South Wales and in 1918 published notes on the flora of NSW, including the federal capital territory.²² Weston used Cambage's notes in a 1918 file of locally indigenous trees and shrubs.²³ Whilst Weston was keen to use indigenous stock – for example he trialled thirty-six species of eucalypts involving 2100 plants in 1917 at Yarralumla – he may have been forced to give them a lower importance than he preferred. In the same year he suggested that the three Cedars (deodar, atlas, and Lebanon: *Cedrus deodara*, *C. atlantica*, and *C. libani*) would be useful as the chief arboreal feature of the city. Cedars have generally performed well in Canberra and many streets are graced by their splendid forms and greatly admired by locals. The same can be said of a range of oak trees, many of which have proved highly successful in Canberra such as the American Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*), described by Pryor and Banks as an excellent street tree which grows faster than most other oaks.²⁴

Such street tree planting and the wide nature strips capable of accommodating large trees are critically significant components to the garden suburb patterns of early Canberra. They offer a sense of place and permanency. This definition of major residential street spaces by large avenue trees and the way they form a filter through which houses are glimpsed is a singularly distinctive element of Canberra's early garden suburbs. The influence Sulman's views on the importance of avenue planting along streets using one tree type per street is evident through Weston's street planting and that of his successors. Sulman and the FCAC directed that electricity wires be sited along the rear of residential blocks created the golden opportunity for Weston to plant large street trees along streets where the growth would be unencumbered by wires. It is a policy that continued in the

²¹ NAA: A431/1 1953/1198 NAA: A431/1 1953/1198.

²² Richard H Cambage, (1918), 'Notes on the Native Flora of New South Wales. Part X. The Federal Capital Territory', *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales*, 1918, vol 43, part 4, Oct 30, pp.673-711.

²³ NAA: CP209/18, 18 March 1918.

²⁴ Lindsay D Pryor, & John CG Banks, (1991), *Trees and Shrubs in Canberra*, Little Hills Press, Crows Nest, NSW with the cooperation and assistance of the ACT Government.



Figure 4 Captain Cook Crescent: Pryor's planting of *Eucalyptus mannifera* in the central median with Weston's Atlantic cedars on the side verges (K. Taylor)

1940s and the NCDC era post-1958 and which has added so much to the unique character of Canberra.

Weston's innovative work was continued by Lindsay Pryor in the period from 1944-1958 and his ideas on the development of Canberra's main avenues have left us a landscape treatment of considerable force. A lasting testimony to Pryor's ability and knowledge of plant material lies in his residential street tree planting which adds so much to Canberra's charm and setting and the meanings it has for residents. In addition to his experiments with plant material, Lindsay Pryor travelled abroad extensively. Through his inquiring mind and keen intellect he sought out species that might be used in Canberra to supplement those already used or known. He realised for example the opportunity for a range of Oaks to be used. He collected seed and colleagues sent him seed. He thereby added to the palette of trees Weston had introduced. A fine example of the combined work of Weston and Pryor is seen in Figure 4.

Weston's planting in the symbolic and geographical centre of the national capital in the area fronting Old Parliament House(1927) with New Parliament House (1988) looking from above is also a significant legacy. A planting plan c1925/1926 and aerial photographs from the late 1920s (Figure 5) show that the Parliamentary gardens area planting was in formal arrangements including avenues, circles, arcs. Planting lists highlight the reliance on dark conifers with some native species, and deciduous trees for spring and autumn colour. Such a mixture of plant material reflected community preferences of the time and continues to offer a series of elegant outdoor spaces (Figure 5a) that are frequently used for public events and that act as a setting for national institution buildings.



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Figure 5 Parliamentary Gardens in the late 1920s (NLA)

Figure 5a Parliamentary Gardens today (K. Taylor)

Post 1955 Senate Select Inquiry: 1958 onwards

Following a 1955 Senate Inquiry on the Development of Canberra and a 1957/58 report by the British planner, Sir William Holford, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was set up by Prime Minister Menzies in 1958 to plan, develop and construct Canberra. The underlying landscape foci briefly reviewed above were grasped by the NCDC. They continued to suffuse planning ideas during the crucial years 1958 to 1988 (when the NCDC was disbanded) where land-use planning policy and implementation integrated civil engineering and landscape concerns in an holistic approach to planning. The garden city ideal flourished to create a city known affectionately as The Bush Capital.²⁵ Not least was the adoption of the **Y Plan** in the late 1960s as a linear model for city growth, with a series of new towns rather than the concentric pattern of other Australian cities. The Y Plan, formalised in the 1984 NCDC *Metropolitan Policy Plan*, articulated the form of urban growth on the basis of a series of new towns (Belconnen, Woden/Weston Creek, Tuggeranong, Gungahlin) separated from central Canberra and each other by landscape corridors. Landscape maintained its primal position as articulator of urban form. With over 14 million trees in the city and its immediate surrounds with associated public and private open space and wildlife, Canberra became and remains the epitome of nature in the city.

Essential to the Y Plan is the integrated open space system of hills, ridges and buffers: the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). The 1992 report *Our Bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces* refers to the NCOSS covering 72 per cent of the Territory as 'a valuable legacy of visionary design and planning.'²⁶ In *Tomorrow's Canberra*²⁷ the forerunner of NCOSS is referred to as 'the emerging metropolitan park system [which] encompasses a wide range of parks, recreation areas, reserves, and other open space.' By 1977 the term NCOSS – reflecting NCDC nomenclature – was used. It embraced the comprehensive network of inner and

²⁵ Bush meaning in Australian open eucalypt woodland and grassy glades. It is also applied to grazing land and originates from early colonial days and when it referred to land outside the city.

²⁶ Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital (1992), *Our Bush Capital: protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces: Report of the Joint Committee on the National Capital*, (Parliamentary Paper No 1992/253, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

²⁷ NCDC (1970), *Tomorrow's Canberra. Planning for Growth and Change*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.

outer hills, ridges and buffers, Lake Burley Griffin, river corridors and mountains with associated bushlands. The primary significance to Canberra's post-1945 planning of the open space system may be gauged from the view expressed in the 1970 NCDC publication *Tomorrow's Canberra*:

The fourth major component of land use, open space, will probably be the most enduring element of the urban structure.²⁸

It is this comprehensive network which articulates the city plan. It was pivotal in guiding the physical layout and planning structure of the new towns inherent in the Y Plan concept. It is also a critical component at the streetscape scale. NCDC records from this era of planning are housed in the ACT Heritage Library and in the National Capital Authority (NCA) library.²⁹

Summary

A remarkable legacy that is Canberra: City in the Landscape is that of a city where records chronicling the history of the development of the city and supporting visions and idealism are readily available for public consumption. The result is a highly informed body of public opinion able to articulate its sense of belonging and place. It is a clear testimony to the way people value places when they are able to understand the history of places as a story of events, places and people through time. This history is often called on to support expressions of public opinion on planning matters and proposed changes particularly where proposed change is seen to strike at the vision that is Canberra, and so eloquently expressed in the following words:

The past lives on in art and memory, but it is not static: it shifts and changes as the present throws its shadow backwards. The landscape also changes, but far more slowly; it is a living link between what we were and what we have become. This is one of the reasons why we feel such profound anguish when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition; we lose not only a place, but a part of ourselves, a continuity between the shifting phases of our life.³⁰

Acknowledgement I am grateful to the help and advice given by Adrian Cunningham, National Archives of Australia in preparing this paper.

²⁸ NCDC (1970), p. 69.

²⁹ The NCA came into being in 1988 when the NCDC was abolished with the advent of self government for the ACT

³⁰ Margaret Drabble (1979), *A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1979, p.270.