John P Lea

Government and the Community in Tennant Creek
1947–78

Australian National University North Australia Research Unit
Monograph
Darwin 1989
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PREFACE

This study was jointly funded in 1988 by grants from the NT History Awards Committee and the North Australia Research Unit of the Australian National University. Field visits were made to Tennant Creek in May and July 1988 and most of the archival research was conducted over the same period in Darwin during a NARU Visiting Fellowship.

I am particularly indebted to Baiba Berzins and staff of the NT Archives Service and Lorna Habermann of the Australian Archives in Darwin for their patient assistance. Colleen Pyne and Peter Loveday offered encouragement when it was most needed and the full use of NARU’s extensive resources. The following also deserve special mention among those who were kind enough to give me assistance: Daniel Anderson, David Carment, Jack Ford, Marge and Bill Fullwood, Alistair Heatley, John Havnen, Michael Hester, Charles Priest, Ruby and Robert Reed, Nigel Skelton, Jennie Small, Hilda and Ian Tuxworth, Shelagh Walsh, Elna Williams and Barbara Winston.

As in my earlier study of Katherine (Lea 1987), it has occasionally been necessary to use identifying terminology about Aboriginal people which was usual in less informed times. No offence is intended by the occasional historical use of the words part-Aboriginal and half-caste and it is recognized these terms are no longer accepted in common usage.

I am also particularly grateful to Hilda Tuxworth and Michael Hester for allowing me an opportunity to delve into the valuable Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection of documents and memorabilia which are held in the Tennant Creek National Trust Museum. I was similarly privileged to be allowed to hunt down old town management board minutes in the town council offices and examine the old newspaper collection in the public library. The cooperation and friendliness extended to me from all sections of the Tennant Creek community removed much of the uncertainty and frustration which so often accompanies data collection. Lastly, and by no means least, I am most grateful for the fast, efficient and uncomplaining typing services of the NARU secretariat in Darwin.

John Lea
Darwin
August 1988
INTRODUCTION

... Tennant Creek in my opinion is one of the best towns in the Northern Territory. It always fought its own way and it always paid its own way (Len Kittle, NTRS 226, TS254).

This investigation of government and the community in Tennant Creek during the 40 years which preceded self-government in the Northern Territory is the third in a series of personal investigations which have looked at the origins of local government in small Territory towns. The first case study examined the deliberate transfer of town administration in the new mining settlement of Jabiru from development authority to elected local government in 1982-84 (Lea and Zehner 1986) and was followed by an historical investigation of evolving community organisation and local government in Katherine (Lea 1987). In addition and of parallel interest are the important histories of Darwin City Council (Heatley 1986) and Alice Springs Town Council (P. Donovan, MS lodged with Town Council). Together with the studies of Katherine and Jabiru, they form the only detailed investigations of the origins of local government in the Northern Territory. There are a number of factors influencing the design of the study which are introduced here before looking at the main sources of data and the overall structure of the monograph.

Complementary themes of governance in the white community and evolving approaches towards Aboriginal urban settlement were introduced in the Katherine study and linked together there for the first time. Very little research has been conducted into the attitudes of small town residents towards the Commonwealth administration of the Northern Territory in the post-war decades preceding self-government, and even less has been directed towards the whole populations of small communities like Katherine and Tennant Creek.

It is quite unrealistic to examine 'white' settlement and community organization in isolation of the far reaching changes which were occurring in the Aboriginal population over the period. This seems an obvious statement today but has rarely been demonstrated in academic studies of northern towns where the members of black and white society are
usually treated separately. Gibbins (1988, 139) recognizes, at a much broader scale, the close interrelationship between whites and Aborigines in their quest for Northern Territory statehood and greater control over their lives: 'statehood is not a zero-sum game being played between the NT government and NT Aborigines; it is a game in which both can win!' Similarly, the localised aspirations of small Territory communities must be seen from the perspective of the whole town, both in the changes which occurred historically and under present circumstances.

Although it is possible to uncover considerable economic inter-dependence between white and black society in Northern Territory towns historically, the two communities were separately administered and Aborigines had little to do with the town organisations described in this study. This simple bi-polar model is complicated, however, by the existence of part-Aboriginal and Asiatic families who were fully integrated into some facets of white society such as schooling, commerce and public housing and were among the most durable and long term 'stayers' in these small northern towns. They too seem to have been only marginally involved in the formation and development of the small town organisations described here. Some were prominent in local sports clubs and societies and others achieved positions of considerable importance in Territory and national public affairs. Among the best known is Jack McGinness a one-time railway settler in Katherine, founding president of the Half-caste Progress Association and leading official in the North Australia Workers Union. Among the Asiatic families Alec Fong Lim, the businessman and current Mayor of Darwin, also came from Katherine and received his early education there. Northern Territory part-Aborigines have not received much attention in the sparse literature on NT towns but are said to have experienced little segregation before race consciousness was heightened following the Welfare Ordinance of 1953 (Long 1967).

It is actually quite easy to demonstrate that Katherine and Tennant Creek exhibited close economic ties between black and white residents from the beginning, even though this was not obvious in these districts in physical terms until the first town camps appeared in the 1950s and 1960s. In the early period after town establishment, for example, Aboriginal labour was used extensively on the Katherine peanut farms and subsequently in the cattle industry. In
Tennant Creek its origins as a goldfield led to some differences as far as Aboriginal involvement with the town was concerned but also demonstrated a close economic relationship in the location of the mineral discoveries. The Warramunga goldfield was aptly named when it is realised that many of the most productive discoveries were found within the boundaries of the original Aboriginal reserve (map 3). Before that, 50 years of white contact at the Telegraph Station together with associated pastoral activity had led to serious disruption in Aboriginal social organisation (Stanner 1980). As far as the town was concerned the expropriation of Aboriginal land for mining at Tennant Creek (even though little Aboriginal labour was employed) was just as important economically as was the more conventional use of black labour on expropriated farming land around Katherine.

In recent times several Northern Territory towns (notably Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs) have increased in importance as centres of a considerable Aboriginal 'welfare industry' of government departments and other support organisations (Drakakis-Smith 1980). In other places, such as the new mining town of Jabiru, Aboriginal investment of funds derived from mining royalties has led to large capital projects in tourism and brought a new dimension to urban development. Such economic inter-dependence is not matched by close social and political inter-relationships today or during the period covered by this study. Though separate in most respects, the existence of two broadly defined communities along racial lines in a place as small as Tennant Creek has directly influenced the nature of development in the town. It is a story which should be told in a single book rather than partitioned into separate accounts of Aboriginal and white experience as is usually the case. Even as late as 1972, for example, a consultant's town planning report on Katherine managed to ignore the existence of the large Aboriginal town camping community completely (Loveday and Lea 1985).

Another factor influencing the study design is the choice of 1947 as the starting point for this research. The reasons for this are that the Tennant Creek District Association (TCDA) was not formed until after World War II and that strong doubts existed about the permanency of the town until after completion of the report to the NT administration by the Tennant Creek Advisory Committee (TCAC) in 1948. A miner's progress association was in existence from the days of the first
main gold rush in 1933/34 (Stanner 1980) but does not appear to have been directly concerned with town affairs at this time (Charles Priest, pers. comm.). Conditions in the emerging pre-war town are described by Tuxworth (1978) and Haines (1937) and early government involvement in the community is examined by Carment (1988). On the Aboriginal side, Nash (1984) traces the history of the Warumungu’s Reserves from 1892 and the movement of these people from the Tennant Creek area to Phillip Creek in 1945 and subsequently to Warrabri a decade later. For all these reasons it appeared sensible to begin this research in 1947, though a number of references are made to earlier events where they are relevant.

It is well established that all the small Territory settlements (other than Darwin) were convinced that they were poorly served by a Commonwealth administration based in Canberra and the northern port. The existence of a ‘Berrimah Line’ south of Darwin has become the euphemism employed to explain real or imagined examples of official neglect which provided a convenient rallying point for elected members of the early Legislative Councils. The extent to which this bias actually existed and the degree of co-operation it generated among the settlements down the ‘track’ in their opposition to the NT administration is also of considerable interest in furthering our understanding of the beginning of modern urban settlement in the north.

Data sources

As in the Katherine study, major steps in the governance transition from progress association to local government in 1978 form a chronological sequence of events which provide a convenient framework for discussing data sources. In the case of those from all ethnic backgrounds who occupied conventional dwellings in the town (mainly Europeans) this allows the sources to be ordered as follows:

1. **Pre-war and war time.** Life in Tennant Creek in the goldrush days is described in the books by Tuxworth (1978); Abbott (1950); Priest (1987); and Grant’s (1981) biography of Skipper Partridge. The articles by Haines (1937) and Carment (1988) should also be examined together with the excellent compendium by Pearce (1984). A valuable summary of administrative arrangements is
contained in the Payne Committee Report (Commonwealth of Australia 1937). Some details about the structure of the population is found in the NT Mines Branch annual reports and these are summarised in Balfour (nd) which is held in the Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection in the the National Trust Museum, Tennant Creek. Among the various CRS:F1 correspondence files of interest held in Australian Archives in Darwin and Canberra are: 39/636; 39/112; M40/805; 40/515; 42/74; M44/275. The early records of the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM, later called the Australian Inland Mission) are lodged in the National Library in Canberra. Grant (1981) also covers some of the pre-war experience of AIM in Tennant Creek. A special 56-page commemorative issue of The Tennant and District Times was published in May 1984 and contains a wealth of material on the pre-war town (copies were still available from the newspaper office in Tennant Creek in mid-1988).

2. The Tennant Creek Advisory Committee (TCAC) 1948/9 and the Tennant Creek District Association (TCDA) 1947/65. The best source of information on TCAC is the correspondence files held in the Tuxworth/Fullwood archive in Tennant Creek. Most of the correspondence can also be found in CRS:F1 (AA Darwin) but not the lengthy verbatim minutes of the first meeting. The only known source of TCDA minutes, correspondence and other material which exists is the Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection. Some TCDA meetings are reported in issues of the Tennant Creek Times in 1956 and 1957. CRS:F1 S2/635 and 54/937 (A. Archives, Darwin) contain much of the correspondence between the municipal inspector in Tennant Creek and the Administration for the 1950s. Useful information on town life in the 1950s and 60s is contained in several of the oral history transcripts in NT Archives, Darwin (NTRS226 TS108, TS109, TS254, TS278, TS284, TS226, TS454 and TS431). NT Legislative Council debates are also a valuable means of cross-checking items raised in TCDA correspondence with the Administration. A particularly useful entry is found in the Hansard report of the first meeting of the First Northern Territory Legislative Council (NTLC) (16 and 17 February 1948) and contains lengthy statements on the town by Dr Webster, the elected member for Tennant Creek (pp. 23-7 and 40-4). The history of the Northern
3. The Tennant Creek Town Management Board (TMB) (1961/78). Chief sources of information are the TMB minutes and annual reports, together with correspondence between the Board and the NT administration. A complete set of minutes are held by the Tennant Creek Council, as are most of the annual reports. The same documents have also been micro-filmed by the Council (16mm) and a copy donated to NT Archives as a result of this study. TMB correspondence held in the Council offices at Tennant Creek cover only the following dates: **Outwards.** Dec 1969 - March 1971; March 1971 - July 1973. **Inwards.** Jan. 1968 - April 1969; April 1969 - March 1971; April 1971 - March 1973; March 1973 - July 1974; August 1974 - June 1975; July 1975 - Sept. 1976. NT Legislative Assembly debates and Parliamentary questions after 1974 are a good source of information about recent events. Three former TMB members (Alf Chittock, Jack Ford and Ian Tuxworth) still reside in the town.

**Aborigines in Tennant Creek**

The most useful early sources concerning the interaction of Aborigines and town residents are found in the Warumungu Land Claim (Aboriginal Land Commission 1982); Davison (1985) and Nash (1984). CRS:F1 files in A. Archives, Darwin deal with the immediate pre and post-war period (M40/805, 42/435, 43/65, M44/275, 46/199 and 52/635). The most detailed study of Tennant Creek people is the Report on the Problems, Needs and Aspirations of Aboriginal Town Campers in Tennant Creek, N.T. (Dept of Aboriginal Affairs, Tennant Creek, 1984), and Appendix 1 has a useful chronological summary of events in the town from the mid-1960s. Another chronology is found in Wigley (1986). Relevant Department of Aboriginal Affairs correspondence files lodged in A. Archives, Darwin are numbered as follows: E460 series, 74/1403, 74/1293, 74/1417, 75/161, 76/820, 77/67 and 79/682; CRS:F1 series 73/4696, 73/6155 and 71/5105. A verbatim account of interviews with Aboriginal women in Tennant Creek is reproduced in Bell and Ditton (1980) and gives a vivid impression of town camp life in 1979. Some useful demographic data is found in the annual reports of the Welfare Branch of the NT Administration between 1960 and 1972.
Scope and organisation of the monograph

As indicated earlier, the twin themes covering formal progress towards local government in Tennant Creek from the time of the Advisory Committee in 1948 and the evolving nature of Aboriginal settlement in the town provide the main focus of the study. Chapter one describes the social and physical conditions immediately after the Second World War and the efforts of the NT administration to assess what would be necessary to upgrade the mining camp into a reasonably habitable desert town. Chapter two traces the experience of the Tennant Creek District Association during the 1950s until it was substantially displaced as the chief voice in urban affairs by the newly appointed town management board in 1961.

The TMB remained as an appointed and progressively unsatisfactory vehicle for managing popular interaction between residents and the Administration (Chapter three) until the first local elections to the Board were held in November 1972. Chapter four presents an overview of Aboriginal urban settlement in Tennant Creek from the mid-1950s when the first attempts to secure the service of paid black labour were made by the municipal inspector. As the Aboriginal population increased, three main camping areas became firmly established as the chief Aboriginal settlements in the town in the 1960s, together with a number of small bush camps and several Housing Commission dwellings. The Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association (WPHA) provided the focus for local Aboriginal aspirations from the early 1970s and is a good example of the difficult beginnings faced by these new Aboriginal organisations in the Northern Territory at this time.

Finally, Chapter five examines the last six years in the life of the TMB as the Administration endeavoured to off-load local government responsibilities onto a small and isolated community which was fearful of the financial consequences of the change and facing severe depression in both the mining and pastoral industries.
CHAPTER ONE
MINE CAMP TO DESERT TOWN

Steel poppet-heads and new iron buildings on a barren, stony ridge; dusty spinifex and dusty, stunted mulga; a gleam of more unpainted iron through the spindly tree-trunks; a whirring windmill; and then a wide expanse of over-hot and shadeless white road flanked by iron buildings, some quite large and others tiny, but all glaring in the hard and brilliant sunlight; a column of choking dust racing up the centre of the mile-long street and distributing a thick and floury layer impartially on everything in the vicinity, on the contents of shops, and on passing scantily-clad, brick-red pedestrians (Haines 1937, 43).

This pre-war description of Tennant Creek provides a vivid word-picture of conditions as they must have been in the small town just after the war, except that the dust nuisance had been lessened somewhat when the Stuart Highway was sealed in 1940 to cope with army convoys. Even the Administrator of the Northern Territory at the time described it as 'unattractive beyond description', poorly located and far from the nearest drinkable water (Abbott 1950, 129). In spite of these shortcomings, the Tennant Creek goldfield (known as the Warramunga field at the time) was the newest and most important part of the mining industry in the Territory in the late 1930s. The comprehensive Payne Committee inquiry of 1937 into the land and land industries of the Northern Territory (Commonwealth of Australia 1937, 74) underlined its importance: 'No industry can better help a pioneering community to become established than the mining industry'. The economic future of the Territory was closely identified with large-scale mining operations which it was thought would give the region 'a most powerful stimulus'.

The Tennant Creek goldfield was not large by international standards, consisting of some 50 small leases worked by only 200 miners and supporting a total population of some 600 persons in 1939 (table 1). The gold itself was uniquely associated with ironstone
Table 1: Tennant Creek Population, 1933-76

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933 (Sept)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 (Dec)</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 (June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500 to 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 (Mar)</td>
<td>533</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937 (Mar) (inc. 12 asiatics, 34 coloured)</td>
<td>628</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938 (Apr) (inc. 10 asiatics, 23 coloured)</td>
<td>546</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940 (Apr)</td>
<td>666</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947 (June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 (June)</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961 (June)</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966 (June)</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>1,065(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 (June)</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>1,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 (June)</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>1,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976 (June)</td>
<td>1,180</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>2,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (1) goldfield population to 1947, thereafter the town population
(2) includes full blood Aboriginal population from this date


rather than the usual quartz and was found in many small 'shoots', or lengths of ore body on which payable values are found (all less than 31 m), in contrast to the larger (up to 305 m) 'shoots' found in the Western Australian fields (minutes of the TCAC meeting, 16 January 1949). In 1938 some 10,958 oz of gold were produced from 52 mines with a value of 90,000 pounds (Tennant and District Times Commemorative Issue, May 1984, 15).

The entry of Japan into the war in late 1941 and the bombing of Darwin in February 1942 soon led to the military occupation of Tennant Creek and the virtual closure of the goldfield. Only the Eldorado mine was to remain in production throughout the war. Opinions differ as to the motives which led the army to acquire much of the mining equipment and other resources in
the town. According to Priest (1987, 16-17), 'it is certain that they did not really require much of what they bought. It was merely a humane gesture from someone in Canberra to ease what they knew must have been a severe financial blow to many of the residents'. He also notes examples of 'graft and corruption' in the town with a black market trade in petrol and the thieving of military stores. Dr Webster, the resident medical officer immediately after the war, accused the army of not only closing the mines but commandeering gear and machinery, much of which was subsequently lost: 'That is one of the great disabilities under which the industry is labouring today' (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 26).

A further effect of the war was to delay greatly a resolution of the land tenure difficulties arising from the administration of the town under the Mining Ordinance. Privately owned residences and businesses were built on Residence or Business Areas granted under the Ordinance (see plate 3) and continuity of tenure was conditional upon the holder possessing a current miner's right and continued use and occupation (CRS:F1, 55/975). In the case of Business Areas, an annual rent was also payable but, unlike a lease, neither form of tenure was for an agreed term. As a result, there was a degree of insecurity attached to such land holding and banks were reluctant to advance funds on such security. As early as 1941, W.A. Hughes, the NT Director of Mines, wrote to the Administrator recommending that responsibility for the administration of the township be transferred to the Lands Branch (CRS:F1 40/515). This change was not to be effected until the mid-1950s and the long delay did little to encourage the establishment of private entrepreneurs in the town (details concerning a typical Residence Area application are found later in this chapter).

The administration of physical development in the early township

Although basic urban amenities such as a police station, small hospital, school and post office were established in the mid-1930s, Tennant Creek remained a frontier township until the late-1940s. The chief reason for this was the precarious water supply dependent on tanks, several bores and temporary surface supplies (Pearce 1984). Reticulated water was not available until the Cabbage Gum borefield was commissioned in 1962.
A survey of the township site was completed in March 1936 and comprised 244 quarter acre business and residence blocks and thirteen larger blocks for government purposes (Pearce 1984). Low lying ground to the east of the town centre became flooded periodically, resulting in various attempts at providing culverts and drains across Paterson Street and to the east of the township (map 2). By October 1937 the Director of Mines reported to the Administrator that some 54,000 pounds had been spent by the government over three years, with 30,000 pounds of it going on buildings, bores, roads and subsidies (CRS:F1 37/25). The appearance of the main street during and after the war is shown in plates 1 and 2. In the words of one local resident 'The only thing Tennant Creek has done is ... a good road' (Northern Standard, 1 October 1935).

In 1941 the NT Public Service was amalgamated into the Commonwealth Public Service with the exception of police, prisons and education branches (Heatley 1979). The chief public servants appointed as Official Members of the new NT Legislative Council in 1948 were the Government Secretary (R.S. Leydin), the Chief Medical Officer (J.G. McGlashan), the Acting Deputy Crown Solicitor (W.S. Flynn) and the Directors of Lands (H.C. Barclay), Works and Housing (L.C. Lucas), Mining (R.W. Coxon) and Native Affairs (F.H. Moy). Mining had been by far the most important administrative branch in the pre-war town but was being rapidly challenged (as we have noted) by the need to consider matters of general urban amenity which did not sit comfortably under the provisions of the mining ordinance. The Mine Warden's powers still covered legal rights to residence but the means of improving the physical welfare of the small community lay elsewhere.

Much of the blame for the poor living conditions in the town was laid at the door of Works and Housing in the first session of the first Northern Territory Legislative Council in early 1948. Dr Webster, the first elected member for Tennant Creek, moved a motion to establish a committee to investigate and report on the organisation and operations of the Department (NTLC debates, 17 February 1948, 40-45). He castigated the NT administration (his own employer) for its inefficiency in allowing very poor housing conditions in the town. 'It takes two years to get the Department to make such minor repairs as painting, or to do such an urgent job as repairing a leaking roof' (p.41). The water supply, unsurfaced back streets and inadequately
Map 2 Area subject to flooding in Tennant Creek, 1940s (CRS F1 40/515)

Note: the flood levels plan used in the preparation of this map is undated but signed by D.D. Smith who was officer in charge of the Department of Works, Alice Springs in the late 1940s.
Plate 1  Army convoy in Paterson St., Tennant Creek, 1940 (H. Tuxworth)

Plate 2  Paterson St, 1946 (H. Tuxworth)
sized school all came in for similar criticism. Younger pupils had to be taught on a verandah and, when the acquisition of a new hut was suggested, the Department's quote of 1,200 pounds was found to be five times more expensive than the cost of a similar building erected by a local club.

Webster and the other elected members from down the 'track' were in no doubt where the blame lay:

We of the Northern Territory proper do not usually think of Darwin as part of the Territory at all, but as a foreign area grafted onto it. We were mystified that Darwin should ever have been chosen as the seat of government in the first place, and we certainly cannot understand why the Administration ever went back to it after the war. We are told that our original ancestor was led out of the garden of Eden by a woman; it has also been suggested that the Administration was led back to Darwin by a similar agent (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 23-4).

To be fair to Works and Housing, water supply in Tennant Creek was listed as a Territory priority but work had been delayed because of numerous frustrating hold-ups in the supply of materials and labour. Pipes for tapping the Ghan bore to the south of the town, for example, were ordered for Tennant Creek and mysteriously diverted elsewhere. Similarly, only one suitably qualified engineer was available for this sort of work in the whole Territory (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 12).

Despite these very real difficulties, it was well established in Canberra, a decade before, that the government of the NT was less than efficient:

Modern government is a matter of tremendous complexity and difficulty even when the country governed has no climatic, isolation or special economic difficulties. The real test of its success or otherwise is the measure of sustained co-operative effort it inspires in the community. Confidence, stability, co-operative effort, progress, and the regular employment, health and happiness of the people are the highest manifestations of good government.
Judged by this standard, the government of the Northern Territory falls far short of what is needed (Commonwealth of Australia 1937, 64-5).

Indeed, Parliament was advised in the same report that the Territory could have been better administered if it had been divided and handed over to the adjoining states. However, this criticism does not extend to the actual performance of NT administration personnel on the ground in Tennant Creek where numerous entries in NT administration correspondence files suggest active concern for the town's welfare. The Administration's known maxims governing the performance of its staff were remarkably enlightened (figure 1) though it is difficult to judge the extent to which they were actually observed in practice.

Undoubtedly, concerns about the expected life of the Tennant Creek field were used by the Administration as an excuse to delay much needed improvements in the town. Webster's eloquent appeals on behalf of his constituents (and patients) were probably a major factor which led to the setting up of the Tennant Creek Advisory Committee at the end of 1948. Its report is considered in some detail later in the chapter and was to provide the basis for transformation of the town into a permanent settlement.

Social conditions in the early township

As can be imagined, living conditions in the pre-war mining camp were primitive and particularly hard for women and children. Mounted Constable Gordon Stott was stationed in the town at the height of the rush in 1935 and witnessed a doubling of the population to 600 in five months: 'in three days 60 men arrived from Mt Isa, and in a week 120 flocked here from that Queensland township, including all classes. Mt Isa people say the whole of that town will come here' (CRS:F1 39/112). Schooling in a single-teacher school in the pre-war years was adequate for those living in the township but out of reach for families stationed at the outlying mines like the Eldorado, from where a hire car cost 10 shillings per trip (CRS:F1 42/74). High turnover of mine labour meant that of the 31 children on the roll at the annual examination in 1936 only two remained in the school in 1938. Of the 19 enrolled in 1938, 12 were classified as European, five as quadroon, one a half-
Administration Maxims

(For all Public Officers associated with Northern Territory Administration.)

1. Nature has been ungenerous to the Territory in many ways. Do what you can, by administration, to counter-balance natural shortcomings.

2. Strive to give persons interested in the Territory such administration as will place them in a position, for carrying on their business, comparable with persons in the more-favoured parts of Australia.

3. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and view administrative matters from that angle.

4. Good administration is "service." Service always helps, and never obstructs.

5. Do whatever is administratively possible to help all persons interested in the Territory to make a success of their enterprises. If profits are made in enterprises already established, more development will proceed and more population will be maintained. Never put hurdles in the way of energetic enterprise, but co-operate to the utmost.

6. Do not be technical in outlook but follow dictates of broad commonsense.

7. Do your best to guide Head-quarters in formulating correct policies. The man on the spot should always be in the position to make clear-cut and definite recommendations for the guidance of Head-quarters. Never shirk responsibility in this regard.

8. Difficulties are meant to stimulate endeavour, not to discourage it and produce inertia.

9. In a pioneering community, Acts of Parliament, Ordinances and Regulations need frequent modification and adjustment. They should not be slavishly followed by officials to the exclusion of commonsense considerations. If the carrying out of an Act, Ordinance or Regulation would have undesirable consequences, representations accordingly should be made to Head-quarters so that an amendment may be considered.

10. When necessary, exercise authority firmly and fearlessly, but never harshly or unreasonably.

11. "Co-operative administration" produces the best results. Endeavour to co-operate with the people because mutual assistance is the king-pin of our social structure.

12. Generally, strive to do your official work in such a manner that Australia will be the better for your service.

Figure 1 Administration maxims (Commonwealth of Australia, 1937)
caste and one Afghan. No pupils were higher than year six and the majority were in years one to three (CRS:F1 42/74).

Social activity in the white community was restricted to the two hotels and a welfare hut and club established by the AIM in 1936. It contained a small billiard table, library and writing room and shower facilities and is reported to have soon become a rendezvous for local hobos (Grant 1981). The needs of Aboriginal people were not provided for in these establishments and their presence in the town was excluded apart from temporary visits:

The employment of natives in Tennant Creek is strictly and well controlled and there are very few natives seen in the town.

Natives from the settlement [Phillip Creek] are forbidden to visit the town and do not .... Occasionally natives from droving plants and others on walkabout visit the town .... However, the stay of natives around the town is not permitted and they are promptly moved on by the police (both entries from CRS:F1 46/199, cited in Nash 1984, 11).

The position of Aboriginal people in the Tennant Creek district was clearly unsatisfactory in the late 1940s and Webster found it necessary to refer to the matter pointedly in his maiden speech to the NT Legislative Council:

I noted with some regret that, so far no member of the Council, except the Director of Native Affairs, made any reference to the natives who, after all, constitute a majority of the population of the Northern Territory. They are human beings, so the scientists tell us, and are in special need of our help (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 25).

He drew attention specifically to the poor condition of the native hospital which was no more than 'part of an old bush kitchen which had been used by the Army' (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 25) and contrasted unfavourably with the medical care of Aborigines in Western Australia.

The Director of Native Affairs was unambiguous in his overview of Administration policy at the time,
emphasising that living conditions must be improved so that 'they may play their part as genuine economic assets to the Territory' (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 14). Settlements and reserves would be established towards this end. According to Davison (1985), most of the Aboriginal population in the district had been moved to a new and temporary settlement called Manga-Manda at Phillip Creek some 43 kms north of Tennant Creek by October 1945 (map 3). The total population of 215 included 95 children of whom 15 were classified as part-Aboriginal; and it remained the official residential area for Warumungu and Warlpiri people in the Tennant Creek area until a new site (called Warrabri), with much better water, was developed on vacant Crown Land south of Wauchope in June 1956. It seems the materials used to build the structures at Phillip Creek came from 'the demolished buildings of the Tennant Creek Native Hospital and from ... the Six Mile depot' (the old ration depot near the Telegraph Station) (Davison 1985, 15). Thus Webster's criticism in the Legislative Council probably refers to what was left of the old Native Hospital in Tennant Creek and does not take into account the services of the small dispensary which had opened in Phillip Creek at the time.

'Tiger' Brennan and an example of an application for a Residence Area

Unfortunately, very little has been written about the early life in the Territory of Harold Brennan who was later to become one of the longest serving Members of the NT Legislative Council from 1955 to 1971. He is best known as being Mayor of Darwin when Cyclone Tracy devastated the town in December 1974, but earlier had a long association with Tennant Creek before he entered political life (Lea 1987, 53-6).

Brennan arrived in Alice Springs in 1933 at the age of 18 and began prospecting at Wauchope and Hatches Creek before joining the Tennant Creek gold rush in 1936 (NTRS, 269). After wartime service with the US forces in the Pacific he returned to Tennant and purchased mining equipment with his repatriation grant. He is acknowledged as one of the first to introduce the new tungsten-tipped rock drill to the goldfield which was a major innovation in an area where the gold-bearing ironstone was very difficult to work with ordinary drills. He was issued with miner's right number 8785 on the 18 December 1946 and shortly after-
Map 3 Aboriginal reserves in Tennant Creek district (after Nash, 1984)
wards 'jumped' a small mining lease known as the 'Never in Doubt'. This had been worked before the war by C.A.V. Priest who had allowed his interest in the mine to lapse. Brennan re-named it the Mauretania but his action was never forgotten by Priest (1987, 42-3) who was to recall the incident many years later.

Brennan’s mining ventures in Tennant Creek were not particularly successful and he moved to the tin field at Maranboy in 1948 but, before doing so, applied for a Residence Area in the town under the 1939 Mining Ordinance (plate 3). Under this legislation a prospector could hold a Residence Area rent free for 21 years with a right of renewal, but must begin living on the block within a month and fence it within a year. It appears he never built a permanent dwelling on the quarter acre block which was situated immediately to the south of a small hill overlooking Windley Street. Brennan’s own sketch plan of the block was drawn on the reverse of his application (plate 4) and indicates he had chosen a site (then numbered as 107E and, later, 321) which was not a surveyed lot in the pre-war street plan. Today, three residential units cover the block on Windley Street and face down Thompson Street (plate 5).

According to Priest (1987, 43), when Brennan was Mayor of Darwin many years later, he was reported in the press as accusing the federal government of 'heartlessness' in resuming freehold blocks of land in the city. Priest took it upon himself to write to the Minister concerned with details of how Brennan 'jumped' his mining lease in Tennant Creek 'with the result that the agitation ceased almost overnight'.

The Tennant Creek Advisory Committee (TCAC), 1949

Towards the end of 1948 the Acting Administrator and Government Secretary, R.S. Leydin, wrote to Dr Webster in Tennant Creek and invited him to be chairman of an advisory committee on the future of the township. It was to consist of engineering, mines, lands and administration officers who, together with Webster, would examine the likely life of the goldfield, the degree of permanency of the town, the suitability of the existing site and other matters (Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection). Webster accepted immediately and Barclay (Lands), Smith (Works, Alice Springs), Coxon (Mining) and Thompson (Administrative) were duly asked to join him.
THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA.

Mineral Ordinance 1939.

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF A MINING TENEMENT OTHER THAN A LEASE.

V. 1078

PERSUANT to the provisions of the Mineral Ordinance 1939 hereby apply for Registration of the land taken possession of and marked off by t

as 3.30 o'clock on the day of June 7th, 1947, as a Residence Area.

The area is partly described in the Schedule herunder, and the position is shown on the attached sketch or plan.

D. 4th. December day of June 1947

Signature of Applicant

Miners' Right No. 8785 Date 18/12/46 Place of Issue Tennant Creek

To the Warden of the Reserve Arrangement Cold-field (or Mineral Field)

The Schedule above referred to:

Name or Names of Applicant (in full and Mailed)

Tennant Creek

Location and Boundaries of Land

Harold Brennan

Appurtenances

Remarks

TOTAL NAMES 18 SHADES

Received this application at 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon of 17th day of June 1947, with fees as under.

Subject to Survey

Warrawanga Cold-field (or Mineral Field)

Registration 5.

Survey 2

Rent (if any) 4/6 dau.

The above application was signed by me on the subject day.

Warden.

Plate 3 Harold Brennan's residence area application, Tennant Creek 1947
(Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection)
Plate 4 Brennan’s sketch plan of block 107E, Windley St (Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection)

Plate 5 Brennan’s block (foreground) in 1988 (J.P. Lea)
In a personal letter to Smith, Leydin explained that he had invited Webster to chair the Committee because he wanted the people of Tennant Creek to 'feel completely satisfied that they have a substantial voice...’ (CRS:F1 48/377). He also indicated that he realised Smith might have some antipathy towards Webster, but that this was not to act as an obstacle in their working together. Chief among Leydin’s objectives was to clarify the expected life of the goldfield, so 'we know where we stand, and shall be able to make decisions in regard to proposed works intelligently' (CRS:F1 48/377). Besides the three questions already mentioned, the Committee was to make recommendations concerning the present water supply and measures necessary to secure an adequate permanent supply; the works necessary to develop the township and improve living conditions (and which of the latter works could be undertaken quickly given the circumstances of the Department of Works and Housing); and anything else of relevance.

Arrangements were made for the Committee to meet in the town on the 16 January 1949 and Webster, who was also President of the Tennant Creek District Association (TCDA), circulated a notice among townpeople urging them to assist the Committee and let him know if they wished to give evidence or appear in person. It is most unlikely he bargained on the reaction of some residents who clearly held him responsible for a threatened movement of the town to another site. During the night anonymous messages written on airmail envelopes were placed under people’s doors with the message 'Why shift Tennant Creek why not shift Webster' (plate 6). His response was to refer to the matter in the opening address at the first TCAC Committee meeting on 16 January:

Well, why not? It wouldn’t be much of a job. The only thing that has kept me in Tennant Creek was the belief that I was doing a good job for the people here in more ways than one. Not a good job for myself - not a good job for any sectional interests, but a good job for the people as a whole, and especially for the man that most needed my help - the man on the basic wage .... I was glad to stay in Tennant Creek because I thought you needed me; and all that is required to shift me is an expression of the peoples’ wish in that direction.
But if the half-witted mongrels who crawl around at night shoving their dirty drivel under decent people’s doors think that they are going to shift me, they are mistaken. What sort of a man, if you can call that person such, is one who is afraid to sign his name to his letters? Not a man at all, ladies and gentlemen, but a slinking cowardly dingo.

I challenge this anonymous letter writer, whether it be one person or a group, to come out of the dingo hide, fight in the open and fight fair. I have little hope my challenge will be accepted (text of speech, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

In spite of Leydin’s appeal, D.D. Smith, the Resident Engineer in Alice Springs, did not attend the meeting and sent along H.K. Graham of his department instead. The verbatim minutes of the meeting are held in the Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection and provide an invaluable insight into conditions in the town at the time and deal with each of the items on Leydin’s agenda in turn.

The estimated life of the goldfield gave rise to far reaching discussion about the output and profitability of current and past mines, with the conclusion being reached that it had at least 20 years to go. The point was made that in most other goldfields there is a single main field whereas in Tennant Creek when ore bodies run out others are found. The present town site was held to be unsuitable because of water supply, flooding and dust nuisance (plate 7) but it was not thought feasible to move to a suggested alternative location north of the Honeymoon Range (Mcdouall Range).

Water supply was seen as a major problem because only a limited source of good water was available from bores 11.3 kms away at the Tennant Creek and was carted at the considerable cost of 50 shillings per 1,000 gallons for urban consumers. Pumping from the Ghan Bore 6.4 km to the south supplied about 20,000 gallons daily to a standpipe. The water was hard and salty and could not be used for most domestic purposes or gardening. It was felt that engineering works to dam a local creek and excavate storage tanks would alleviate the position. The suggested dam was to be located at Woolbie Creek (a tributary of the Tennant) and it was recommended that Works and Housing investigate the feasibility of the idea as a matter of urgency. In
WHY SHIFT TENNANT CH
WHY NOT SHIFT WEBSTER

Plate 6  Protest note against Webster, January 1949
(Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection)

Plate 7  Flooding in Tennant Creek 1947
(H. Tuxworth)
addition an earth dam to the west of the aerodrome should also be investigated.

Of immediate importance to the township was a long list of essential works which were, in descending order of importance: the town's reconstitution as a townsite under the Lands Ordinance and an ending of controls through the mines legislation; replanning of some sites presently zoned for government purposes; the commissioning of a contour survey of the town as part of the design of a drainage scheme; construction of a new hospital to provide for a population of 2,000, because the present facilities were seen as totally inadequate; better housing was considered essential for both public servants and mine personnel, with prefabricated designs seen as a possibility for the latter; a swimming pool was thought to be more of a priority in Tennant Creek than anywhere else in the Territory; the post office to be redeveloped; and certain road sealing and bitumizing of major roads.

It was felt that in spite of the evident shortcomings in the Department of Works and Housing it should still be possible to complete all the recommended items in the short term other than the new hospital. When it came to certain 'other matters' to bring before the notice of the Administrator, the Committee identified two major concerns: the fact that certain public servants in Tennant Creek received less leave than their counterparts in Darwin; and the need to foster a spirit of community awareness in the town. It was pointed out, for example, that there were few forms of recreation other than drinking in the two hotels. These were said to be among the most profitable in the whole of the Territory and South Australia, with annual profits of some 20,000 pounds per annum between the two of them. 'Not one penny of that money is being returned into the town or district. It is simply going into a bottomless pit as far as the district is concerned' (minutes of the TCAC meeting 16 January 1949, 5). The solution put forward was for the establishment of a community hotel which would have the double benefit of keeping most of the profits in Tennant Creek and making it easy to control 'inebriety'.

The final TCAC meeting was held in Darwin on 19 February 1949 at which some follow-up matters were discussed. Chief among them were alterations to the town hall (Scott's Hall) which had recently been purchased by the Administration for public use. It was
hoped a library could be included in the building and a stage provided. In addition, a rather primitive and cheap evaporative cooling system was suggested by Webster which worked by forcing air into the building after passing through a tunnel containing evaporating water (either percolating through charcoal or in the form of fine sprays). This was said to cost only 50 pounds to install, was low on maintenance and could reduce the temperature in a building by up to 25 degrees Farenheit (CRS:F1 48/377).

Leydin, to his credit, wasted no time in acting on most of the recommendations by writing letters in March to the various branch offices responsible for the proposed works. Unfortunately for the citizens of Tennant Creek the wheels of government turn slowly and one at least of their most cherished hopes, the new swimming pool, was not to materialise for almost 20 years. However, it was now officially recognised that the town was not going to disappear or degenerate into a roadhouse stop on the Stuart Highway and could take its rightful place as the third largest settlement in the Northern Territory.

The subsequent career of Dr Webster in the legislature demands a postscript because his case appears to be the first of several instances of NT public servants suffering official restriction as a result of their privately held political opinions. He later served on the NTLC Select Committee on medical services in 1949 and attacked his own department for obstructing the committee’s work (Heatley 1979). He was then dismissed from his position. Though re-elected to the Council in 1949, he soon resigned in May 1950, being replaced in the Third Council by J.S. Higgins (TCDA correspondence, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection). Webster appealed for re-instatement of his job to a new Minister of Health in Canberra but was ignored. In his letter of resignation to the President of the Legislative Council he said:

As I am dependent on my profession for my living and as there is at present no opportunity to practise in the Territory outside of a Government job, I have been, by the action of the late Government, virtually exiled from the Territory. As the present Government has done nothing to make it possible to live there I have no alternative but to submit my resignation (letter of

Higgins, his replacement, was nominated to the seat by the Administrator in spite of the presence in Tennant Creek of the candidate who had come second in the election with 44 per cent of the vote (Walker 1985). That person was Charlie Priest, a declared communist (Priest 1987). Priest himself (pers. comm. 1988) has said he was sounded out by the Mining Registrar (presumably on the instructions of the Administrator) to see if he could be interested in taking Webster's seat. He refused, however, on the grounds he thought another election should be held.

Heatley (1979) sees the Webster case as leading directly to the 1953 amendment which excluded public servants from election to the Legislative Council. It is interesting to note that 30 years later another small town doctor in the NT was thought to have been forced from his position in the new town of Jabiru for very similar reasons, while serving as an elected member of the Jabiru Town Advisory Council (Lea and Zehner 1986).
CHAPTER TWO
THE TENNANT CREEK DISTRICT ASSOCIATION

From the municipal angle the most important point in the Administration's policy has been the encouragement and establishment of progress associations .... As a result of the establishment of such associations people in the various townships became used to the idea of managing their own affairs which, in turn, leads to the establishment of municipal self-government (R.S. Leydin, NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 7).

The earliest firm evidence of the existence of the TCDA appears to be a statement by Webster in February 1948 about an event he was involved in 'a few months ago' as President of the District Association (NTLC debates, 17 February 1948, 43). Its name was different from that of the pre-war miners' progress association and it seems likely that the TCDA was established in Tennant Creek in 1947. The earliest correspondence using the distinctive TCDA letterhead inscribed with the words 'All Sections - All Interests - General Progress - Individual Welfare' is dated 1 July 1950 and concerns seeking of advice from a Melbourne company about the analysis of water from the Ghan bore. The results indicated the water was 'only suitable for use in a septic tank system' (Tuxworth/ Fullwood Collection). Although no correspondence remains from 1949, the first cheque book stub dated 20 September 1949 carries the words 'on occasion of Dr Webster's farewell' and possibly refers to a party held to mark the President's departure after his dismissal from the medical service.

According to a local source, the Association was established by a public meeting of townspeople 'concerned to push for Tennant Creek with the Administrator in Darwin' (Bill Fullwood, Tennant Creek 1988, pers. comm.). Another view has it that the TCDA was established by Webster to help him politically. His strength in the community apparently lay in the fact that the Catholics were behind him (Charles Priest, pers. comm.). An undated copy of the proposed
constitution of the TCDA lists the following objectives:

. ... shall be the organisation of the people of Tennant Creek and district, and of all sections, interests and classes to work together for the general well-being, prosperity, and development of the district as a whole. In the attainment of the general object the following immediate aims will be pursued (sic).

. The establishment of a representative and democratic form of government for the Northern Territory.

. To ascertain from time to time the amount of government money available to be spent in the district, and to advise the spending thereof.

. The provision of adequate and efficient battery facilities in the Tennant Creek.

. The provision of an adequate water supply to Tennant Creek township and mining field.

. The enforcement of practical health regulations throughout the district.

. Provision of adequate medical service and hospital accommodation at Tennant Creek.

. The provision of adequate educational facilities in Tennant Creek.

. The improvement of existing air services, including cheap cut freight service on perishable foodstuff.

. To improve general transport services between Tennant Creek and other centers (sic), especially capital cities, and to have freight rates decreased, with a specially cheap rate on essential foodstuffs.
. The establishment of a community hall and civic centre, with women's rest room and district library.

. The encouragement of all forms of entertainment and sport for the health, happiness and recreation of the people.

. Any other activities which shall in the opinion of the association further its main object (Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

Although this list of objectives must be among the fullest ever assembled by an Australian progress association, those which were deleted from the proposed constitution reveal even more insights into the feelings which existed in the small town in the post-war years. Among the more significant of these were: increased representation in the Commonwealth Parliament; establishment of democratically elected local government bodies in the N.T. 'with real power and responsibilities'; scientific exploration of the Tennant Creek mining field plus 'vigorous and adequate aid for practical prospecting and development work'; removal of a tax on gold production in the N.T.; assistance towards provision of 'healthy, convenient and comfortable houses'; reasonable and adequate building control in Tennant Creek with regard to town planning, health and utility; and to procure substantial reductions in present rates of fare for persons proceeding on holidays.

Membership was to be open to all persons over 18 years and would attract an annual fee of two shillings. The office bearers would consist of a president, two vice-presidents and secretary/treasurer. The committee as a whole was to consist of six members elected by the annual general meeting in June. Ordinary meetings were to be held monthly and the records show these were on the third Thursday at the public hall. During the last nine years in the life of the Association there were at least 59 recorded meetings, few of which attracted more than 8 to 12 persons but special events saw the number swell to almost 100.

We know by an invoice and receipt from 'Armstrong's Golden Crust Bakery' that the meeting held in Scott's Hall on 15 October 1950 consumed refreshments costing one pound, nineteen shillings. For
this the members received 12 dozen sugar balls and four gallons of milk coffee! The condition of the hall demanded urgent maintenance but the reply from the Administration when it eventually arrived six months later in mid-1951 was that the costs involved (5,500 pounds) were too much for a town the size of Tennant Creek and that any improvements would have to be done on a self-help basis (R.S. Leydin, 8 June 1951, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

Although most of the early Association correspondence, as might be expected, dealt with parochial matters like the supply of garbage containers or the Jubilee procession of 1951, there is an example of wider concerns. The Central Council of Progress Associations in Darwin was incensed ‘that residents of this apparently forgotten part of the Commonwealth ...[were disenfranchised] in referenda concerning the Constitution of the Commonwealth’ and sought support from the TCDA and other organisations in the Territory (letter J.W. McKechnie, 9 October 1951, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection). Paul Hasluck’s response was conveyed via Jock Nelson, the N.T. Member of the House of Representatives, and drove home the lack of autonomy in the north: ‘The Constitution clearly provides that any proposal for the amendment of the Constitution is a matter between the States and the Commonwealth and not one which directly concerns the Territories which were created after the Commonwealth was established’ (letter P. Hasluck, 16 October 1961, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

Government, the Association and the town

The municipal administration of Tennant Creek in the early 1950s fell under the jurisdiction of the Administration in Darwin and was performed remarkably diligently by a locally employed municipal inspector who experienced little contact from his distant superiors. The handwritten monthly reports of these inspectors reveal a perspective on town and TCDA affairs which is not seen in the Association’s own correspondence. No reference, for example, is made in the latter’s early dealings with Darwin about Aboriginal affairs in the town. The first Aboriginal civilian labour to be granted official permission to work in Tennant Creek was to assist the town’s sanitary contractor and was only secured after being rejected initially by the Administration:
It is hoped that the contractor Mr T. Hare will be allowed to employ casual native labour through application to Native Affairs Branch. White labour is as usual unobtainable for the clearance of sanitary pans and garbage.

Anyone willing to work can obtain much better pay at any of the local mines. Sergeant Lullfitch is not in favour of having any natives in the town as he considers that once they are employed or allowed to reside in a town it is very hard to get rid of them.

I have explained that it would be only a temporary arrangement to employ one single native to assist with the cleaning up of various heaps of rubbish in the town. It is essential that native must be a single man (letter from A. Fraser, Municipal Inspector, May 1952, CRS:F1 52/635).

After initial rejection, permission was eventually recommended by the Director of Native Affairs for the employment of a male from the Phillip Creek settlement under strict conditions and only if white labour was unavailable:

(1) the contractor be issued with a licence to employ;
(2) a satisfactory employee be provided on condition that he is paid award rates; he will be provided with suitable accommodation on the contractor's premises and that the contractor would feed him and charge him board;
(3) a covering permit for the employee to reside within the prohibited area be issued;
(4) the employee would be paid 2 [pounds] per week and the balance paid to the Trust Fund;
(5) deductions for board would be made in accordance with the Works and Services Award (letter from Acting Government Secretary, 13 November 1952, CRS:F1 52/635).

It seems unlikely that such an employee would receive any cash in hand after payments for his board and the
conditions were probably arranged with this objective in mind.

Residents appeared unimpressed with the efforts of the Association to secure improvements on their behalf, leading the Inspector to comment to Darwin that 'In recent months "TCDA" enthusiasm has been lacking to such an extent that meetings lapsed for want of a quorum...' (letter July 1952, CRS:F1 52/635). Towards the end of 1953, the Local Government Bill was debated in the Legislative Council and the first approaches were made to the people of Tennant Creek regarding its relevance for the town. The response of the Association was a motion to the effect that they were '... opposed at this stage to the idea of local government and its introduction to this area' (letter, Secretary TCDA, 20 March 1954, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection). Interestingly, TCDA assistance had been sought by the Alice Springs Progress Association in support of their own letter to Darwin opposing the introduction of local government. This had followed a public meeting in Alice Springs in February which declared that the NT must first become a separate state of the Commonwealth and various other administrative reforms instituted. Among these were the appointment of a southern Administrator; the setting up of an advisory panel of citizens; creation of a sub-Treasury in Alice Springs; a NT public service separate from Canberra be formed; and the NT be divided by an east-west line to the north of Tennant Creek taking in the area as far south as the South Australian border (letter from Alice Springs Progress Association to the Administrator 15 February 1954, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

This stirring of discontent in the south eventually reached the Minister in Canberra who wrote to the Acting Administrator in mid-1955 that '... there is a serious need in Tennant Creek for better arrangements for town management' (CRS:F1 55/975). It was pointed out the 'Acting Municipal Officer' has no clear instructions as to his duties or powers '... beyond performing such functions as that of putting dead people into coffins and digging the grave' and that immediate attention be given to the appointment of a District Officer in the town (CRS:F1 55/975). The only other public servants in a town which now had a population of 1,000 were two Mines Branch officials, a teacher, the police sergeant and the postmaster.
The Administration's response was to place the town under the direct jurisdiction of the District Officer in Alice Springs who '...would make regular visits to Tennant Creek, say on a set day, as far as possible, each fortnight, of which visiting day the civic leaders of the town, i.e. the Tennant Creek District Association ... and the people generally, could be kept informed (letter, Director of General Services, 15 August 1955, CRS:F1 54/937). The suggested changes were well overdue because matters had reached a low ebb with the Municipal Inspector reporting '...through continual lack of a quorum unfortunately no meeting has been [held] by this body (TCDA) for a period of over six months...' (letter, 5 March 1955, CRS:F1 54/937). By the end of the year renewed enthusiasm had seen a 'reactivation of the association' with well attended monthly meetings (letter 7 December 1955, CRS:F1 54/937).

Living conditions in Tennant Creek in the second half of the 1950s were worse than for any other town of comparable size in the Territory and appeared the more so when contrasted with the town’s booming economy. Elected members of the NTLC were quick to point out that this was one of the very few financially self-supporting communities in the Territory and that it deserved a better deal from Darwin (NTLC debates 28 October 1959, 914-22).

The Golden Years: the urban economy and provision of infrastructure in the 1950s

In the post war years gold mining in the Tennant Creek area fell increasingly under the control of company operations rather than the individual 'gouging' activities which had characterised the old Warramunga field in the 1930s (plates 8 and 9). Two companies, in particular, were to consolidate their position in the 1950s as the main gold producers and employers of mine labour. Australian Development NL had been formed in 1935 to work the 'Rising Sun' deposit to the southeast of the town and discovered rich gold values at Noble's Nob in 1940. The mine was not fully developed until after the wartime embargo in 1948 but soon became one of the richest producers in Australia with forecast grades of 20 dwts per ton, with some patches assaying at 1,000 oz per ton (Priest, 1987). Between 1951-1953 more than 100,000 ozs of gold were recovered which amounted to some $45 m in today’s (1985) values (Bullock, n.d.). By the end of 1954 60
Plate 8  Small goldmine in Tennant Creek district 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 9  Mine, Tennant Creek district 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
men were employed at the Noble’s Nob mine and ore reserves were estimated to provide a life of a further eight years (CRS:F1 55/975).

Peko Mines NL was formed in 1949 to mine gold from the early Peko discovery to the east of the town (Tuxworth, 1978). In 1952 the copper content of the ore overtook gold in terms of profitability and the company became primarily a copper producer. In 1954 some 130 men were employed at the mine producing 130 tons of ore per day, yielding concentrates of 21-24 per cent copper and about 9 dwts of gold per ton. Reserves were thought to give the mine a life of about 15 years (CRS:F1 55/975). Besides the main mines there were a further 15 operations where mining was being carried out in the mid-1950s but they were all fairly small concerns and none, apart from the ‘Eldorado’ which employed 35 men, were significant gold producers. However, the importance of Tennant Creek to the overall Territory economy was such that by 1959 Tiger Brennan was able to state that the town ‘has produced approximately four million pounds worth of gold and copper in the last twelve months... and it works out at 2,600 pounds a head of population’ (NTLC debates, 28 October 1959, 919) (plates 10-16).

The poor basic physical infrastructure of power, water supply and drainage in the 1950s reflected the town’s development as a government-financed settlement primarily serving the interests of the private mining industry. In its reliance on publicly provided facilities Tennant Creek was not dissimilar to Katherine, even though the latter had no mining industry and no large source of regional wealth. Whereas the popular approach of townspeople saw it as a government duty to return some of its taxes in the form of urban improvements, the Administration soon promoted the idea of ‘user pays’ (or at least ‘user supplies’) in the provision of some infrastructure. The old Number Three Government Battery which had been located at a site 1.6 km to the east of the town in 1939 was now re-built with public funds as a formal gesture of confidence in the district’s mining base. The new battery was duly commissioned at an opening ceremony attended by the Minister (Paul Hasluck) on 11 October 1958 (plates 17 and 18).

By mid-1956, the small power house was unable to meet demands for the town and serious breakdowns had made the situation precarious (NTLC debates, 20 June 1956, 216-17). The town diesel engines were already
Plate 10  Duke of Edinburgh inspecting ore samples, Tennant Creek 1956 (Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 11  Noble's Nob goldmine, Tennant Creek district, 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 12  Peko mine, Tennant Creek district, 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 13 Peko mine headframe, Tennant Creek district, 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 14 Peko power plant, 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 15 Peko mine, Tennant Creek district, 1960s
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 16 Peko miners, Tennant Creek, 1960s
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 17 Sir Paul Hasluck opening the new government battery, Tennant Creek, 11 October 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 18 Government battery, Tennant Creek, 1958
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
older than their design life of 15 years and the plant was experiencing heavy annual operating losses. Liaison between the Department of Works and the Peko Mine (which had a generating capacity 50 times greater than the town consumption) suggested that considerable economies could be gained from purchasing bulk supplies from them (plate 14) (CRS:F1 55/975). The power house was duly closed in 1957 having the effect, among other things, of putting Charlie Priest out of work and forcing him to move to Alice Springs (Priest, 1987, 68).

The question of water supply is another example of the growing incapacity of the publicly financed services to cope with demands from the expanding town. In 1955 the main sources of water were three bores and one new dam on the eastern boundary of the town. The latter, which was of the excavated earth variety, with a capacity of five million gallons and equipped with an overhead tanks and chlorination, now became the main supply. All water was carted at a cost of three pounds per 1,000 gallons as the pipe from the Ghan bore went out of service in 1952. Conditions for the 145 consumers (made up of 110 households, 2 hotels, 1 club and 32 business premises) were intolerable yet no reticulation was contemplated by the government (CRS:F1 55/975). Periodic droughts, like the one in 1952, forced the town to depend on supplies from Bonney Well, some 84 km to the south, at a cost of over seventeen pounds per 1,000 gallons (NTLC debates, 28 October 1959, 919).

Towards the end of 1959, with no improvements likely, Len Purkiss the Member for Barkly who had represented the town since 1951, moved an adjournment in the NTLC to discuss a matter of 'urgent public importance' (NTLC debates, 28 October 1959, 914). He made the point that the economy of the town was healthy but it could not be expected to grow without a reticulated supply. His colleagues among the elected members, particularly Brennan, used the adjournment as an opportunity to criticise the Administration for its neglect of Tennant Creek and the water supply situation in general. Adams, the Director of Mines, explained that reticulation would cost a quarter of a million pounds and that a lengthy programme of drilling was underway in the Cabbage Gum area to investigate the acquifer. No decisions would be made until the work was complete (NTLC debates, 28 October 1959, 917-19). The latter did not occur for another three years and the
Plate 19  Installation of water supply, Paterson St, 1962
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 20  Floods on the Stuart Highway near Newcastle Waters, 1960s
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
reticulated supply was eventually opened in November 1962 (plate 19).

Tennant Creek had been proclaimed a township on 3 June 1954, marking its transformation from a mining settlement to an open town. Amendment of the Crown Lands Ordinance in 1955 enabled the Minister to grant perpetual leases over blocks held under the fragile tenancy of the annually renewable miner’s right and led, in May 1956, to the grant of such leases to 86 Tennant Creek residents (Tennant Creek Times, I, 2, 1956).

In terms of social infrastructure, the steadily growing size of the local school was another indication of the town’s prosperity and showed an increase in average daily enrolments from 42 in 1945 to 70.5 in 1950, and 100 in mid-1955. There had been three teachers on the establishment since 1953 and this was thought likely to increase when enrolments passed 110. There were also some 50 pre-school children in the town in 1955 and building work was underway to enlarge the number of classrooms and effect other improvements (CRS:F1 55/975).

TCDA: the final years

Civic pride appeared to have returned to the TCDA in 1956 and this body was praised generously by the District Officer: ‘it shows that some people are prepared to work for the welfare of the town. Tennant Creek would not have achieved what it has without the efforts of the District Association’ (Tennant Creek Times, I, 25, 1956). The TCDA Committee elected in 1956 comprised L.J. Kittle (President); A.F. Campbell and C.F. Bourne (Vice-Presidents); E. Groughan (Secretary); Mrs E. Griggs (Treasurer); and Mesdames Fullwood, Kittle; Messrs Silberiesen, Young and Shirly (Members). Association business was reported in the local press as being concerned with the power supply, air freight charges, installation of a public telephone, water supply, and the appointment of trustees for the public hall reserve (lot 50). The District Officer was taken to task for not bothering to attend Association meetings even though he had been asked to do so by the President (minutes, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection)

There was considerable disillusionment with the lack of response from Darwin to the Association’s
regular requests, leading to a motion in May 1956 'expressing resentment' at the state of affairs. Members felt attendance at meetings to be 'a waste of time and energy' and that the Association 'had accomplished little or nothing over the past year'. Replies received from officers of the NT Administration were 'evasive of the issues' and visits by the DO to Tennant Creek 'accomplished nothing, in spite of the apparent enthusiasm of that officer...'. The Administrator replied to the President in June 1956 saying 'I am very surprised at the text of the resolution and the tone of the letter' and that 'I want to assure you that I am very anxious to help but I can do nothing unless you ask something specific' (correspondence, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

By October 1957, an editorial in the Tennant Creek Times (II, 70, 1957) felt it necessary to bolster community spirit by encouraging citizens to support the TCDA:

What the stranger may not realise, and feel, is the wonderful spirit and friendliness, the generosity and unselfish desire to help his mate in time of need that pervades our town. If you don't feel these things yourself and want to act on them, then you cannot class yourself as a true Tennanite.

Unfortunately, the paper ceased publication in December 1957 and was not replaced until the local Apex Club started the Tennant Times in July 1975. Handwritten minutes of the regular TCDA meetings are still preserved in the Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection at the National Trust Museum in the town but rarely provide more than the barest detail of Association business.

Further appeals were occasionally made to the public at large to support the Association, as in the open letter of 9 October 1958. Here the agenda included concern about the flooding of the main street where 'water is flowing in reverse to the natural fall'; the intolerable dust nuisance in the main street; the long awaited swimming pool and tree planting. A list of Association achievements was also included covering things like the provision of the library, fire station, improvements to street lighting, water supply, and so on (Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection). Such items, important though they were to the business community and some residents, could hardly have seemed worth
bothering about for the majority of the mining population.

Indeed, the Administration had already decided to promote the introduction of new town management boards in Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek as a more formal means of incorporating some local participation in the process of urban government. The TCDA did not close immediately after the inaugural meeting of the Tennant Creek Town Management Board (TMB) on 20 July 1961 and it was to carry on until the middle of 1965. The presence of the new Board did have an adverse effect on the TCDA, leading to calls for its closure towards the end of 1962.

Following the formation of the Tennant Creek Town Management Board last year the activities of the TCDA lapsed owing to no one attending the advertised meetings for the remainder of 1961 other than Mrs Griggs and myself. In view of the lack of interest I have made no attempt to hold any meetings during 1962, nor have I been approached by anyone to do so.

It appears to me now that the Association could be considered defunct and I suggest in view of your interest in the Red Cross Old Timers Home you may care to initiate the winding up of the Association with a view to handing over remaining funds as a donation to the Old Timers Home... (letter from the President to A.E. Chitcock, Vice-President TCDA, 20 December 1962, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

This advice was clearly ignored and the Association was revived again in January 1963 and went on to hold 18 more meetings until it finally closed in June 1965.

It is interesting to speculate why the small pool of residents actively concerned in town affairs should have bothered to keep the TCDA running in parallel with the TMB for so long. One obvious reason was that the membership of the new Board was appointed from a short list drawn up by secret ballot at a public meeting in the town on 29 May 1961, rather than being fully elected as were all office-bearers in the TCDA. But the notion of democracy was probably not enough in itself to sustain the regular meetings held in 1963-64. More likely was the fact that Alf Chitcock, TCDA President
in 1963, was not appointed to the TMB himself until the middle of 1964 and it was this and the duplication of meetings involved which led the more active and civic minded members of the community to transfer their energies to the new Board.

Another practical reason for the Association's demise is the likelihood that the Administration in Darwin was scarcely likely to welcome continued dealings with two civic organisations in a town as small as Tennant Creek. This alone would have made most of the TCDA business irrelevant as far as the Administration was concerned.

In conclusion it should be noted that there is no reference in the TCDA minutes to Aboriginal settlement or the presence of Aboriginal people in the town. The 'Village' town camp which was developed in the late 1950s, after the opening of the Warrabri settlement in 1956, was used to accommodate full-blood wards in government employment with the police, hospital and welfare (Welfare Branch Annual Report 1960-61, 75). Clearly this situation was not considered exceptional in the town at the time, nor was the design of a new camp on the site in 1961 (see Chapter Four).
CHAPTER THREE

TOWN MANAGEMENT BY APPOINTMENT

In a general way the Board has a purely advisory function; but it does provide a sure regular and permanent way of conveying to the Administration the views of local bodies and persons in regard to town management matters generally and to enable the Administration to have the benefit of these views in any decisions that require to be made in that particular field.

Its other and perhaps equally important function is to enable local organisations and persons to obtain at first hand from the Government Nominated Members information concerning the affairs of the township and the planning and progress of projects for the township's development and improvement (letter, J.C. Archer, Administrator, 28 September 1960, TMB correspondence).

There were probably very few senior officers in the Administration who would have predicted difficulties with the passage of the Tennant Creek Town Management Bill at its second reading in the NTLC in March 1961 following, as it did, the similar legislation for Katherine the previous year. However, this was to underestimate the concern felt by most of the elected members about the way in which the town management boards by appointment would be controlled from Darwin. Brennan, in particular, seized the opportunity to attack the Board membership conditions already operating in Katherine and the control over meetings exercised by senior Darwin-based officials.

The essence of the dispute was twofold: that the Board membership of nine which comprised four Administration officers and five local appointees should have the former selected from local public servants rather than senior Darwin personnel; and that the restriction on the rest of the membership being appointed only from non-public servants be lifted. Persisting behind the scenes was the feeling that membership by appointment did not go far enough and should be replaced by fully elected representation. It is also likely that Brennan saw the debate as an opportunity to attack the 'Darwin bias' of the
Administration for the benefit of his electorate in the Katherine district:

Mr BRENNA N: ... in the case of the Katherine Town Management Board three Darwinites were appointed . . .

Mr MARSH (Assistant Administrator): Take a Territory view old man.

Mr BRENNA N: I wish the Administrator would also take that attitude instead of taking the Canberra attitude, as he so often does. He very often supports the Canberra attitude against us in the Council (NTLC debates, 22 March 1961, 1344).

The debate which was quite acrimonious at times largely revolved around the nature of the official membership of the TMB, before confirmation was reached in the case of Tennant Creek that this would consist of a Darwin-based chairman and local (Alice Springs and Tennant Creek) officers.

The appointment of the five private members to both the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Boards was different to the procedure followed in Katherine in 1960. In the latter case a public meeting in the town had agreed to the representatives being selected from a panel of names from four local organisations (Lea 1987). In Tennant Creek the public meeting on 29 May 1961, attended by 31 persons, decided on eight names in order of preference by secret ballot. Although not obliged to do so, the Administrator duly appointed the first five names on the list (letter, L.L. Gillespie, 12 July 1961, TMB correspondence). The full membership which met for the first time on 20 July 1961 was as follows: L.L. Gillespie (Chairman), E.C. Williams (District Officer), Dr. J. Boyd (MOH) and A.E. Spring (Dept of Works), official members; and J.R. Bromage, J.C. Ford, G.G. Kittle, G.R. Morris and Mrs M. Williams, appointed members. Bromage and Kittle left the town during 1961 and were replaced by C.I. Bourne and the MLC, Len Purkiss. Minutes were taken by the town’s municipal officer according to an agreed Administration format and confined in the main to the barest detail.

TMB business

As might be expected, the scope of Board business in the early years was limited almost entirely to the
discussion of physical improvements to the town and matters, like the quality of the air service to Tennant Creek, which required a strong local viewpoint to be raised with external bodies. In the first year, for example, success was claimed in improving street lighting, storm drains, road works of various kinds, speed limit on heavy trucks, negotiations with the Housing Commission for more dwellings, water supply, the visit of a dentist, storm relief and progress towards the water reticulation scheme. The long-awaited swimming pool also seemed to be a step closer with vague promises of the project being included in the 1963/64 works programme.

In the first annual TMB report it was stated that the TCDA had decided to remain in existence for a period 'during which the achievements of the Board could be assessed', but that it had subsequently ceased to function. This was held to be 'indicative of the attitude of local residents' and 'a fair indication of confidence in the Board' (TMB 1st Annual Report 1961/62, 5). In fact this was not quite the case and, as we have already noted, the TCDA remained in business until the middle of 1965.

The second, third and fourth years were business as usual in terms of town improvements and, in spite of repeated overtures, the swimming pool remained unfunded. The first expressions of discontent in the town with the slow pace of municipal improvement were addressed to the Board in early 1965 with complaints about the appointment of TMB members and the general neglect of Tennant Creek. The Chairman, Frank Dwyer, responded that the Administration did not regard the town 'as a flash in the pan' and that it would hardly have spent the money it had if it planned to 'wipe the town off the map' (minutes 27th meeting, 23 March 1965).

It is sometimes hard when reviewing the TMB correspondence of the 1960s to remember that Tennant Creek was primarily a mining town and that a significant proportion of its residents were financially dependent directly or indirectly on the two main companies. Mining issues were rarely raised in the TMB minutes and the mine management made few direct representations about matters of concern to the industry. In April 1969 a joint meeting was held between the management of Peko and Australian Development, the TMB, the local MLA (Eric Marks) and Ansett regarding dissatisfaction with the Tennant Creek
service. The Peko Clarion (mine newspaper) of 17 April 1969 had complained of deteriorating service and the real problems of isolation faced by the town. It had become common practice for business people to hire cars from Mt Isa and Alice Springs in order to visit the town. Many had to drive to Alice Springs to catch interstate planes because of the poor southbound service. The mining companies indicated that their industry was booming and that the growth rate of Tennant Creek, as measured by the increase in passengers and freight in the 1961-65 period, was not being recognised by the airlines (table 2), nor was 'its importance as an industrial area paying its own way' (TMB correspondence, 21 April 1969).

Table 2  Airline Freight and Passenger Traffic, Tennant Creek 1961-65. Cost Comparisons for Tennant Creek and Other Routes, 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Passengers</th>
<th>Tons of Freight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2,792</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3,444</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>3,479</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>3,930</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>4,136</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1970</th>
<th>Air miles</th>
<th>Cost $</th>
<th>Cents/miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T/C - Adelaide</td>
<td>1145</td>
<td>72.30</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T/C - Sydney</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>114.50</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T/C - Melbourne</td>
<td>1553</td>
<td>96.20</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney - Darwin</td>
<td>2276</td>
<td>130.50</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney - Melbourne</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney - Brisbane</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>26.90</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney - Perth</td>
<td>2070</td>
<td>121.80</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane - McKay</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>30.50</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne - Launceston</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne - Hobart</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TMB correspondence, 21 April 1969 and 1971
Another example of mining industry/TMB interaction and one that was more directly relevant to the limited advisory powers of the Board was the complaint by Australian Development regarding the condition of the roadway between Noble's Nob and the Peko road. The mine manager complained to the TMB that the poor standard of the unsealed public road was adversely affecting the journey to work by employees who lived in the town and therefore was impacting upon the viability of the town to adequately service the mine. The argument put forward was that the mine was trying to prevent decentralisation of housing out of Tennant Creek and had encouraged its employees to live in the town but could scarcely expect that to happen given the state of the road:

We have encouraged employees to apply for these homes [Housing Commission] and reside in the town and have their families join them with a view to stabilising the community into positions of a permanent nature. It is obvious that there is little encouragement for employees to seek or remain in positions when they are compelled to use an unsealed roadway and only results in a retardation of industrial development which ultimately affects the overall district economy; not only the wage earner, but the large and small business trader who is also reluctant to encourage business at a point when travel over corrugated roads is necessary (letter, R.G. Blake, 2 May 1969, TMB correspondence).

The mine appears in this instance to be making a somewhat strenuous case for public investment to maintain a road which was used almost exclusively by its own company and employee transport. It did underline, however, the symbiotic relationship of town and mine by suggesting what was good for Australian Development was, ultimately, good for Tennant Creek as well.

The Peko management sought TMB support in the same year for improvements to the radio reception in the Tennant Creek area. The point was made that the numbers of people living in the town’s hinterland was growing quite rapidly (table 3) and that there were possibly as many as 4,500 living within 241 km of Tennant Creek. The frustrations of poor reception, it was thought, could be alleviated by shifting the broadcast aerials to a hilltop in the town:
... the continuation of a noisy, image struck tape played at least 6 decibels below normal broadcast level at an inconveniently early hour, often makes three programmes difficult and painful to listen to. If this is added to the 10 kilocycle whistle often present at night from an adjacent station, it can be seen that the service received from 8TC at centres out-side of Tennant Creek is very poor indeed (letter, E. Davies, 21 October 1969, TMB correspondence).

Table 3 Mining Population in the Tennant Creek District, 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Radial Distance from the town - km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peko Mine</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noble's Nob Mine</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivahoe Mine</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando Mine</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrego Mine</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractors and Drillers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>various</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: letter, E. Davies, 21 October 1969, TMB correspondence

It can be imagined that the situation was considered intolerable in a mining community where radio was almost the only form of media entertainment. Once again, the point was made that the growing economy of the Tennant Creek district deserved a better deal, 'This area is developing steadily, although perhaps not as spectacularly as some other mining areas, and we do feel that the time has come when we can expect an improvement in the radio service available' (E. Davies, 21 October 1969).

Perhaps the most forthright example of mining industry involvement with the TMB is seen in the strong criticism of the NT Administration budget allocations for civil works in the 1971-72 financial year (table 4). The lead article in the Peko Clarion of 1st
October 1971 was devoted to the financial neglect of Tennant Creek and the huge discrepancy in expenditure per head in comparison to other centres of population in the Territory: 'if the "dying mining town philosophy" is not prevalent in the Northern Territory Administration in Darwin it must certainly be prevalent in the top echelons of the Department of the Interior in Canberra'. It was pointed out that despite having the fastest growth rate in the NT in 1970 the financial allocation for Tennant Creek had fallen, whereas that for all the other centres had increased.

Table 4  Expenditure per Head of Population, NT Civil Works Allocations, 1971-72

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Population(1)</th>
<th>Expenditure $m</th>
<th>Expenditure per head $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>32,822</td>
<td>16.91</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>9,778</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>3,000(2)</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>2,449</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
(1) 1970 Census  
(2) estimate  
Source: Peko Clarion 12, 5, 1971, p.1

An open invitation was issued to members of the TMB to express their annoyance with the situation, particularly when comparisons were drawn with Katherine:

Not only have vital works such as sewerage and street sealing been overlooked, but absolutely no indication has been given to the Town Management Board of when such programmes will be implemented. Local resident members of the Tennant Creek Town Management Board have every right to be not only disillusioned but downright disgusted and angry. By way of comparison, the Katherine allocation includes $1.3 million for sewerage, $40,000 for arrears in street
sealing and $150,000 for the Katherine Gorge Road (Peko Clarion, 1 October 1971, 1).

It was not mentioned, of course, that Tennant Creek had received considerable financial assistance a couple of years earlier towards the completion of the town swimming pool, a facility which the people of Katherine were not to enjoy for many years to come.

**Tennant Creek in the 1960s**

By the end of the decade the town population had doubled from 837 in 1961 to 1,706 in 1970 (table 1) and the district population had reached 743, marking a major change in the pace of development. Tennant Creek was still overwhelmingly a mining town with 620 persons employed in the two main mining companies and many others directly dependent on them. The climbing output of gold, copper, bismuth and silver was also reflected in building activity in the town itself (table 5). Exploration activity all over the goldfield had placed the town in the centre of mining activities and the companies were making deliberate attempts to encourage their employees to live there and commute daily to work. In 1967 Peko introduced town and travelling allowances for those who chose the commuting option and was aiming to raise the ratio of its married workforce from 32 to 50 per cent (Tennant Creek Town Management Board 1969).

**Table 5  Growth in the Tennant Creek Economy, 1967-70**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Output</td>
<td>11.56</td>
<td>12.85</td>
<td>13.91</td>
<td>13.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Approvals</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Commonwealth of Australia 1971, 4-5

Buoyant conditions in the mining industry together with company policy in utilising the town's infrastructure to the fullest extent was placing
considerable pressure on most urban facilities, particularly housing. An inventory undertaken in mid-1970 listed 370 dwelling houses and 33 flats in the town plus two hotels, three motels, a caravan park and five hostels. The Housing Commission had built 92 of the houses and almost all the flats and had a further 75 dwellings under construction. Much of the public housing was available for mine employees who qualified for this accommodation and 30 of the new Commission dwellings were earmarked for lease to the mining companies. Not surprisingly, there were between 60 and 70 families on the waiting list for Commission houses and flats in 1969-70 and the delay was six months for houses and 10 months for flats (Commonwealth of Australia 1971, 5-6) (plates 21-24).

A special TMB sub-committee was set up in early 1969 to look into the emerging accommodation crisis and attempted to forecast the likely level of demand. This was wisely limited to a three-year period given the volatility of metal prices and the fact that Tennant Creek was yet to see substantial diversification in its economic base. Their chief task was to assess the level of company demand in the town and the growth of employment in the various service industries. The mines were forecast to need 136 more dwellings taking into account company married:single ratios, housing subsidies and an average married family size of four persons. To that was added 50 houses for other occupations in the town, adding up to grand totals of 925 (increase in population) and 196 (demand for dwellings) (Tennant Creek Town Management Board 1969). Although it does not include the distribution of married women in the workforce, the pattern of employment shown in the survey of Tennant Creek businesses (table 6) provides a useful picture of the variety of employment opportunities in the small town at the end of the 1960s.

It was not suspected at the time, of course, but the optimistic forecasts of growth and development at the start of the new decade were to mark a high point in the town and district economy which would not be seen again until well into the 1980s. The cyclical nature of commodity prices and other changes in the mining industry saw mining dropping from 40 per cent of the district's employment in 1981 to only 21 per cent by 1985 (O’Faircheallaigh 1987, 49-50), and being replaced by considerable diversification into new areas like tourism.
Plate 21 Tennant Creek, 1963
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 22 Tennant Creek post office, 1963
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 23 Tennant Creek, 1966
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 24 Goldfields Hotel, Tennant Creek, 1966
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Table 6  Male and Single Female Employment in Tennant Creek Town, April 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Name or Department</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Single Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Departments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT Administration</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMG’S</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Aviation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Science</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotels and Motels</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek Hotel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldfields Hotel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safari Lodge Motel</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airliee Motel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan Park</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.J. Kittle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford Bros.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromages Service Station</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kittle Bros</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Driveway</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Ck Tyre Service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Ck Panel Works</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Business</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek Bakery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.S.&amp; A. Bank</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooalah Restaurant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excelsior Butchers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Ck Travel Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts Supermart</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Boutique</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Refrigeration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Aerated Waters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomerang Restaurant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker Box Cafe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaney’s Pharmacy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer Theatre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oasis Milk Bar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silbereisen’s Snack Bar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silbereisen’s Supermarket</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geopoko Ltd</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooks General Merchants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total male and single females employed  310

Note:  (1) includes employers and employees  
(2) females living in single status

Source:  Tennant Creek Town Management Board 1969, App.C
Local government overtures

In August 1964 the NTLC appointed a Select Committee chaired by Harry Chan to look into the desirability of extending local government in the Territory and the necessary legislative amendments involved. Darwin City Council was the only fully-fledged municipality in the Territory and the other centres, notably Alice Springs, had made it plain in 1954, 1958, 1959 and 1962 that they did not wish to proceed to full local government nor did they wish to pay rates. Urban populations had now grown to the extent that the Administration considered Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine as suitable candidates for municipal responsibilities if they petitioned the Minister under Section 18 of the Local Government Ordinance towards this end.

Far too little time was given to the Committee or the residents of the three towns to adequately consider the implications of the change but the report to the NTLC was reasonable under the circumstances and recommended the immediate introduction of local government only in Alice Springs. In Tennant Creek and Katherine the TMB Ordinances were to be amended to provide for the election of members other than the official appointees and that the present Boards should continue until this was achieved. By 1968 the Tennant Creek TMB had grown impatient of waiting for Darwin to initiate the changes and was informed that an offer for the introduction of local government (along the lines of the one at Alice Springs) was under preparation (letter, R.L. Dean, 25 July 1968, TMB correspondence).

In the meantime attempts to secure elected representation on the Katherine and Tennant Creek TMBs had become a political football in the NTLC and the object of open dispute between the elected and official members. The five-year merry-go-round of tabling and defeat of various Bills is explained by Heatley (1979, 130) and led, eventually, to the passage of the legislation in mid-1972. It was not before time because the local TMB membership had clearly grown exasperated with the heavy hand of the Darwin-based Administration and their lack of power to get things done. Contained in the oral submissions to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works inquiry into the Tennant Creek sewerage system in late 1971 was a revealing outburst by one of the TMB members:
I will tell you about the Town Management Board set-up. One time we used to write to anybody or do anything we liked. Now we are an advisory committee. All we can do is write to the Administrator advising something, and in 3 months time we would probably get a reply. That is what goes on (Alf Chittock, oral evidence, Commonwealth of Australia 1971, 119).

When the Bills to enable partly-elected TMBs at last came before the NTLC for their Second Reading on 21 June 1972, the elected members berated the government for its delays and questioned why they were not proceeding with full local government. Eric Marks (Member for Barkly) declared he was 'disgusted with the Government which has mucked around for three and a half years and produced nothing' (NTLC debates, 21 June 1972, 694). The Administration's response was that they had a provisional timetable for the offer of full local government to Katherine and Tennant Creek by 1 July 1973 and that the partly elected boards were a step towards this.

Given Darwin's previous record of delay and procrastination the timetable was optimistic in the extreme and Marks suggested the whole thing was inexplicable: 'How does the honourable member explain this to the people, that if we have an election the board will probably only operate for about 6 months, say 12 months at the most?' (NTLC debates, 21 June 1972, 695). He need not have worried, the timetable was to extend over another six years before local government came to the two small towns down the 'track'.
CHAPTER FOUR
ABORIGINAL URBAN SETTLEMENT

Mr PURKISS (Tennant Creek): ...To my mind, Mr President and members, there seems a great contradiction. On the one hand we have regulations governing the housing of these people on stations, leases, and wherever they may be employed; and on the other hand in at least one of the settlements, Warrabri - I cannot speak for the others - there is no provision made for the housing of these people.

Mr WARD (Darwin): There is a nine-hole golf course. (NTLC debates, 12 June 1957, 234-4).

The detailed history of dispossession and forced movement of Aborigines in the Tennant Creek district is well covered in the works by Bell (1983); Davison (1985); and Nash (1984). Some 215 Warlpiri and Warumungu people had been moved from the ration area near the Telegraph Station to a new settlement at Phillip Creek in 1945 (Davison, 1985). Full-blood Aborigines were not permitted to live in the town itself, though people from the Phillip Creek settlement were employed by some of the small mines, such as the Whippet (W. Fullwood, NTRS 226, TS431). In 1956 water shortages at Phillip Creek led to the closing of the settlement and forced a move to a larger camp called Warrabri more than 100 km to the south of Tennant Creek.

The Aboriginal population of Tennant Creek

The town itself being off-limits for Aboriginal residential purposes meant that the only non-white residents in the urban area immediately before World War II were a small number of quadroon, half-caste and asian families (CRS:F1 42/74). As we have already indicated, the first permission for the employment of Aboriginal labour in the town was granted to the sanitary contractor in 1952 and subsequently extended to include other branches of the Administration. No details are available about where such employees were
Plate 25  Peko mine pre-school centre, 1963  
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
housed though it is likely that some informal camping began in the 'Village' area (map 4) after the establishment of Warrabri (now Ali Curung) in 1956. By 1960, more than 50 Aboriginal children were enrolled in the pre-school centre in Tennant Creek and at the Peko Mine (plate 25). Of these, eleven were identified as full-blood and it must be assumed they were the children of five government Aboriginal employees (NT Welfare Branch Annual Report 1960-1961, 75 and 103).

By early 1961 plans were drawn up for a government-financed camping area at the Village to consist initially of five Kingstrand houses in a semi-circle, facing a communal latrine/laundry. A part-time matron was employed as supervisor (CRS:F1 73/4696). In June 1963 the population of the Village numbered 33, of whom 14 were children under the age of 14 years and the decision had been made to provide water and electricity to the camp but not to individual houses (NT Welfare Branch Annual Report, 1962-63, 35). By the following year, the Village population (no other urban settlement in Tennant Creek is mentioned) had more than doubled in size to 84, of which 41 were children (NT Welfare Branch Annual Report 1963-64). Employment was said to be 'good for any Aboriginals who were good workers', and in 1965 some 15 males were working in Tennant Creek, of whom nine received award wages. In the case of the others, wages and benefits were held to amount to the award rate (NT Welfare Branch Annual Report 1964-65, 86).

From 1965 a quarterly census was held by the Welfare Branch of the NT Administration which provided much more detailed demographic and employment data (table 7). The totals show sharp increases in 1964 and 1970 both of which may be associated with major legislative changes affecting the status of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The Social Welfare Ordinance of August 1964 eased restrictions on Aborigines seeking employment and increased their access to alcohol. The changes were found to have a marked effect on drunkenness and race relations in Katherine (Lea, 1987) but it was not possible to quantify their effects on the numbers of Aboriginal people being attracted to settle in that town. The employment figures in Tennant Creek shown in table 7 only increased by five between 1964 and 1965 (NT Welfare Branch Annual Report 1964-65) and appear to have remained steady until the mid-1970s. The total population increased considerably, however, after 1970 and seems likely to have been affected by the
### Table 7  Aboriginal Population and Employment in Tennant Creek, 1963-74

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (1)</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th></th>
<th>Children</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967(2)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>167</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>209</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note (1) figures for March quarter only from 1965
(2) figures for June quarter in 1967

Sources: NT Welfare Branch Annual Reports, 1962-63; 63-64; NT Welfare Branch quarterly population Census figures (CRS E460/T4 76/820)

introduction of award wages on the cattle stations in 1968.

Figures collected by the regional office of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) in Tennant Creek suggest that a steady decrease in employment on the cattle stations led to an Aboriginal population turnaround of considerable proportions between 1965 and 1982 (table 8). The effects of award wages were compounded by difficulties in the pastoral industry in the 1970s and the introduction of new technology such as helicopter mustering (Dept of Aboriginal Affairs, Tennant Creek, 1984, Appendix I, 4). In certain cases deteriorating conditions led to walk-offs such as the one described by Bell (1978) at Kurundi.

It should also be noted that the large size of some Aboriginal families could lead to significant proportional changes in the size of the Tennant Creek Aboriginal population, even though few family groups
were involved. Thus the movement of three families from Brunette Downs, Banka Banka station and Warrabri led to an increase of 17 in September 1970. The customary stand downs of station hands usually resulted in a marked increase in the transient Aboriginal population over the Christmas/New Year period (CRS: E460, 76/820).

During the 1960s a threefold physical grouping emerged based on where people lived, their personal priorities and general socio-economic condition. At the top in terms of income were a group of families (some of them part Aboriginal) who occupied conventional Housing Commission dwellings in the town. According to Bell and Ditton (1980, 69), the women in these households fulfilled an important role in Tennant Creek:

... several hold down regular jobs. Many of these town dwelling women are strong church members .... These women are outspoken, generally well informed, attend public meetings, partake of life in the town and are the go between for whites and Aborigines on many occasions. They still maintain their family ties to other communities such as Warrabri and Banka Banka ... and observe rules of kinship and marriage.

These ties also incorporate social obligations to visitors and, as in similar circumstances in other
Territory towns, may result in real hardship and disturbance for the hosts. Occupying a Commission house may actually prove an advantage for some in this respect because the rules do not permit multi-occupancy and can be used as a way of limiting excessive visits (Bell and Ditton 1980). In the eyes of the Administration these families had been successfully assimilated into white society and were a model for those who were not so well established.

The second identifiable group were those occupying a site in the formally acknowledged town camps. These were areas either provided by the Administration or accepted by it for Aboriginal camping purposes and were usually supplied with certain basic services and shelters. In Tennant Creek the first of these areas was located in the south and became known as the Village (map 4). In succeeding years the Mulga to the north, Blueberry Hill not far from the Village and Karguru to the east attained this status. Town campers were seen as a transitional stage in urban Aboriginal social evolution and it was expected that the economically successful would eventually move into a Commission dwelling. As we will see later, the numbers and locations of the town camps were also conditioned by language and cultural affiliations in the Tennant Creek Aboriginal community.

Thirdly, were the itinerant occupants of small bush camps which offered informal and casual living conditions with a minimum of interference from the authorities or from other, more established, Aboriginal groups. The bush camps appear to have fulfilled at least two important functions; they provided newcomers with a toehold into urban life but were also a refuge for those who were displaced from the main groups or who wished to be left alone. To the authorities these camps were unacceptable eyesores which posed a grave health and environmental threat to the town as a whole. Both the Mulga and Blueberry Hill started as bush camps until upgrading in the 1970s turned them into town camps proper.

It is now possible to see the Aboriginal urban settlement of Tennant Creek over the past 50 years as a dynamic process with its origins in the dispossession of tribal lands, leading to displacement via ration stations, mission and welfare settlements, army labour camps and cattle stations, to the growing opportunities for personal involvement in the cash economy of the town. Throughout the three post-war decades linkages
Map 4 Tennant Creek town and Aboriginal town camps (after Wood, 1987)
among family and language groups allowed some adjustment to externally-induced changes which affected everyone in the Tennant Creek district. The effects on Aboriginal population mobility of major changes in the urban economy have not been investigated in Tennant Creek but probably have similarities to the situation in Katherine revealed by Taylor (1988). It appears that three main forms of movement were observable in the Katherine district and the occupants of the town camps were primarily involved in the last two of them:

(1) Aboriginal households moving into the town area via a series of steps from one urban place to another;

(2) Aboriginal households arriving in the town camps from rural communities in the Katherine district; and

(3) Circular and repetitive movements between town and family settlements in the district.

As Larbalestier (1979, 194) points out the last of these, the circular movements, are an important aspect of Aboriginal social life in the north: 'To maintain specific and meaningful Aboriginal associations it is necessary to move about'. The town camps in Katherine and Tennant Creek form an integral and important part of this district kinship network.

In the early 1960s there now appeared a highly visible social dimension to add to the underlying economic ties between white and black which had existed from the time of first contact. The changed circumstances were soon to be reflected in the reactions of both Administration and townspeople to the emerging presence of the Tennant Creek town camps.

**Growth of the town camps**

The influx of Aboriginal people into Tennant Creek in the 1960s was only partially accommodated in the Village and soon led to the appearance of bush camps. The first two of these were recorded by welfare officer Bottcher in November 1966 as being located to the north-west of the town and accommodated 21-27 persons. Another was found near the old town dam to east. The initial government reaction was to shift some of the people to Warrabri and attempt to contain camp growth:

I now feel that some serious action should be taken to prevent the expansion of the living
area [a bush camp] and possibly cause its disbandment. I recommend that a case be prepared for a charge of neglect to be brought against each of the children residing in the camp with a view to having these children committed to Warrabri Settlement (District Welfare Officer, J.A. Cooke, letter cited in Dept of Aboriginal Affairs, Tennant Creek, 1984. App.I, 2).

The Administration appeared loath to increase the amount of conventional residential accommodation at the Village camp and sought assistance from other organisations, such as the Baptist Church, to set up a hostel for single Aboriginal workers. They found difficulty in placing Aborigines in employment in the mines because 'the company [Peko] was not particularly keen to do any training of young Aboriginals ...', and even arranged to bus them weekly to Warrabri. 'This practice is of course somewhat expensive for Aboriginals although it has some advantage in that the bus proprietor is also interested in backloading vegetables from the Aboriginal agriculturalists at Warrabri' (CRS:E460 74/1403) (plates 26-29).

Such devices were hardly likely to discourage the steady stream of new arrivals and it was to be expected that publicity would soon be given to deteriorating Aboriginal living conditions in the town. The Territorian of February 1967 stated that some 50 Aborigines lived in the Tennant Creek Village where there was only one tap and no electricity connection (though power was available 200 yards away), and 'This sort of thing does indeed smack of discrimination' (p.16). For the first time the subject of Aboriginal affairs was mentioned by members of the TMB in the minutes of the 47th meeting in September 1967 and led to concern being expressed to the Welfare Branch at the conditions under which Aborigines are living in makeshift premises west of the township. By contrast, Heppell and Wigley (1981) note that the Alice Springs TMB raised the question of Aboriginal town camping at its inaugural meeting six years earlier than this in 1961.

The reply from H. Giese, Director of Social Welfare, was that he was not aware of the development and had '... no authority to remove Aboriginals who may be camped on vacant Crown land or who may be offending health regulars in these areas'. He said he could '...
Plate 26  Warrabri School, 1963
(Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 27  Children's lunch at the Warrabri Mess, 1963
(Australian Archives, Darwin)
Plate 28  Co-op canteen, Warrabri, 1963
        (Australian Archives, Darwin)

Plate 29  Sewing class, Warrabri
        (Australian Archives, Darwin)
merely use some persuasion with them to have them improve their conditions or to move ...’ (CRS:E460 74/1403). The power of this ‘persuasion’ was in fact considerable and its use in the closing down of the Blueberry Hill bush camp in 1967 makes an interesting case study. The welfare authorities were mainly concerned about the camp as a health hazard and were determined on its eradication at all costs.

The Blueberry Hill camp (map 4) at this time accommodated 43 people housed in nine bush dwellings spread over an area of some 2.4 ha. It appeared from the Welfare Branch investigation that these people did not wish to live in close proximity to those of another tribe, they disliked the drinking and brawling in the Village and felt they were ‘being policed too much’ when living there (CRS:E460 74/1403). Plate 30(a) shows a galvanised iron shed which was furnished with three beds kept outside, a wurley also with three beds and several swags inside; Plate 30(b) shows in the foreground a low wurley roofed with iron and branches and objects to hold these down. There were no furnishings except blankets covering the floor; Plate 30(c) is another iron shed, partly open on one side, with a stove, rough seating, a table and two cyclcone beds. There is also an outside bed and swag; Plate 30(d) is a temporary wurley (CRS:E460 74/1403).

The ground in the camp was described as covered with rubbish, old drums, tins, old clothing, car parts, crockery fragments, glass, broken bottles, old cans, paper and polythene wrapping, old boxes and food. The area was polluted with human and canine faecal matter and at least 30 dogs lived in the community. Together this was judged as being a potential health hazard, though it was admitted ‘all residents are in remarkably good health and seem well fed’. But the environment was found ‘... to be producing an attitude of lethargy, apathy and laissez faire’. They seemed, with a couple of exceptions, to be ‘... beyond caring or troubling themselves to any degree to better their lot’ (CRS:E460 74/1403).

The campers told the local Welfare Branch office in Tennant Creek that they considered themselves permanent residents and would not move. The District Welfare Officer reported to Darwin that none were ‘of a standard to be recommended for a Housing Commission house because of their financial position and stage of social advancement...’, and that ‘... direct action needs to be taken to prevent the expansion of this
Plate 30(a) Blueberry Hill bush camp, 1967
(CRS E460 74/1403)

Plate 30(b) Blueberry Hill bush camp, 1967
Plate 30(c) Blueberry Hill bush camp, 1967

Plate 30(d) Blueberry Hill bush camp, 1967
living area and to discourage any further Aboriginals from moving to the camp' (letter, D.A. Stewart, 9 November 1967, CRS:E460 74/1403). The direct action took the form of a visit to the camp by Giese himself who stated later that 'I informed those who were there that we proposed to offer them the means to return to their home areas and to clean out the camp completely'. This had apparently been done before but they had only returned to the area (letter, H.C. Giese, 7 December 1967, CRS:E460 74/1403).

By the end of December the camp had been completely evacuated with most people being moved to Warrabri or stations in the Barkly Tableland. A group of 'diehards', five adults and five children had shifted to the waterhole at Seven Mile (near the Telegraph Station) and further attempts were being made to send them to Warrabri. The makeshift dwellings and rubbish were taken to the town dump (letter, D.A. Stewart, 20 December 1967 CRS:E460 74/1403). This, of course, was not the end of Blueberry Hill Camp and two years later it had become established again.

In 1969, some 20 adults and children lived in ramshackle huts and were once again causing the Welfare Branch concern. The immediate reasons for being there varied from wanting to get away from the 'drinkers' in the Village to just wishing to be independent. In one case the family group were known to be very heavy drinkers and had wrecked at least two government homes in the town before moving to Blueberry Hill (letter, C. Bottcher, 10 October 1969, CRS:E460 74/1403). In more general terms it was now clear that there was a latent demand by some Aboriginal people in most of the small Northern Territory towns for a freedom from institutionalised control to allow them to provide informal housing for themselves. None of the three main options available - settlement living away from the towns in places like Warrabri, Housing Commission accommodation, or supervised town camps like the Village - were able to satisfy the desire for more autonomy and choice in housing.

Many families valued their freedom to move regularly for varying periods between bush and town communities, the stations and other town camps and, above all, wished to live in proximity to their own cultural and language groups. In the case of Tennant Creek these comprise the four main groups of Warumungu, Warlmanpa, Warlpiri and Alyawarra but also include Wakaya, Wombaya, Djingili, Kaytej and Anmatyerre. As
several researchers have pointed out, although the town and immediate district is Warumungu territory, most of the other groups have established town camps there as well (figure 2). The failure to understand the significance of this cultural separation led to several simplistic and unworkable camp developments provided by the authorities in the 1960s (Lea 1987). The proliferation of small and often unsightly bush camps within or close to the town boundary was in direct contradiction of what was then considered good planning practice. The NT administration was not alone, of course, in failing to understand that informal solutions to housing and employment difficulties were an essential response to the intrusion of the modern cash economy in many parts of the world. As long as responsibility for housing and welfare lay with the distant authorities, the likelihood of acceptable housing conditions materializing for Aborigines in Tennant Creek was remote.

By the time of their visit in 1979, Bell and Ditton (1980) were able to report that the people in Blueberry Hill kept their own camps swept and clean but the area as a whole was covered with rubbish and there was still no power or water. They record an interview with Mary Curtis, one of the long term residents, who was perplexed about the lengthy negotiations which were continuing about the tenurial status of the camp:

MARY:  I've been here for years. My old fellar was here but they're arguing over land. They've got pegs here, but the white ants were eating those out now. I want to know what is happening. Welfare and all them councils made that promise about my house. I should have a house here now. I should have one for myself. I'd like to live here. I don't want to shift in the town.

TOPSY:  That's true they were living here for years and when people came back from settlement and station they get a house but Mary's got nothing. She was staying when she was young.

MARY:  I used to work hard.

DIANE:  Where did you work?
Figure 2 Aboriginal language groups in Tennant Creek district (after Wigley, 1986)
MARY: I need to work on station. I’d like to have a house here and the kids can go to school from here. I’d like to have a house like they promised us.

DIANE: A lease for the land?

MARY: We’re supposed to have a lease for the house. Slow and they don’t do anything.

DIANE: What sort of house do you want Mary?

MARY: Brick house, that’s what they promised me. Just me to live in it and one house for the Foster mob and a laundry separate from us with a washing machine and a kitchen in the house and a bathroom for us and a public one in the laundry and electricity and stove to cook. They’ve been talking about for a long time. I like to stay here. I don’t like to move around (Bell and Ditton, 1980, 75-6).

Unfortunately, this dream of stable and secure living would not be realised for many because of other pressures affecting the lives of most bush camp residents. As in Katherine (Lea 1987), the mid-1960s brought the problem of alcohol abuse to the forefront of difficulties facing Aborigines in Tennant Creek. This subject has been examined in some detail for the town as a whole by Brady (1988) and was particularly disrupting for those living in Blueberry Hill. Some had moved there to escape the effects of drunkenness elsewhere but for others the bush camp was an ideal environment: 'For the Blueberry Hill residents, many of the binges appear to be cyclical. There will be a period of heavy drinking followed by a very sober and sorry period' (Bell and Ditton 1980, 80). Regardless of the causes of the drinking, the effects of it were a hindrance to those Aboriginal campers who wished to qualify for better housing in the town.

The NT Administration was not the only possible source of assistance in improving Aboriginal living conditions and there was one remarkable example of private philanthropy in Tennant Creek which was to lead to considerable controversy. This was the determination of Mary Ward, a local pioneer, to secure the future of her Aboriginal employees by making provision for them in the town after she left the district.
The Mary Ward Hostel

The offer made by Mrs Ward in 1971 was to build a hostel for the accommodation of Aboriginal cattle station employees when visiting Tennant Creek. Her generosity was immediately accepted by the Administration in Darwin and referred to the TMB for further discussion. This galvanised the Board into action and led to public meetings and a major dispute about the hostel’s proposed location on the main street at the northern end of town. The verbatim minutes of the large public meeting held on 10 November 1971 are a good indicator of residents’ feelings about Aboriginal settlement in the town and are examined here by way of a case study.

Mary Ward and her husband, Phillip (Ted), had arrived in Tennant Creek from Western Australia in the rush of 1933. They eventually made their fortune from the Blue Moon mine and purchased the Banka Banka station with the proceeds (Tuxworth n.d., 50-52). In 1969 the station was sold and Mrs Ward subsequently decided to look after some of her old station hands by building the hostel and purchasing six houses in the town for the use of Aboriginal people. The TMB initially considered the hostel proposal from three perspectives: the principle of the offer, its siting and the administrative arrangements. They readily agreed that some facilities were necessary for visiting station labour but required it be restricted to such use and not be available for ‘transients and locals’ (minutes special meeting, 17 August 1971).

The siting was altogether more controversial and discussion revolved around the relative merits of the place already recommended by the Administration for the hostel (lot 1015) which was located on the main street at the northern approach to the town adjacent to an existing Aboriginal camp. Two southern sites, not far from the Village (map 4), were decided as preferable to the one in the north which was already affected by informal camping and known as the ‘Mulga’. It was thought a permanent hostel here could lower land values and damage the appearance of the main street. A range of administrative issues regarding a caretaker and maintenance costs were also identified and required resolution prior to the final reservation of the land.

It soon became clear, however, that the Administration had tacitly approved Mrs Ward’s own preference for the site at the Mulga though had not
announced the decision publicly. The public meeting on 10 November 1971 was attended by Frank Dwyer (Assistant Administrator), Harry Giese (Director of Welfare), Mrs Ward and approximately 150 townspeople. Dwyer opened the proceedings by saying that the Administrator had considered the TMB's recommendation for a southern site but had decided not to accept this for several reasons, among which was that such a location 'would be amongst institutions clubs and churches' (notes on public meeting, CRS:F1 71/5105). Giese praised Mrs Ward for the generosity of her offer and that it should be applauded by everyone present. For her part Mrs Ward said she was under the impression that the land was available, and had already purchased fencing materials and had employed a contractor.

A member of the TMB (Alf Chittock) felt the Board had been slighted by the Administrator's rejection and others present questioned the northern location for various reasons. Ian Tuxworth, for example, felt that putting the proposed development opposite a zoned motel site and subjecting the new Aboriginal residents to a walk past two hotels and one police station en route to the Village in the south was a disadvantage and 'could become social discrimination against natives'. Quite simply almost none of the townspeople attending the meeting understood that the Mulga had provided temporary camping for Mrs Ward's employees and other Warumungu people for years and that to seek to locate them in the south among another language group would provide no solution at all. Mrs Ward addressed the meeting herself and told them that those who would take advantage of the hostel '... are from the northern stations' (Notes of the public meeting, CRS:F1 71/5105). In closing Dwyer stated that the Administration considered there was nothing wrong with the southern end of town, the reason the northern end was favoured was because he supported Mrs Ward's own reasoning. This was not fully revealed to the public but the points were listed in an Administration communication by Dwyer to Canberra in November 1971 and provided a much more persuasive case for the northern location than any of the alternatives:

(a) It was on the northern approach to the town and Aboriginals using the hostel would be mainly coming from pastoral properties to the north of Tennant Creek.
(b) For many years this area has been the dropping off and picking up point for Aboriginals visiting the town.

(c) The Lot was closer to the shopping areas than the other sites and the majority of the Aboriginals using the hostel would not have transport.

(d) On the southern end of the town there is a welfare village occupied by Aboriginals and their families, the male members of which work during the day time. It was considered undesirable for single men from the hostel to be so close to the camp, which might lead to them visiting the women in the Village.

(e) Mrs Ward felt that the hostel should not be hidden away from the public view.

(f) The area comprised 3 acres 17 perches which would give ample space for the erection of the buildings and landscaping to give a good presentation. The other sites were about 2 acres (CRS:F1 71/5105).

The TMB accepted that the Administration would not change its mind and approved the northern site at its meeting on 23 November. Ironically, the hostel which cost $58,000 to build and equip was rarely used for the purpose to which it was intended and soon acquired the distinctive name 'The Pink Palace' (plate 31).

By early 1973, the TMB once again decided it was necessary to do something about the presence of Aboriginal campers in the Mulga area. This time the manager of the caravan park had made complaints about '... noise and stench from the Aboriginal camps' (CRS:E460 79/682). The TMB moved at its February 1973 meeting that the Administrator should '... request advice from the Dept of Aboriginal Affairs on their policy of mixing of the tribes in the Tennant Creek area, so that we can know whether we are going to have to try some other method of putting them all in one village or separate villages'.

When an inspection was undertaken it was found that a group of some 30 Warumungu people were squatting on vacant Crown land to the north and east of the caravan park and the Ward Hostel. The numbers were swelled considerably during the Christmas/New Year
Plate 31  The Mary Ward hostel ('Pink Palace') in 1988
(J.P. Lea)
stand down period on the stations and the whole area (known as the Mulga) had become accepted by town residents as an Aboriginal camping area. On being questioned about their housing preferences, most campers opted for Housing Commission dwellings rather than the Kingstrand houses in the Village. It was also plain that these northern people did not wish to live at the Village and there was no room for them there anyway. Thus Welfare Branch officers recommended the creation of a properly serviced camp site in conjunction with the existing Mary Ward hostel area (CRS:E460 79/612). The TMB too, conducted its own appraisal of the situation in May 1973 and wrote to the Administrator that a new and serviced temporary camp be located to the south of the Mulga and south east of the old town dam.

New and important changes in the administration of Aboriginal affairs were soon to overtake events in Tennant Creek and had their origins in the arrival in Canberra of a Labor government in 1972. Chief among the changes was a new found desire to grant much more responsibility to Aborigines to manage their own affairs and, particularly, to become involved in the provision of their own housing. In mid-1973 steps were taken to establish the Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association (WPHA) under the guidelines for such associations put forward by the Whitlam Labor government. Membership would be open to all Aboriginal people over 17 years old living in Tennant Creek and soon a core of some 30 persons declared their interest. Before looking more closely at the formative years of the WPHA, it is interesting to comment on the NT Welfare Branch’s ‘model solution’ to the problem of housing the fringe community of an imaginary town called Broga in the Northern Territory. The guidelines are set out in full in Appendix I as they represent the final late flowering of the official and paternalistic response to coping with the increasingly difficult problems presented by the town camps. The fact that such a document was prepared at all indicates the concern felt in government circles at the proliferation of Aboriginal town camps in the Territory at this time.

There is little to find fault with in the detailed lists drawn up by the Branch and the comprehensive coverage indicates that a good grasp had been attained of the many variables involved. The chief weakness was that this stereotyped approach towards improving the living environment of Aboriginal people in Northern
Territory towns was limited to developing new and more modern 'Village' layouts, when the possibilities for improvement were much more varied and concerned matters other than housing and physical infrastructure.

The Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association

The WPHA was established shortly after the introduction of the Aboriginal Housing Association Scheme by the new Labor government in March 1973. This government had committed itself at the Launceston conference of 1971 'to properly house all Aboriginal families within a period of 10 years' (Heppell 1979, 20) and the Northern Territory scheme soon became a blueprint for the establishment of housing associations across the country. In the NT some 46 associations were set up and each was required to appoint a technical consultant 'to prepare plans and specifications in accordance with the needs of the community and recognised building standards ...' (Heppell 1979, 22). In the case of the WPHA, such consultants were selected on their behalf by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in July 1973 with fees to be charged '... on a time basis as set out in the Conditions of Engagement and Scales of Minimum Charges of the Association of Consulting Engineers, Australia' (CRS:F1 73/6155). Accountants were similarly employed and a series of projects identified in Tennant Creek by early 1974.

Responsibility for Aboriginal housing in the town was now shared between the NT Housing Commission which had already housed 16 Aboriginal families and provided standard dwellings for applicants who were deemed capable of occupying such accommodation successfully, and the WPHA who would cater for the rest. The Association initially targeted the three main camping areas at the Village, Blueberry Hill and the Mulga and sought leases from the Department of the NT to secure title to the land involved. It also sought to develop the Mary Ward Hostel on Lot 1016, which was little used, and to acquire more building lots in the town (CRS:E460 74/1403). But the single most difficult hurdle to be overcome was the problem of land acquisition.

Progress as far as the TMB was concerned was not fast enough and a series of letters were dispatched to Darwin in the first half of 1974 seeking information about the housing of fringe-dwellers. The Administrator
eventually replied in September confirming the difficulties in land acquisition: 'The role of the Housing Association, as soon as areas of land are officially available, will be to develop housing programmes ...' (letter, J.N. Nelson, 13 September 1974, TMB correspondence files). In June the Association had bid successfully for perpetual leases on three blocks at the Tennant Creek land auction but this caused considerable controversy in the town. It appeared that the only 5 blocks zoned under Residential D (a self-contained residential building excluding flats or semi-detached) were bought by the Association and Peko Mines, giving private interests little opportunity to compete (CRS:F1 73/6155).

By early 1975 the Association had been in existence for almost two years but there was very little to show in terms of new or improved accommodation. Difficulties had been experienced in securing the supply of building materials, particularly galvanised iron, and title to existing camp areas like Blueberry Hill. Here, the town plan zoning was industrial and application by the Association to build 10 houses was refused. The overall Aboriginal population of the town in June 1975 (table 9) numbered just over 300 persons, of whom at least 20 per cent were living in unserviced camps. The situation in the Mulga was again becoming an issue in the town and $10,000 was provided from WPHA funds for emergency shelters and services (letter, G.K. Castine, 11 June 1975, CRS:E460 79/682).

Time had run out, however, as far as political voices in the town were concerned and the Member for Barkly in the NTLP, Ian Tuxworth, publicised the fact that the WPHA had now received $250,000 in public funds over two years but had not completed a single house. The accusation received wide media attention and included the charge that '... most of the associations throughout the Territory were also being frustrated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' policy demanding the use of consultants and accountancy firms in planning and design' (Northern Territory News, 21 August 1975). There was a good deal of truth in the overall charge that the one thing the NT Aboriginal housing associations had not been doing was to build houses. A later analysis by Heppell (1979, 77) shows that only 76 were completed in the 1972-75 period with total outlays of almost fifteen and a half million dollars!
### Table 9  Aboriginal Population and Housing in Tennant Creek, June 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Houses</th>
<th>Camps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Village</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberry Hill</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mulga</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Ward houses</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (inc H.Comm.,</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>319</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 21 persons were identified as itinerants and at least as many were not recorded. 20 families in the 'Others' were in H. Commission dwellings; 8 in privately owned housing; and 4 renting privately.

Source: CRS:E460 79/682

### Table 10  Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association

**Expenditure 1973/74 to 1974/75**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Building Program (materials and labour)</td>
<td>63,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of land</td>
<td>40,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs and maintenance</td>
<td>21,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants' fees</td>
<td>39,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative costs</td>
<td>48,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting-up grant (plant/equipment)</td>
<td>15,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maker service</td>
<td>7,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash on hand 20 June 1975</td>
<td>13,884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**                                           | 251,385 |

Source: CRS:E460 75/161
The situation as far as WPHA was concerned was not as bad as had been suggested in the press because its activities extended considerably beyond construction alone. The breakdown of expenditure (table 10) indicates that the direct costs involved in actually building three houses (24, 29 and 55 per cent completed) by mid-1975 were some $64,000. The Association had also undertaken to operate a home maker service for persons moving into conventional housing; to assume responsibility for the repairs and maintenance of the Village; and to purchase residential blocks. In a less tangible way WPHA had also become the focus of Aboriginal aspirations in Tennant Creek and was acting as a valuable forum for community discussion and a focus for people who had rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to speak as a single group (CRS:E460 75/161).

In spite of the legitimate financial claims arising from the Association’s wider responsibilities, there were two considerations which could not easily be dealt with. One was the necessity and sheer cost of employing technical and financial consultants at full commercial rates and the other the question of management. In September 1975 an editorial in the Tennant Times laid the blame for poor performance on the former factor:

The influx of unemployed people from the stations could not have been foreseen but if the Association had been able to build its houses without the interference of ‘bureaucracy and consultants’ it would have been more ready for the crisis it is now facing. The Times would like to know just who these bureaucrats and consultants are, and above all why not one house has been finished.

The technical fees for architectural and engineering services of $24,258 were on the standard scale but looked grossly inflated when set against the output of houses built. In Heppell’s (1979, 27) summary the total technical fees paid to consultants for the 46 NT Aboriginal housing associations by mid-1975 came to $831,257 and is contrasted with an output of 76 houses. In April 1976, the WPHA dispensed with the services of its technical consultants, deciding that its poor financial position left it no alternative (minutes of the meeting of 6 April 1976). The question of management performance was also reviewed formally by
DAA staff involved with the Association: 'Due mainly to bad management and lack of adequate advice and supervision, efforts made by the Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association to assist in developing a Housing Programme have been less than desirable ...' (letter, R. Huey, 3 February 1976, CRS:E460 79/682). A new manager was appointed and events took a turn for the better.

A Land Rights Bill based on the Woodward Land Rights Commission report was submitted to the Commonwealth Parliament in October 1975, making it possible, among other things, for NT urban Aborigines to claim land on the basis of need. Land Councils had also been set up under the same recommendations with responsibility for negotiating and investigating these claims on behalf of urban groups. In Tennant Creek this led to the WPHA seeking the assistance of the Central Land Council in putting forward claims over the Village, Blueberry Hill and the Mulga on its behalf. Productive meetings were held with the TMB in early 1976 where these claims were discussed with a view to notifying the Interim Land Commissioner.

Before the claims could be heard, the change of government in Canberra in November 1975 led to a termination of all claims (Heppell and Wigley 1981). Eventually, Special Purpose Leases were to be issued under NT legislation for the Village (1980) and the Mulga and Blueberry Hill (1981).
CHAPTER FIVE
ELECTED REPRESENTATION

The key issue for Tennant Creek people to decide upon is who they want to run Tennant Creek -- politicians in Darwin or a local body (Grant Tambling, Cabinet Member for Finance and Local Government, speaking at a public meeting in Tennant Creek, 26 May 1977).

The TMB elections of 4 November 1972 established a partly-elected Board consisting of five local members from a field of 13 candidates and four officials appointed by the Administration. Three members of the old Board, Mrs Y.L.N. Williams, P.G. North and A.E. Chittock were returned together with M.W. Robertson and I.L. Tuxworth. The last, a soft drinks manufacturer and hotelier, was elected chairman at the first meeting on 22 November. Of the four appointees only one, the Assistant Director of Local Government, was Darwin-based the others having regional responsibilities in the Tennant Creek district. One elected member (P.G. North) resigned almost immediately on being transferred elsewhere and was replaced at a supplementary election in February 1973 by J. Ross, a local electrical contractor.

At the first meeting, Frank Dwyer, an Assistant Administrator, outlined the Administration viewpoint that an elected TMB was an interim step towards the full form of municipal government which had already been achieved in Darwin and Alice Springs. An offer for Tennant Creek to achieve this status would be made in due course because it was felt that people should accept some responsibility for the conduct of town affairs. Local government would not be forced on any community and opportunity would be available for the offer to be discussed before acceptance or rejection. On being questioned about the plan to introduce local government in Tennant Creek by 1 July 1973, Dwyer was forced to admit this was now only a very remote possibility (minutes, 89th Meeting, 22 November 1972).

TMB business in 1973/74 covered the usual array of municipal issues dealt with in previous years but also included time to debate the possible changing of the town's name from Tennant Creek to plain Tennant.
Apparently this raised great extremes of support or opposition with the majority appearing to want it left as it was. The item captured media attention in various parts of Australia and its consideration was thought justified for that reason alone (TMB Annual Report 1972/73). Chief among the major building projects discussed were the plans to eventually build a new civic hall and the raising of $35,000 as the town's contribution towards its cost. Perennial problems such as the shortage of single persons' accommodation were also raised with external bodies like the NT Housing Commission.

Elsewhere in the town other groups with an active interest in civic affairs had also formed whose membership overlapped with the TMB. The Tennant Creek Chamber of Commerce, for example, held its inaugural meeting on 10 May 1973. The items discussed were remarkably similar to those often raised in the TMB and included matters such as the conduct of bicycle riders possessing '... custom built or modified bicycles with extended front forks that constitute a danger to riders and drivers due to lack of control', and '... flagrant breaches of the law relating to bicycle riding on footpaths'. Another old chestnut was the need for a dog pound and a dog catcher given the problems being experienced with these animals in both business and residential areas (minutes, 1st meeting Tennant Creek Chamber of Commerce, 10 May 1973).

Altogether more serious were the perennial problems experienced in maintaining a viable health service in the town. The members of the Ladies Guild wrote in June 1973 appealing to the TMB and all organisations and service clubs in Tennant Creek to write to the federal Minister for Health about the medical and dental service deficiencies. The hospital upgrading was not planned until after 1975 and it had proved impossible to retain qualified personnel in the area for any length of time. In the past five years there had been four different medical superintendents, many other doctors passing through and no resident dental treatment. Townspeople had become accustomed to travelling at least as far as Alice Springs for diagnosis and child birth and the 'dentist to population ratio' for Tennant Creek was 0:3000!

One matter brought before the Board in 1973 had wide implications which extended far beyond the parochial affairs of the town and this concerned the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the NT's inquiry into
the question of more autonomy for the Territory. It was the Commonwealth government's intention to establish a fully elected Legislative Assembly by the end of 1974 and a committee had been appointed to sound out the opinions of Territorians to a range of issues. Among them was the future role to be played by the town management boards:

The Board feels that Town Management Boards could play a more definite role in Community affairs by being responsible to a fully elected Legislative Assembly instead of to the Administrator. From the Board's personal experience the present system has many shortcomings. The Board also feels that any community no matter how small, should be able to form a Town Management Board or Community Advisory Board should they wish to do so (submission by TMB to Parliamentary Joint Committee on Northern Territory, 16 January 1974, 2).

In answer to another question about whether it mattered if local government in the NT did not pay its way, the Board felt it 'highly improbable that local government in the Northern Territory would ever pay its way'. These questions about the circumstances of governance no doubt emphasised the shortcomings felt by TMB members regarding their own position as merely advisors to higher levels of government about detailed local matters which were probably of little concern elsewhere. Throughout most of 1974 the Board waited for the offer of local government from Darwin to materialise and when it did not they wrote to the Administrator asking for it. At last, in December, it arrived and became the chief item of TMB business for the next three years.

Steps towards local government

The Administration's timing could hardly have been worse. Although Tennant Creek was not directly affected by the huge impact of Cyclone Tracy on Christmas day 1974, the question of future governance arrangements for the town did not figure prominently on the agenda of a NT administration which had been forced to transfer its own operational base to Brisbane. In fact negotiations on the whole question of local administration and fiscal responsibilities in Tennant Creek had been addressed sporadically for 20 years and
further delays surprised no one (table 11). The TMB moved quickly to set up its own sub-committees to look into financial, municipal, general impact and town boundary effects, and decided not enough time was available for the transfer to take place in mid-1975. They suggested to the embattled administration that a more realistic date was 1 July 1976. The Department of the NT agreed to the request (letter, T.A. O’Brien, TMB correspondence, 12 March 1975).

The sheer scale of the destruction left by the cyclone and the fact that virtually the whole command structure of the NT administration was badly disrupted were matters of great concern to all communities in the Territory. The Cattlemen’s Association of Northern Australia, for example, at a special meeting in Katherine on 24 February 1975, decided to do something about the vulnerability to natural disaster of the administrative over-concentration in Darwin. They wrote to the TMB along with local bodies in the other centres suggesting that decentralisation of administrative functions was essential and that a steering committee be formed immediately:

Pre-Tracy, pretty well total Administration – including communications (of both Government and Private enterprise) was centred in Darwin.

Result – nil communication – pretty well a complete breakdown in all services of Administration (again both public and private) not only to Eastern Australia – but to Territory Centres themselves! Your centre – your people.

After all, Alice Springs for example – an important centre – is nearly 1,000 miles away from Darwin. In Europe this could mean six countries or nations away in distance. Gove is in a similar situation – Tennant Creek – and even Katherine (letter, R.F. Condon, TMB correspondence, 1 March 1975).

Although an appeal was made for Territorians to rise above party politics because of the bipartisan issues involved, pastoral interests would stand to benefit directly from any real attempts at decentralisation. Nothing came of the proposal but it illustrated the continuing suspicions held by many Territorians of the Darwin-based bureaucracy, a fear and mistrust which had
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1953/54</td>
<td>Local Government Bill debated in NTLC. First approaches made to Tennant Creek.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Local government re-established in Darwin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Bill to provide for the levying of rates in town areas outside Darwin defeated in NTLC.</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Rates Bill defeated again in NTLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Rates Bill defeated again in NTLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964/5</td>
<td>'Chan' Select Committee on Local Government visits Tennant Creek (9 April 1965). Recommends election of local members to TMB.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Tennant Creek TMB requests details of offer of local government from NT administration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Local government instituted in Alice Springs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Offer of local government received in December. Cyclone Tracy delays government business.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>TMB requests that offer be left open for negotiation with view to transfer on 1st July 1976. Request made that offer include full indexation of operational subsidies along the lines suggested by Katherine TMB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Dept of Northern Territory rejects notion of indexation in February.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Grant Tambling visits in February and introduces idea of gradual phasing-in of local government responsibilities. New offer received in April with phasing-in over 4 years. Public meeting to discuss offer on 26 May attended by Tambling and Tuxworth. TMB returns list of amendments in July/August. Phasing-in period to be curtailed and transfer date brought forward to 1 July 1978. TMB requests transfer on 1 July 1979 and referendum in Tennant Creek. Visit in December by Robertson who urges acceptance and transfer by mid-1978.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>TMB accepts offer in January without need for referendum. Tennant Creek becomes a municipality on 1 July 1978. Alf Chitlock the first Mayor.</td>
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Source: TCDA correspondence; Tennant Creek TMB minutes.
been eloquently advanced by Dr Webster in the first meeting of the NTLC almost 30 years before.

The chief concern in the minds of TMB elected members was that local government in Tennant Creek would be too great a financial burden on the small community. The Administration’s proposal that its operational subsidy to the new town council be agreed over a five-year fixed term was particularly worrying. There were obvious inflationary implications to consider and the state of the town’s economy and the immediate prospects for the mining and cattle industries did little to instil confidence. Arrangements were made in July for two TMB members, Messrs Allen and Tuxworth, to visit shire councils in Queensland along with Tambling (the relevant executive member) and Otto Alder (for the Dept of Northern Australia), in order to see the operation of full local government in practice.

The report on the visit confirmed fears that Tennant Creek would soon experience financial difficulties and this view was underlined by the receipt of information about how the Katherine TMB proposed to handle the matter. At a special meeting in August the TMB adopted the five Katherine cost escalation principles and resolved to inform the Administration accordingly (table 12). Their action was further supported by Senator Kilgariff who visited the TMB in October to advise on the Alice Springs experience of adopting full local government, ‘... it was essential that the Board obtain an offer which would give sufficient financial support and not one with a fixed government contribution’ (minutes 119th meeting TMB, 27 October 1975).

A negative response from the Department of the Northern Territory to the TMB proposal was not received until February 1976 but the door was left open to further negotiation:

... it will be necessary for your Board to reconsider this offer and whether any further satisfactory alternatives could be agreed upon. Consideration could also be given to whether there are interim arrangements which particularly resolve the Town Management Board’s desire to move to areas of responsibility (letter, V.T. O’Brien, TMB correspondence, 2 February 1976).
Table 12  The Five Inflationary Safeguards Adopted by the Katherine and Tennant Creek Town Management Boards, 1975

The TMB therefore resolves that the following funding principles be written into the offer so that the townspeople are not disadvantaged by inflationary movements beyond their control:

(1) THAT the annual operational subsidy payable by the Australian Government be reassessed at the beginning of each financial year by varying it with the proportional change in award wages occurring during the previous year.

(2) THAT, at the same time, a retrospective increment to the previous year's total grant be calculated in such a way that it would when added to the previous year's grant remove distortion caused by the proportional increase in award wages, and that this increment (if any) be included in the first payment of grant in the ensuing year.

(3) THAT the payment of any increase in annual subsidy be conditional upon the total rate levy for that year maintaining at least the same percentage to total cost as that accepted as applying in the first year of the offer.

(4) THAT the capital grant for the Municipal Chambers be made on the basis that the cost (per square to the approved floor area), at the time the contract is to be let, is accepted as reasonable by the Department of Housing and Construction in comparison with similar buildings in Tennant Creek and that any escalation of that cost arising out of an acceptable rise and fall clause in the contract be considered for a supplementary grant on its merits.

(5) THAT the capital grant for the Municipal Depot be quantified at the time the contract, based on plans certified as to scope required for the size of the municipal operation at the introduction of local government and as to cost reasonableness in relation to similar works in Tennant Creek by the Department of Housing and Construction, is to be let, with the same provision for cost escalation as in (4).

Source: Minutes of Special Meeting Tennant Creek Town Management Board, 27 August 1975.
Almost immediately, the new Executive Member for Municipal and Consumer Affairs, Marshall Perron, visited the TMB and urged them to get on with deciding which municipal functions they were prepared to accept. He assured the members he would push for the necessary legislative changes to be made and, within two months, had advanced proposals for a new 'Community Development Ordinance' which would allow communities to gradually assume various powers rather than full local government (minutes 123rd meeting TMB, 10 May 1976).

Enthusiasm in the town was now at a low ebb, with the depressed economic outlook reflected in the local response to a land auction:

... when the fifth lot, 18 Meyers St was auctioned at $3, the auctioneer stopped, stunned, muttering something like "farce", he reopened the block for auction again. A wise move - an extra $2 went into the government coffers (Tennant Times, 34, 19 March 1976).

Attempts were also being made to broaden the town's economic base through the promotion of tourism but a public meeting held in April to launch the idea was very poorly attended.

The TMB elections were arranged for 19 June and a special meeting at the school was organised to meet the 12 candidates for the five vacancies. Once again, the general lethargy and lack of interest was reflected in poor attendance with the candidates outnumbering members of the public:

After all candidates had spoken it was evident that all had but one aim in mind and that was to introduce Local Government in the early stages ... it was unanimous on all counts that the town should foster the Tourism Promotion Scheme (Tennant Times, 46, 11 June 1976).

Shortly afterwards the local paper complained that only one candidate had bothered to place an advertisement '... no doubt as a result of the lack of importance attached to the TMB by both the candidates and the public' (Tennant Times, 47, 18 June 1976). The editorial blamed the present situation on the approach towards TMB business followed in the past rather than the limited powers of the Board itself:
The TMB have certainly been far from an active organisation in Tennant Creek in recent times. The Board meets infrequently and little of what happens during the meetings filters through to the public ... Seldom is the public consulted for its opinion on matters under discussion.

Is the Board so limited by the TMB Ordinance, or so inactive, that its presence is of minimal value? It would seem that the Board is largely to blame for its own impotence. The establishment of Local Government is all very well, but first let us see the incoming Board play an active and, more importantly, a visible role in the affairs of our town.

We ask the residents of Tennant Creek to exercise their right to determine the direction in which their town is heading, and elect representatives who show promise of enlivening the Board. Yet it appears that there are few candidates on the list with such desires (Tennant Times, 47, 18 June 1976).

The election results showed that some 250 out of the 1200 on the roll actually voted, giving a total of 21 per cent which, though low, was better than in Katherine. Of the five elected T. Callaghan topped the poll with 169 votes, R. Maher (153), T. Darlington (137), K. Conway (136) and A. Chittock (121). The only female candidate, Beth Staunton, was not elected.

At least two of the new Board members (Conway and Darlington) were soon involved with a Steering Committee to establish a Tennant Creek Community Development Council under the provisions of the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP). The latter had been introduced by the Whitlam Labor government in 1973 as a means of regionalising social welfare planning. Australia was divided into 70 welfare regions, of which 37 had been established by mid-1976. Among them were three regional councils for social development in the NT based in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. Unfortunately for Tennant Creek, there were already suspicions that the Fraser Liberal/National Country Party government would cease to fund the councils beyond mid-1977.
The aim was to create a representative public body which would involve local community organisations, clubs, public servants and citizens interested in working together for social and community development in their regions. They were not intended to replace existing groups or local authorities but to encourage co-operative effort. Funding for Tennant Creek was to come initially from $10,000 made available by the other NT regional councils until a separate grant could be secured from July 1977 (notice by the Tennant Creek Steering Committee, 9 July 1976, Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection).

Although a discontinuation of government funding was to close all the regional councils in 1977, the process of inauguration in Tennant Creek was an excellent example of what the AAP hoped to achieve. A questionnaire was circulated to all residents (numbering almost 3,000 in early 1976) with a response rate of 60 per cent. It revealed most of the returns came from young people under the age of 18 years who emphasised the need for more youth activities and the creation of 'green areas' in the town.

A public meeting held in August 1976 adopted a written constitution and saw the election of an executive committee. The physical boundaries of the region were agreed as were four specific objectives (table 13). Besides Tennant Creek and its outlying mining communities, the region extended north to cover many of the pastoral properties in the Barkly Tableland as far as the Gulf and the Queensland border. As in the similar organisation established in Katherine (Lea 1987), the objectives were ambitious and were bound to overlap extensively with the network of government and private agencies already in place.

The final offer

Perron wasted little time in coming to Tennant Creek to address the new Board about the importance of adopting local government as soon as a new offer was made available, 'Unless Local Government was introduced townspeople would have little say in the affairs of the town ...' (Marshall Perron, reported in the Tennant Times, 51, 16 July 1976). Nothing firm was heard from Darwin, however, until the new Cabinet Member for Finance and Local Government, Grant Tambling, addressed the TMB in February 1977.
Table 13  Extract from the Constitution of the Tennant Community Development Council, 1976

Boundary

The region within which the Council may work shall be defined as that area between the southern boundaries of the following pastoral stations:

Wallamunga  Dungawan  Cooee Hills  Spring Creek  
Birrindudu  Marranji  Tanumbirini  Robinson River  
Hooker Creek  Hayfield  Balbirini  Calvert Hills  
Wave Hill  Shenandoah  McArthur River  Wollogorang  

and north of latitude 21° 31', in the Northern Territory.

Objects

The object of the Council shall be:

To improve the well-being and community feeling of the people living within the region.

(a) encourage local self help initiative.

(b) elicit and evaluate the community's own perceived needs and solicit constructive ideas for the solution of these needs from the affected community groups themselves and thus help facilitate the development of community projects.

(c) bring together efforts in the field of community services by government, statutory, business and voluntary bodies, disseminating knowledge throughout the community to both consumers and producers of these efforts to avoid duplication, omission or competition wherever possible.

(d) Set up and establish a Regional Council in a permanent form which reflects the views of the community in the region.

Source: Tuxworth/Fullwood Collection
Both Tambling and Tuxworth (MLA for Barkly) assured the Board that the details of the offer would be made available very soon and that they should feel free to contact the various government departments to seek advice and further information. Local government powers could be phased-in gradually over a period of years (minutes 131st meeting TMB, 15 February 1977). At last, in April, the offer was delivered to the Board who were asked to regard it 'as a starting point and basis for further discussion' (minutes 133rd meeting TMB, 19 April 1977). They would be given until the end of May when Tambling and Tuxworth would visit the town again to address a public meeting and assess local reactions to the offer.

The question of future rates was uppermost in the minds of Board members and residents and the new offer outlined a system based on the unimproved capital value of the land at levels very similar to Darwin and Alice Springs. A Commonwealth base valuation of all rateable property placed a total value on Tennant Creek of $650,000 and the new Council would be empowered to borrow against the sum. Darwin and Alice Springs rates (household $97-$225) would be averaged and phased-in over a four-year period. Thus 40 per cent of the average would be payable in year two, 60 per cent in year three, and so on. A special operational grant would be payable to the new Council to bridge the gap between receipts and the actual sums needed to establish local government (minutes of the public meeting, 26 May 1977). Even a public meeting of such significance to the town's future did not stir much local interest and was only attended by 22 local residents.

Indeed, the Board soon realised there was general apathy and very little interest in the town as a whole regarding the introduction of local government (minutes 135th meeting, 14 June 1977). This is not unusual in mining communities where the majority of the population could be considered to have only a small stake in the future of their settlement (Lea and Zehner 1986). It made life very difficult for TMB members and they appointed a special sub-committee to itemise their amendments to the offer and come up with any counter suggestions. Chief among the concerns were: the acquisition of new Council motor vehicles; the relocation of the new Council Chambers on a site on Peko road to the east of the storm water drain; the upgrading of service lanes in the business area; securing higher than award rates to attract the right person to the position as town clerk; negotiations with the
government to obtain rates from its buildings on high value land in Paterson Street; and acceptance of existing town boundaries in the negotiation of the offer (minutes of TMB Sub-committee meeting, 17 June 1977).

Further Board meetings in July and August extended the list of missing items to include an increase in the size of the town dump; better drain covers; the first re-sealing of town roads to be at government expense and the installation of more drainage works by government. These, when added to the special inflationary safeguards adopted by the Katherine TMB (table 12), formed the basis of the Board's acceptance in principle. No definite response to the points made had been received from Darwin by early November apart from a decision to abandon the four-year phasing-in and to introduce full local government from 1st July 1978. Board members decided not to agree to the new timetable until a response in writing from Darwin was received and, furthermore, would not commit themselves to local government before July 1979 and certainly not until after a referendum had been held in the town (minutes 140th meeting TMB, 15 November 1977).

As in the parallel case in Katherine (Lea 1987), the Cabinet in Darwin would brook no further delays and dispatched Robertson (Cabinet Member for Community and Social Development) and Tuxworth to Tennant Creek to sew the matter up. The TMB was told by Robertson that a referendum was not advisable and could lead to the 'possibility of an uninformed vote as the people would assume increases of rates and the result ... could be biased' (minutes 141st meeting TMB, 20 December 1977). The TMB was asked for an unequivocal response in the positive or negative. In particular, they were told by Robertson that the letters of understanding now being prepared for the Prime Minister from the Department of the NT regarding the advent of self-government for the Territory in July 1978 should include the formal acceptances from the people of Katherine and Tennant Creek. If it did not, the view was held that the subsidy agreement for NT local governments would be considerably weakened.

Finally, at their January meeting in 1978 the TMB moved to accept the offer of local government without a referendum. Even so, members of the public at the meeting repeated their concerns:

Mr Darlington (TMB): ... it would be more desirable to accept than reject the offer as the
town will be rated in any case and it would be far better to take the opportunity of having a town clerk and the town’s elected members of the Council to look after the interests of the town.

M. Bremner (public): ... people were very satisfied with the old administration of the town but it was frightening to go into something they knew nothing about and there is also the fear of the mining industry collapsing. (minutes 142nd meeting TMB, 17 January 1978).

Thus some 20 years of sporadic negotiation with government had come to an end (table 12) and the TMB could feel satisfied it had secured a generous settlement. Important constitutional determinants underlay the speed with which local government was introduced in Katherine and Tennant Creek in mid-1978, as they did in shaping the discussions about the role of the third tier of government in the long process of negotiation from 1972 to 1978 leading to self-government (Heatley 1986). Functional responsibility for local government was transferred from the Dept of the Northern Territory to the new NT public service in early 1977: '... anything happening with regard to local government should be taken in the context of what is happening in relation to state functions ... the local government function was transferred on 1 January 1977 and the Legislative Assembly is keen to vest responsibility where it can be most effective’ (Grant Tambling, minutes of public meeting in Tennant Creek, 26 May 1977). Further, as already noted, there was concern in the NT Executive that the subsidy agreement for Territory local government contained in the offer by the Commonwealth of self-government would be weakened if further delays took place in Katherine and Tennant Creek.

The local government elections in May 1978 attracted a large field of 20 candidates for the six aldermanic vacancies and four for the position of Mayor. A.E. Chittock was elected Mayor with more than half the votes and Messrs Allen, Browning, Callaghan, Carpenter, Darlington and Kappler filled the former positions. In his ‘thank you’ advertisements the new Mayor captured the intimacy of local politics:
I am so honoured and yet so humble, that mere words cannot adequately express my feelings, and however phrased in beautiful adjectives, my gratitude to you. So from my heart with two simple words, I say 'Thank you' (Tennant Times, 143, 19 May 1978).

Conclusions

... all history depends on memory, and many recollections incorporate history. And they are alike distorted by selective perception, intervening circumstances and hindsight (Lowenthal 1985, p.xxii).

This account of the beginnings of community government in Tennant Creek in the years after the Second World War covers a period of economic struggle and growing maturity which laid the foundations of the modern town. There were doubts in the late 1940s that such a small and marginal settlement would achieve permanence and there are many Australian examples of similar places which have disappeared altogether. The reasons for its survival until diversification became possible in recent times are complex and rest on a combination of resilience in base metals mining in the district, considerable government support and human tenacity.

Aboriginal people had lived in this part of central Australia for many thousands of years before the first 'white' contact in the mid-nineteenth century and their presence has always been a significant factor in the development of Tennant Creek. As in the case of Katherine and most other Northern Territory towns, Aboriginal urban settlement has strengthened the functional importance of small communication centres and staging posts which charted the progress of European expansion into northern Australia. An indigenous network of kinship links and bonds of language affiliation has incorporated these places and greatly enhanced the likelihood of their permanency.

The motives for undertaking the study were to trace the manner in which Tennant Creek became a self-governing municipality in 1978 and to examine the evolution of local institutions which emerged spontaneously or were imposed on the community from Darwin. It was known that considerable pressure had been used in Katherine (Lea 1987) and Jabiru (Lea and Zehner 1986) to persuade residents to accept more
responsibility for running their affairs and it was assumed the same situation prevailed in Tennant Creek. However much deeper resentment seems to have been felt by southern Territorians about the role of an administration based in the 'Top End' and the sentiments are obvious in many references to neglect by far away Darwin officials. Modern communications have greatly reduced the tyranny of distance which was keenly felt by the people of Tennant Creek only 30 years ago. Darwin was not thought as belonging to the Northern Territory proper and a controversial choice as seat of government (NTLC debates, 16 February 1948, 23-4). It is quite another matter to find evidence which can sustain a charge of systematic neglect and most indications suggest the problems of the town were viewed sympathetically by senior public servants who had little wish to live there themselves. Even Frank Dwyer, a senior officer in the NT Administration and a person who had little time for complaints from Katherine residents (Lea 1987), is said to have had a 'soft spot' for Tennant Creek (A.E. Chitlock, pers. comm.).

The town was for many years the main source of mineral exports from the Territory and its position as a generator of income was only challenged by the widespread pastoral industry. In this respect the people of Tennant Creek did have grounds for complaint because the local mining companies did little to invest in the improvement of the town. Peko even preferred to locate much of the workforce for its new copper smelter at Warrego only 47 km from the town rather than base them in the main population centre. There was also scant acknowledgment from Darwin about the overall economic importance of the town to a Territory economy massively subsidised by the Commonwealth. This situation contrasts markedly with the involvement of mining companies in the provision of urban infrastructure in some northern towns in modern times (Lea and Zehner 1986). Miners did not have to be encouraged to join the goldrush historically and considerable efforts were made to turn them away. It is possible to say with hindsight, however, that the relative neglect of the town by the mining companies has prevented it from becoming over-dependent on the industry and may have facilitated later diversification into tourism and other service industries after 1978 (O'Faircheallaigh 1987).

The pattern of Aboriginal urban settlement can be traced quite accurately in Tennant Creek from its
origins in the 1950s and appears to have been directly influenced by changes in pastoral employment and recession in the cattle industry in the late 1960s. The subject of Aboriginal town camping did not rate a mention in the minutes of the TMB until 1967, several years later than the first publicity given to the subject in Katherine. Indeed, the records suggest that race and alcohol problems in Tennant Creek never achieved the levels of public consciousness experienced in Katherine during the 1960s and 1970s. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for this except to say that the Aboriginal presence in the southern town does not seem to have been considered as obtrusive by white residents and the records do not reveal the same degree of inter-tribal conflict among camping groups as experienced in Katherine.

The establishment difficulties suffered by the Warramunga Pabulu Housing Association expose the severe problems faced by new Aboriginal community organisations in the early 1970s. Housing might have provided the formal rationale for the existence of the associations from the government perspective but the WPHA was seen in the Aboriginal communities as something of wider significance. The fact that so few houses were built in the early years in no way detracted from the considerable importance and achievement of the Association in raising Aboriginal consciousness in Tennant Creek. Although little new leasehold land had been acquired for Aboriginal housing by the time the study ends in 1978, interaction between the Association, TMB and the NT government had paved the way for the changes that were soon to follow.

Without wishing to minimise the existence of differences of opinion in the town, it seems that Aboriginal affairs were treated as a bi-partisan issue by candidates in the local government election of 1978. Concerns were rarely highlighted in the local press and few questions raised in the Legislative Assembly in the 1970s when compared with the case of Katherine. It may be speculated that Tennant Creek, being largely a mining town, experienced a much higher population turnover rate than the other town whose economy was primarily a pastoral, tourism and Aboriginal welfare service centre. This in turn might suggest less commitment to urban affairs by the majority of residents and less interest, perhaps, in issues connected with ownership of property and the Aboriginal population.
Nevertheless, Tennant Creek has proved to be a remarkably resilient community with plenty of residents prepared to involve themselves in the betterment of the town. Isolation and climatic duress appear to have moulded an urban society with a self-help philosophy. By the time local government arrived in 1978 there had been a 30-year apprenticeship of progress association and town management board which facilitated the transfer of responsibility. An era of paternalism was at an end and it is no accident that Territory self-government and local administrative autonomy combined after 1978 to promote a diversified town where mining now provides less than half of the jobs in the community.
Appendix 1

(Australian Archives CRS E460 Item 74/1403)

The Town of Brolga

Housing and Accommodation for Fringe Communities

1. The attached drawings 'A' and 'B' relate to suggested model solutions to the problem of housing the fringe community of an imaginary town in the Northern Territory. All the elements of the proposed standard model solution are present and three variations are shown in drawing 'B' to suit the requirements of three different populations.

2. Brolga is a town of some 250 white people and part of the town plan is shown in drawing 'A'. The Aboriginal fringe community has always camped on the river bank, behind the recreation reserve. When first approached about the problem the local Progress Association suggested that a camp be set up about one mile out of town. However, after some prolonged consultation and assurances that the accommodation would be of an acceptable standard, would be constantly maintained and would be set on properly fenced and landscaped blocks of land the Progress Association was persuaded to accept the use of the land shown in drawing 'A'. The Aboriginal groups wanted to live somewhere north of the recreation reserve and had to be convinced of the value of being where water, power and proper access was available.

3. Four building blocks were necessary to provide sufficient land for the present population and for the requirements of the future population that, it is hoped, will require standard housing.

4. Drawing 'B', solution 1, shows a layout to suit the following population.

   2 pensioner couples ) all related and living
   5 pensioner women  ) in one group

   1 pensioner family with 5 children of school age
   and camped apart from the above group
TOWNSHIP OF BROLOGA
Hundred of Black and White
County of Utopia
SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEM OF HOUSING FOR FRINGE DWELLERS OF DIFFERENT TYPES.

TOWNSHIP OF BROLGA
Hundred of Black and White
County of Utopia
The shelters and the house are each derived from the basic accommodation unit which is described in the attached design brief. The four building blocks have external cyclone fencing and are provided with a driveway for the grouped accommodation and pathways block. The family unit has internal fencing and its own driveway. All units are based on the standard design so that they can eventually be altered or extended so as to become a proper house. Arrangements have been made for continuous maintenance of the grounds. The gardens and lawns have been designed and laid out so as to require a minimum of upkeep.

5. Solution 2 is for an itinerant population of about twenty persons who have little experience with anything but living in wurlies. For this reason, plus the temporary nature of their visits to town, there is not much chance of them learning to use individual facilities and a specially designed communal ablution and toilet block has been installed. The layout and the use of standard foundations and building components ensures that if necessary, in the future, other options up to normal housing can be pursued.

6. Solution 3 is for a population of three families that are young and capable of coping with standard housing. One family has relatives who are a pensioner couple and who camped with them in the fringe community camp. Provision has been made for this pensioner couple to live in reasonable proximity. Discrete family units are fenced off and, with these families, more responsibility for maintenance, etc., is given out.

7. A design brief for standard buildings capable of meeting all the requirements of suggested model is attached and should be read as a supplementary part of the model solution.

The Design Brief

1. The Problem

Aboriginal groups living on the outskirts of urban and town areas

- generally lack even basic services.
- live in unhygienic conditions.
- have no facilities for proper food storage and preparation.
have no recreation facilities and are culturally deprived.
are excluded from the main community because of their low standards of health, hygiene, personal appearance, education and habits.
are a visual reminder of the continuing sterility of government policy.
are the prey of Europeans with depraved appetites and of Europeans with a need to practice overt concern for humanity.
are often economically insecure.

The groups are not all the same:

- some are mostly pensioners.
- some are remnants of whole populations.
- some are displaced persons.
- some are personally degenerate.
- some are itinerants.
- some are visitors.

Their aspirations are generally low.

The facts of their existence are a visual and material reinforcement of their low status and supports the assertion that they are lazy, dirty, intractable, unintelligent and hopeless.

- they have little or no experience of higher standards of living.
- they have no perceivable future and therefore no need to postpone whatever pleasure the present can offer.
- they are not in a position to choose, arrange and manage an optimum range of material facilities that can be adapted to suit an environment that might change for the better because they have no experience of a better environment and no expectations that such a thing is possible.

The larger community cannot help them:

- some whites would like to help.
- some whites will not help.
- individual efforts always end in disappointment.

The government has failed to make successful assistance available.
camp situations confirm the status-quo while they offer better facilities.

village situations are better but still reinforce the understanding between white and black that black is inferior.

individuals placed in standard housing have been lonely, unsupported, patronised, exhorted and finally, failures.

the elements of partial success that have been seen in such places as the Katherine pensioner houses and the Elliott village have never been identified and assessed.

2. The Requirements of the Situation

Aboriginal fringe communities need some effective help from the Department to better their standard of accommodation and living in such a way as to open to them the possibility of upward social and material mobility in the future.

it is impossible for whites to know how Aboriginals will view assistance that is made available.

assistance needs to be made available in such a way that future options are not precluded merely because of rigidity built into the system now. For instance, the Katherine High Level camp is locked into a design that ensures it will always be different from the main community.

assistance made available must be comfortable for Aboriginals but most look good to whites.

assistance offered must involve those elements of the white community who want to help.

assistance, once offered, must be available if we are going to do better than administrations have done in the last 200 years.

3. A Plan of Action

It is agreed that we must do something. However, the fear has always been present, that we might do the wrong thing. The basic assumption in the proposed plan of action, set out beneath, is that, provided whatever is done is not rigidly locked into a camp or village mould so that there is no possibility of future
progress towards or into the accepted standards of the main community, then even if what is done is not absolutely suitable at the time when it is done, no permanent problem is created. The following is a simple plan of action.

. commission an adviser for each fringe group.
. identify and carry out census of group.
. classify groups into their dominant types, eg., pensioner, whole population, itinerant, etc.
. contact community groups likely to be interested in a solution to problems of fringe dwellers and explain a proposal for action.
. consult with the Aboriginal group and explain the model solution (set out beneath), obtain their views on options, their suggestions for location, facilities, standard of accommodation, etc.
. examine possible land options and check status and requirements for title, etc.
. return to community groups and client groups and explain the range of possible options.
. obtain general agreement to a reasonably detailed proposal.
. form required association or incorporated body, appoint necessary technical assistants, accountants, etc., apply for finance for organisation expenses.
. obtain final agreement to details for accommodation, facilities, and management.
. apply for building finance and arrange letting of contracts.
. apply for personal finance for furniture, etc., as required.
. arrange on-going requirements for servicing, landscaping, etc.

A Model Solution

Any model solution can be nothing more than a starting point because the needs of each fringe group will vary and change. There will be obvious differences between the needs of itinerant groups and permanent groups and differences also between the requirements of pensioner groups and whole populations. However, as mentioned before, the model solution, while allowing variations to suit all needs, must ensure that future options remain open, that the Aboriginal clients
are comfortable and that the final result look pleasing to the white community. A model solution is set out beneath in respect of each element of the situation.

(a) Land

. location must be a compromise between where the client group wishes to live and what land is available. Apartheid situations must be avoided.

. the opinion of the white community must be canvassed but, it is suggested, given little weight because the solution is going to be pleasant in appearance.

. must be acquired in units of the same size as is used for residential purposes in the main community and in sufficient number to allow of each family unit eventually having one discrete land unit.

. units must be collected together so that families can live so as to provide each other with mutual social and cultural support, if that is required, but must not be used so as to preclude a final split into the same discrete units as are used by the larger community.

. must be properly landscaped, drained, paved where necessary, fenced and maintained.

. title must be acquired or eventually available for discrete units to individual families.

. must be serviced to the same standard as in the main community.

. examine the attached drawings (note: these are missing).

(b) Accommodation

. architect designed for a full range of options.

. well built and meet all building regulations in its final form.

. capable of meeting various levels of material living.

. capable of meeting several purposes, eg., shelter, dormitory, full house, etc.

. attractive in each stage.

. avoid the use of communal facilities except where camp type arrangements are necessary for itinerants, etc.
. examine the attached drawings (note: these are missing).

(c) Facilities

. all that are available.
. installed to normal standards including garden taps.
. include solar hot water services.
. external fencing is a minimum, internal fencing installed as required.

(d) Management and Control

. should be tailored to the needs and abilities of the groups involved.
. finance should be available for on-going maintenance with or without concurrent rentals, etc.

Note: This incomplete document is anonymous and undated but from its position in the archive file was probably written in the Welfare Branch, Darwin in 1972 (CRS E460 Item 74/1403).
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