RULED BY REMOTE CONTROL:

The Commonwealth’s Role in the History of Darwin, 1911-1978

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A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of Creative Arts and Humanities
Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts
Charles Darwin University
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to the ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Kathy De La Rue

6 February 2014
Figure 1: Sketch map of the Northern Territory of Australia
Abstract

The Australian Commonwealth government, mindful of the need to settle the northern coast for defence purposes, and conscious of the possible criticism from other countries at the failure to develop what was regarded as a potential source of great wealth, assumed control of the Northern Territory in 1911. In this thesis I examine the impact of the government’s policies and their implementation on the development of Darwin.

The thesis is essentially an urban history of Darwin during the years that the Commonwealth government administered the Northern Territory. It chronicles the social and economic developments in the city during this period and traces the changes to the physical landscape caused by government policies, and outside influences such as World War Two and Cyclone Tracy. The interaction between the various ethnic groups in the city and between the long-term residents and the transitory public servants is investigated. I also portray the way in which the perception of the Northern Territory as an untamed wilderness and Darwin as a backward colonial outpost gradually changed after the war as politicians and bureaucrats began to accept more fully that the development of the region was of vital importance to the well-being of the nation.

Territory residents were disenfranchised when the Commonwealth took control of the region. The story of the following years includes the slow and difficult struggle of politically minded residents to win some sort of representation in the federal parliament and also to achieve some measure of control over the administration of the Northern Territory. The thesis ends with the granting of self-government in 1978 and the end of rule by remote control from Canberra.
Acknowledgements

Many years ago, Emeritus Professor David Carment AM suggested I write a paper on the historical geography of Darwin. His help and encouragement at that time fired my enthusiasm for the subject, and, with some unavoidable interruptions, I have pursued this interest ever since. When I began my present research David was my principal supervisor and his continued support, even after he retired from Charles Darwin University in 2008, has made my job so much easier than I expected. I would like to thank him most sincerely, knowing this is an inadequate acknowledgement of all he has done for me.

Emeritus Professor Alan Powell took over as my principal supervisor a few years ago and I would also like to thank him for his advice and encouragement. Alan’s confidence in my capacity to complete this thesis has been an inspiration – and a spur – to me.

My work would have been almost impossible without the willing assistance of many librarians and archivists. I would particularly like to thank staff members from the Northern Territory Library, the Charles Darwin University Library, the Northern Territory Archives Service and the National Archives of Australia at the repositories in Darwin and Canberra.

During the course of my research I travelled to Canberra twice to consult the National Archives and other archival repositories there. My first trip was an extended stay of six weeks and was only made possible by my receipt of a Northern Territory History Grant. The Northern Territory Archives Service administers the grants on behalf of the NT government and I am grateful to all involved for the funding I received.

My task in producing this thesis would have been so much more difficult, if not impossible without the help of my family and friends, and I wish to express my love and gratitude to them all.

My husband Colin has always offered me encouragement and support, and I can always rely on him to provide carefully considered advice on my draft chapters. My dearest daughter Stephanie is responsible for persuading me to undertake this research. She too is invariably encouraging: she must be so tired of saying “You can do it, Mum”. She also gave me practical help with the graphs in the thesis, for which I thank her sincerely.
My dear friends Jenny and Colin Rees in Canberra assisted me in so many practical ways while I was in the capital doing my research. They also made sure that I was not lonely or bored during the hours I could not visit the repositories. On my second visit to their wonderful city they cheerfully offered me accommodation and a friendly relaxing refuge to come home to after work. Thank you both so much.

Other friends who helped me by offering advice, encouragement and practical help with proof reading include Ron Ninnis, Julie Mastin and Dr Wendy Beresford-Maning. To these people, too, I offer my grateful thanks and sincere affection.

My final acknowledgement must go to Charles Darwin University for the facilities and services it provided to assist me in my work. I much appreciated having the use of a study area and equipment. It not only gave me valued practical help but also allowed me to have contact with my fellow PhD candidates. I have much enjoyed my time at the university and I will probably be seeking reasons to return there after this project is finished.

Kathy De La Rue
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(b) The first four digits following the ‘PH’ indicate the collection from which each photograph has come. These collections are listed at the end of this section.
(c) Digital copies of photographs from the NAA and NTAS collections have also been used, and my thanks also go to the custodians of these collections.
(d) The captions which are enclosed in quotation marks are taken from the ‘Title’, ‘Caption’, or ‘Description’ given by the donor and/or the custodians of the photographs.

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Don Bonson’s family is one of many multi-ethnic dynasties whose members possess talents which have earned them great respect in Darwin. PH0091/0049.
PictureNT Photograph Collections used in this thesis:

0001 – William C.J. Tracey (sic) collection
0030 – Don Mutter collection
0091, 0093, and 0095 – Northern Territory government photographer collection
0100 – Federal Parliamentary Party Visit 1912 collection
0106 – Duncan Jenkins collection
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0110 – Christa Roderick collection
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\(^1\) Some maps have no dates provided because they were compiled from various sources and place names and were included for the readers’ information, without reference to the dates the places existed. Fort Dundas, for example, was abandoned long before Southport was established.
Abbreviations

ADB – Australian Dictionary of Biography
AGPS – Australian Government Publishing Service
AIAS – Australian Institute of Applied Sciences
AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIF – Australian Imperial Force
AMF – Australian Military Forces
AMIEU – Australian Meat Industry Employees Union
ANU – The Australian National University
ARP – Air Raid Precautions
AWA – Amalgamated Workers’ Association
AWAS – Australian Women’s Army Service
AWU – Australian Workers’ Union
BAT – British Australia Telegraph Company
BOM – Bureau of Meteorology
CDU – Charles Darwin University
CPD – Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CPP – Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper
CPSCA – Commonwealth Public Service Clerical Association
CSIR – Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (predecessor to the CSIRO)
CWA – Country Women’s Association
DDC – Darwin Development Committee
DDCC – Darwin Defence Co-ordination Committee
DRC – Darwin Reconstruction Commission
DTAL – Darwin Town Area Lease
DTMB – Darwin Town Management Board
FIMCO – Frances Creek Iron Mining Corporation
Gazette – Northern Territory Government Gazette
GEMCO – Groote Eylandt Mining Company
GRIC – Government Resident’s Inward Correspondence
H of R – House of Representatives
HSNT – Historical Society of the Northern Territory
JCPA – Australia, Parliament, Joint Committee of Public Accounts
MAGNT – Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
MHR – Member of the House of Representatives
MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly
NAA – National Archives of Australia
NABALCO – North Australia Bauxite and Alumina Company
NADC – Northern Australia Development Committee
NAIU – North Australian Industrial Union
NA Monthly – North Australian Monthly
NAMS – North Australia Medical Service
NAR – North Australian Railway
NARU – North Australia Research Unit
NAWU – North Australian Workers’ Union
NDO – Natural Disasters Organisation
NLA – National Library of Australia
NT Administration – Northern Territory Administration
NTC – Northern Territory Collection (Northern Territory Library)
NT Times – Northern Territory Times and Gazette
NTAS – Northern Territory Archives Service
NTDB – Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography
NTL – Northern Territory Library
NTLCD – Northern Territory Legislative Council Debates
NTU – Northern Territory University
NTWU – Northern Territory Workers’ Union
OT – Overland Telegraph
PSANCA – Public Service Association of North and Central Australia
QEA – Qantas Empire Airways
SAPD – South Australian Parliamentary Debates
SAPP – South Australian Parliamentary Paper
SRLNT – State Reference Library of the Northern Territory (now the NT Library)
SRSA, CMCNT - State Records, South Australia. Correspondence to the Minister
Controlling the Northern Territory
Standard – Northern Standard [newspaper]
Chapter One

Introduction

The Physical Setting

Darwin\textsuperscript{1} sits on a plateau forming a peninsula which juts southward into the Darwin Harbour. The harbour was given its name in 1839 by Lieutenant John Lort Stokes, senior surveyor of HMS \textit{Beagle}. Its captain, John Wickham, was instructed to explore and chart those inlets along the north coast which previous surveyors/explorers had lacked the time to examine in detail. Stokes’ discovery of some interesting rocks at Talc Head reminded him of Charles Darwin, ‘an old shipmate and friend’\textsuperscript{2} with a keen interest in geology, and he accordingly named the waterway ‘Port Darwin’ some twenty years before \textit{The Origin of Species} was published.

The Darwin plateau, or ‘table land’ as Goyder called it,\textsuperscript{3} is bounded by sandstone cliffs ranging from fifteen to thirty metres high. The southwest end of the peninsula was occupied by the round, steep-sided Fort Hill which has since been levelled although the name has been retained. Fort Hill is connected by a low saddle of land to the plateau, and is matched by Stokes Hill on the southeast corner of the peninsula. The almost vertical cliffs of the plateau are coloured in a mottled pattern of red, brown and mauve, which is caused by various amounts of iron oxide in the rock.\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{1} The capital was originally called ‘Palmerston’ and the port was designated ‘Port Darwin’. There were, however, other places in Australia and New Zealand named ‘Palmerston’, which caused some confusion. Darwin’s residents frequently referred to the town as ‘Darwin’ so the Commonwealth government formally changed the capital’s name to ‘Darwin’ when it assumed control of the Territory in 1911. In order to avoid confusion with the modern city of Palmerston, established twenty-two km from Darwin in the early 1980s, I have used the name ‘Darwin’ throughout this thesis, except when quoting another source.
\bibitem{3} G. W. Goyder, “Northern Territory Survey Expedition 1868-70: Diary kept by the Surveyor General (G.W. Goyder), Jan. 1 to Sept. 28, 1869” (Adelaide: State Library of South Australia, Photographic Service, [198-?], microform). See, for example, the entry for 11 September 1869.
\bibitem{4} \textit{Darwin’s Scenic Coastline: Places to Go} (Darwin: National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory), [1987]), p.12.
\end{thebibliography}
Taken in 1887, this photograph shows Fort Hill on the right and the plateau on which the town is sited on the left with The Camp buildings visible on the saddle between the two. The gabled Residence is visible on the horizon.

Two major creeks break the coastline between Lee Point and East Point, and, before the European settlers disturbed the landscape, most of the plateau consisted of ‘tropical woodland’ which is ‘dominated by eucalypt trees, their canopies spaced sufficiently apart to allow plenty of sunlight to reach the smaller shrubs and grasses below’. There were also a few areas of rainforest or ‘monsoon vine forests’ on the plateau, and at least two areas of mangroves on the coast. Harriet Daly (nee Douglas), daughter of Darwin’s first Government Resident, described the view from the ship on her arrival in 1870:

The shores were clothed with masses of rich green vegetation down to the water’s edge, and the cliffs overspread with thickly growing palms ... Ironbark trees, casuarinas and the bright green milkwood tree grew here in great luxuriance. It looked what it was – a land of perpetual summer. We sailed along, passing

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5 Later named Rapid Creek and Ludmilla Creek.
6 Mike Clark and Stuart Traynor, *Plants of the Tropical Woodland* (Darwin: Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, 1987), p.4.
8 These mangrove areas have since been ‘reclaimed’ and are known as ‘Mindil Beach’ and ‘Vestey’s Beach’. See Australia. Department of Construction. “Vestey’s/Mindil Beaches, Rapid Creek/Casuarina Beaches: Environmental Planning and Coastal Management Study. Prepared for the Department of the Northern Territory, November 1978” (Charles Darwin University [hereafter CDU] Library, Special Collection, photocopy), paragraph 4.3.1.
9 The senior administrative officer in the Northern Territory during the years of the South Australian administration was called the ‘Government Resident’. The title was changed to ‘Administrator’ when the Commonwealth took control of the Territory.
smooth white beaches, on to which waterfalls from the overhanging cliffs shed glittering streams of crystal, dancing and shimmering in the sunlight.\textsuperscript{10}

Located at 12°25’ South latitude and 130°50’ East longitude, Darwin is the only Australian capital situated in the tropics. A monsoon climate prevails. Strictly speaking, the term ‘monsoon’ refers to the ‘seasonal persistence of a given wind direction’,\textsuperscript{11} but in popular use, it simply describes the onset of the seasonal rains at about November of each year. The early settlers eventually abandoned their attempts to relate the weather to the southern seasons and resorted to dividing their years into the ‘Wet’ and the ‘Dry’.\textsuperscript{12} The temperatures in Darwin throughout the year remain fairly stable. The average daily maxima range between 28°C and 33°C, and the average minima range between 18°C and 25°C. It is the relative humidity, which changes the hot but pleasant climate of the Dry season from April to September into the sticky, enervating atmosphere of the Wet, when the humidity rarely drops below 50% and often exceeds 80%.\textsuperscript{13} This weather pattern – and the prevalence of voracious white ants – induced the settlers to modify both their buildings and their social activities to accommodate their changed circumstances.

The Wet season is also referred to as the ‘Cyclone season’ and these phenomena have contributed significantly to Darwin’s tempestuous history. As well as being virtually destroyed during the Second World War, Darwin was almost completely levelled by cyclones in 1897 and again in 1974, while others, such as the one which hit Darwin in 1937, caused serious damage to buildings. The dramas which Darwin has experienced throughout its history have often coloured and at times overwhelmed the various historical writings about the city and the region. Books such as Winds of Fury\textsuperscript{14} and Australia’s Pearl Harbour,\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{10} Mrs Dominic D. Daly, Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia (1887; Reprint, Victoria Park, WA: Hesperian Press, 1984), p.43.


\textsuperscript{12} The Aborigines of the north coast divide the year into six or more climatic seasons, the beginnings of which are marked by the arrival of particular fish in coastal waters, or the appearance of fruit on particular bushes and trees. See Stephen Davis, “Aboriginal Knowledge and Use of the Coast and Sea in Northern Arnhem Land,” in Coasts and Tidal Wetlands of the Australian Monsoon Region: A Collection of Papers Presented at a Conference held in Darwin, 4-11 November 1984. Mangrove Monograph No. 1, eds. K.N. Bardsley, J.D.S. Davie and C.D. Woodroffe (Darwin: The Australian National University, North Australia Research Unit [hereafter ANU, NARU], 1985). Page 301 shows the N.E. Arnhem Land seasonal calendar. The Larrakia had a similar system.

\textsuperscript{13} See Australia. Bureau of Meteorology [hereafter BOM], Climate Almanac: Darwin, 1991 ([Melbourne]: BOM, 1991) for day-to-day record temperatures and rainfall; and BOM, Climate of Darwin (Canberra: AGPS, 1980) provides informative descriptions of the climatic changes on a monthly basis.


while interesting and valuable additions to the historiography of the region, tend to give a
distorted view of the city, which has, after all, spent many long years of peaceful existence
between these dramatic events. Only a general, comprehensive history of Darwin can
provide a holistic view of the city’s growth.

The Original Inhabitants

The city of Darwin lies in the heart of Larrakia country which extends from Gunn Point
across much of Darwin’s urban and rural area and over the harbour to include Cox
Peninsula.\textsuperscript{16} Kelvin Costello, a member of the Larrakia nation, explained that his people are
‘often referred to as “saltwater people” although our boundaries extend about fifty kilometres
inland’.\textsuperscript{17} Like other Aboriginal peoples on the continent of Australia, the Larrakia roamed
their territory in small family groups, hunting land and sea animals and gathering edible
foodstuffs as they were available. The population density varied according to the available
food, and only rarely and for very short periods did they gather in larger groups at one
location. Aborigines were, as Donovan phrased it, ‘ecologically adjusted’.\textsuperscript{18} Apart from
setting fire to the long grass during the Dry season to flush out game and perhaps to assist in
the regeneration of the edible vegetation, the Larrakia people barely disturbed the land in
which they lived.

According to early European reports, the Larrakia, unlike their neighbours on the Tiwi
Islands and in the Alligator Rivers region, were a friendly people. They showed themselves
to be helpful to the first Europeans to settle on their land and their curiosity prompted many
of them to stay around the embryo settlement, providing the occasional labour for the settlers
and receiving meagre amounts of food and a few implements and other artefacts in return.
Their willingness to be exploited in this way almost certainly hastened the destruction of their
traditional way of life, but some of their culture survived and the Larrakia Nation is a
significant and influential element in Darwin society today.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Kelvin Costello, “Preface” in Saltwater People: Larrakia Stories from Around Darwin, ed. Samantha Wells
(Casuarina NT: Larrakia National Aboriginal Corporation, [2002]), p.v.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} P.F. Donovan, A Land Full of Possibilities: A History of South Australia’s Northern Territory (St Lucia,
\textsuperscript{19} Wells, ed., Saltwater People, p.v. See also http://www.larrakia.com; [database online] (Larrakia Nation
Aboriginal Corporation), [accessed 20 August 2013].
Urban History

According to Dyos, urban history ‘includes anything about cities ... [It is] a field of knowledge, not a single discipline in the accepted sense, but a field in which many disciplines converge, or are at any rate drawn upon’. Abbott specified its ‘core topics’ as being ‘the sources of urban growth ... the shaping of urban space ...[and] social patterns and power’. Urban history was accepted in Britain as a separate sub-discipline in the 1960s. There had of course been histories of various towns and cities written before this, but they had not attempted to provide a comprehensive picture of the complex changes occurring in the social, economic, political, and physical landscapes of the particular town or city being studied. Instead, they tended to conform to one of two types of history: the ‘scissors and paste’ type or what is often called the ‘city biography’. The first is merely a collection of newspaper cuttings and other memorabilia strung together with a minimal amount of narrative, such as the one prepared by J. Rintoul, on the West Australian town of Esperance. Some of these can be very interesting and even entertaining, while others tend to be an untidy hotchpotch of unconnected data. The ‘city biography’, otherwise known as ‘municipal history’, concentrates on the political development of the town or city, giving details of local government and the growth of services and facilities in the urban setting. These histories are often commissioned by the local authority to commemorate some special event such as a significant anniversary.

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25 See, for example, L. A. Easton, Stirling City (Nedlands, WA: University of WA Press for the Stirling City Council, 1971), which was written by the Assistant Town Clerk of Stirling; and D. S. Garden, Albany: A Panorama of the Sound from 1827 (West Melbourne: Nelson, 1977), which was written by a professional historian.
The newly recognised Urban History grew from a very pragmatic base. The escalation of urbanisation in the developed countries following the Second World War gave rise to a number of serious social and logistic problems, such as overcrowding, traffic congestion, civil disorder, conflict, racism and crime. In an attempt to understand and deal with these problems, government authorities contracted sociologists, economists, geographers, town planners, architects, and other professionals, to make a study of the conditions in towns and cities and the ways in which these conditions arose. Inevitably, the historical component of these people’s work was incomplete and fragmentary. British historians came to realise that there was a need for wide-ranging, in-depth histories of the major towns and cities in Britain which would utilise the methodologies of a variety of disciplines to ensure that the research was as comprehensive as possible. Their informal discussions in the early 1960s culminated in a conference on the scope and methodology of urban history held in Leicester in 1966. Jim Dyos, the acknowledged doyen of urban history in Britain, organised the conference. In his position as Professor of History at the University of Leicester, he continued to foster and mould the growth of urban history by organising other conferences and by establishing a journal called the Urban History Yearbook, the first volume of which was published in 1974. Dyos died in 1978, but other urban historians (many of whom had been students under Dyos at Leicester University) established a Centre for Urban History at that institution. Despite this, the popularity of urban history began to wane in the 1980s, but it has recently revived and, if the review of recent theses is anything to go by, it has revived with renewed vigour and purpose.

In Australia, local historians seemed to satisfy the need for historical information on suburbs and towns until the 1960s. It is now acknowledged that Noel G. Butlin’s book Investment in Australian Economic Development which ‘first demonstrated the economic importance of

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27 Roey Sweet, “Urban History,” in Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession in Britain (The Institute of Historical Research, 2008); [database online] available at http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/urban_history.html [accessed 29 October 2009].
28 The sub-discipline reached America, where practitioners adopted a ‘quantitative methodology’ based on census dates and renamed their discipline the ‘New Urban History’, much to the disapproval of Dyos, who thought their focus was too narrow. See David Cannadine, “Urban History in the United Kingdom: the ‘Dyos phenomenon’ and after” in Dyos, Exploring the Urban Past, pp.203-21.
29 See, for example, Caroline L. Miller, “Research in Urban History: A Review of Recent Theses,” Urban History 33, no.2 (August 2006): pp.293-306. This review was a regular feature of Urban History.
urbanization'\textsuperscript{30} initiated the rise of urban history in Australia.\textsuperscript{31} McCarty further explored economic aspects of Australian cities, and the publication of Davison’s *Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* in 1978 ‘extended Butlin and McCarty’s economic analysis to the urban dimension of Australia social structure’.\textsuperscript{32} By the late 1970s ‘a veritable boom in Australian urban history was underway’\textsuperscript{33} although much remains to be done.

**The Typology of Towns**

When researching an urban history it is easy to get so involved in the topic that everything about it seems unique and remarkable. As a basic tool to assist researchers in maintaining some perspective on the uniqueness or otherwise of their chosen subject, scholars from various disciplines developed a typology of towns. By the 1950s European scholars had settled on three major categories of human communities: ‘ancient villages’, ‘preindustrial towns’, and ‘industrial cities’. Within a few years, however, sociologists, geographers and urban historians who were interested in the Americas, Australasia, Africa, India, and Asia had reached the conclusion that the accepted categories did not apply satisfactorily to any country which had been colonised by another nation.

McGee was among the first to introduce the term ‘colonial city’ into the debate,\textsuperscript{34} but on further investigation it became clear that there were two distinct types of colonial city. The development of cities in areas such as America and Australasia where there were no large settled Indigenous communities differed markedly from the cities established in Africa India, and Asia where there were sedentary Indigenous populations with their own administrative structures already in place before they were colonised. McGee assigned the name ‘replica towns’\textsuperscript{35} to the first type of colonial urban centre because of the way they duplicated as closely as possible the townships and cities in the colonists’ home countries.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{34} T. G. McGee, “The Rural-urban Continuum Debate, the Preindustrial City and Rural-urban Migration,” *Pacific Viewpoint* 5 (September 1964): pp.159-79.  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p.172.
Australian historian John McCarty further explored the subject of ‘replica towns’. He substituted the term ‘commercial cities’ and explained that, unlike ‘manufacturing cities’ which arose following the industrial revolution in Britain, industrialisation in these commercial cities followed urbanisation. They were established ‘at a moment of time’ and their prime economic function was to act as bases for the opening up of new lands and at once assumed an important and often dominant role in the new region. Manufacturing was often an important industry in these cities but was induced by population growth, and by the linked demands of services and export industries.  

McCarty further pointed out that the towns and the administrative structure were established first and that the colonists rarely had more than a sketchy knowledge of the hinterland. He acknowledged that, to a certain extent, Sydney, Hobart, and Brisbane diverged from this pattern because they were originally established as convict settlements rather than purely administrative/commercial centres, but they too followed the general pattern of development of the other cities.

McCarty’s explanation tallies with the history of Darwin’s foundation. It was established ‘at a moment in time’ as a commercial and administrative centre, and it was to act as a basis for the opening up of new lands. Furthermore, the authorities had very little knowledge of the hinterland and its capabilities. But an examination of the later histories of Australia’s cities shows many differences between the southern capitals and Darwin. Generally speaking, the southern capital cities followed a similar pattern. After a few years of struggle and hardship, successful primary industries were established in the hinterland, jobs in the city relating to the processing, merchandising and export of primary products led to increased populations in the cities. As populations rose, secondary manufacturing industries were established and the original tertiary administrative sector was joined by ever-increasing commercial, manufacturing, and service sectors.

In the first twenty years of its existence, Darwin seemed to be following the same pattern. The bureaucracy was established and a few enterprising merchants and agents set up their businesses in the area close to the port and the administrative centre. But permanent European settlers did not arrive to develop the hinterland. The struggling pastoral industry

employed members of the Indigenous population, Chinese miners dominated activity in the mining centres, and agricultural experiments failed to flourish. Transport costs and other difficulties ruled out large intercolonial and overseas markets, and a miniscule local market meant that those commodities produced in the ‘Top End’ had nowhere to go. Apart from the large influx of temporary residents who arrived to work on such projects as the railway construction in the 1880s and the Darwin meat works for a few years from 1914, the population remained fairly static until the Second World War, numbering between three and five thousand white people.

The social histories of these urban centres also show many differences between Darwin and the southern capitals. In the south the gender imbalance gradually disappeared, and the Europeans quickly overpowered and outnumbered the Indigenous inhabitants of the region who were often relegated to the outskirts of the towns or left to roam the bush following their traditional lifestyle. There were also a significant number of Chinese throughout Australia, many of whom migrated here to search for gold. Occasionally, concern was expressed about their increasing numbers, and their willingness to work for long hours and meagre pay roused the resentment of Anglo-Australian workers, but they remained a minority and they usually maintained a much lower profile in the south than they did in Darwin. In general therefore, the culturally, politically and socially homogenous nineteenth century cities in the south mirrored conditions in England, where social divisions were primarily based on class rather than race, religion or ethnicity.

In Darwin on the other hand, the European population remained a minority for many years. While traditional British political and social institutions were the ones reported in official papers and the local press, the Chinese community was a significant element in the town, dominating the commercial sector and providing an indispensible pool of skilled labour. Not only that, but there was a number of other ethnic groups in Darwin. People belonging to these groups had little or no contact with the European population outside working hours, and conducted their lives along culturally different lines. The Indigenous population, too, was much more evident in Darwin. In spite of repeated attempts to move them on, Aboriginal camps continued to be set up in vacant areas in the town, even after the Kahlin Compound was established in 1913. The Indigenous people were relied upon for domestic labour and

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37 The area from Katherine to the north coast of the Northern Territory is commonly called the ‘Top End’.
other unskilled or semi-skilled work in the town. The conflicting desires amongst Europeans
to avail themselves of Aboriginal labour, and at the same time banish the Indigenous people
from the town’s environs was a continuing theme in government archives relating to Darwin.

The marked difference between Darwin and its southern counterparts was too great, and a
paper written by Nordin Hussin describing the colonial port cities of Malacca and Penang\(^\text{38}\) made me realise that, at least until the Second World War, Darwin was more truly a ‘colonial
city’ than a ‘replica town’ or ‘commercial city’.

One of the most strikingly similar features of these towns in Africa, India and Asia is their
multicultural nature. Horvath, an American geographer, provided a satisfactory summary of
the ethnic mix prevailing in all colonial cities.\(^\text{39}\) According to Horvath, the population of a
colonial city could be divided into three sections. The first comprised ‘the elite’ who were
the permanent settlers and transient administrators from the colonial power. They differed
culturally and racially from the majority of the population. The second group was composed
of the Indigenous people who may originally have lived elsewhere in the country but were
attracted to the colonial cities by the employment possibilities and the benefits of
technological advances found there. Horvath called the third section the ‘intervening group’.
This group arose in two ways. The first members migrated to the colonial city from other
countries in the hope of obtaining jobs and/or of setting up commercial enterprises. They
comprised many ethnic backgrounds, but almost invariably the Chinese were a significant
component. The fact that the colonial cities usually suffered from a shortage of women led to
the second element of the ‘intervening group’, which was made up of the offspring of inter-
racial liaisons.

The social hierarchy in most colonial cities, including Darwin, placed the members of the
colonial power at the top of the ladder, followed by the Chinese and members of other ethnic
groups engaged in trade and commerce. The tradesmen and workers of various nationalities
were the next on the list, followed by the people of mixed-race, with the Indigenous people
placed firmly at the bottom.

\(^{38}\) Nordin Hussin, “A Tale of Two Colonial Port-Towns in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English
\(^{39}\) Ronald J. Horvath, “In Search of a Theory of Urbanization: Notes on the Colonial City,” The East Lakes
In common with other colonial cities, Darwin also showed marked differences from the morphology of the southern capital cities in Australia. In the south the cities were usually laid out in a rectangular grid with the administrative and commercial areas placed centrally and the industrial zones further out. At first, the residences were within walking distance of the place of work, but as public transport developed, the residential areas extended along the railway and tramlines. Once the automobile was in common use, the residential zones spread out, no longer tied to the need for access to public transport.

In colonial cities however, the heterogeneous population had a significant impact on their morphology. Homes for the ‘elite’ tended to cluster around the administrative and commercial centre of the town, although some of the wealthier inhabitants had large estates in the nearby hinterland. In some cases, this centre also included a fort and a parade ground, troopers’ quarters and officers’ bungalows. The remaining population lived in areas designated for them and based on their ethnicity. The Indigenous population was usually placed furthest from the town centre, while the Chinese sector was usually closest to the elite.

Darwin, too, had its ethnic enclaves although they were different in detail. For one thing, the colonial power’s residential area was split into three distinct sectors: the town centre, the railway station and workshops area, and Myilly Point. Most of the Chinese lived and worked in Cavenagh Street close to the town centre, and many people regarded this as the most important commercial area. In earlier years other ethnic groups clustered closely around Chinatown, but when the government demolished many of their buildings in 1913-14 the ‘Police Paddock’ in what is now Stuart Park, became a multi-ethnic settlement for the ‘intervening group’. At first, the Indigenous inhabitants were, as far as possible, exiled to the outskirts of town, but later most of them were herded firstly into Kahlin Compound and, later still, the Bagot Reserve, although some Aboriginal camps remained inside the town’s boundaries.

It is also instructive to examine the ways in which Darwin did not conform to the colonial city paradigm. The first anomaly becomes apparent when one considers the reasons for the establishment of a colonial city. Most of the Asian, African and Indian centres were set up because a colonising nation or authority wished exploit the known resources in the area. South Australia, on the other hand established an urban settlement at Darwin because it believed that exploitable resources must be present in such a vast area. In this respect,
Darwin conformed to the southern commercial cities where the settlers had little or no knowledge of the hinterland.

When the Commonwealth took over the Territory, the government’s motives were entirely different. While it hoped that the Territory’s resources could be exploited profitably, its main concern was to ensure that white settlers inhabited the region both for the sake of national security and to silence perceived international criticism that Australia had no right to own a vast area of the continent which was not being utilised.

Another significant difference between Darwin and other colonial cities was the size of its population. Because of their large settled Indigenous populations, colonial cities in Africa, India and Asia quickly became bustling market, trading and export centres for the region, attracting a large number of Indigenous people and migrants from other countries. In the Northern Territory there was only a relatively small number of nomadic Indigenous inhabitants, and Darwin remained a struggling little outback town until after the Second World War.

Most colonial cities were established in the era before rapid communications and transport were available. In most cases therefore, the senior administrative officer in charge of the colonial city was given a large sum of money which he could spend in the ways he considered best benefitted the needs of the city and surrounding region. The officer was expected to expend the money in a responsible and intelligent way, especially as he was aware he would be held accountable on his return to his home country. In Darwin however, the government kept a tight rein on the ways in which the available finance was expended. A single line budget entry in the Estimates was never introduced in spite of the many recommendations that this strategy be adopted. The decisions on how to spend the money were therefore made primarily by people who lived in the south and had no experience of any special difficulties which pertained in the Territory. The system caused serious problems when it came to the construction of buildings and infrastructure in the Top End, because the money allocated at the beginning of the financial year in July did not become available until the beginning of the Wet season. Most public works had to wait until the weather cleared and construction was therefore limited to about four months in each year. In most cases the money could not be fully expended during that time and the unused portion had to be returned to consolidated revenue. Southern bureaucrats tended to assume that the money was
returned because it was not needed, thus making it more difficult for the NT Administration
to obtain adequate funds for the following year.

Scholars now seem reasonably satisfied with the paradigm of five major types of urban
community: the ‘ancient’ or ‘folk’ village, the preindustrial town in Europe, the industrial
city of Europe, the ‘commercial city’ of the ‘New Worlds’, and the ‘colonial city’ of Asia,
Africa and India. In spite of the differences detailed above, Darwin’s physical landscape,
population characteristics, and social dynamics until the 1950s at least had more in common
with the colonial cities to the north than it had with the commercial cities of southern
Australia.

My Thesis

After my work on the history of Darwin from 1869 to 1911 was published, I decided to
continue the narrative through the years when the Commonwealth administered the Territory,
that is, from 1911 to 1978 when a reasonably comprehensive form of self-government was
introduced. After being accepted as a PhD candidate, my supervisor, Professor Carment,
suggested that I concentrate on studying the role of the Commonwealth administration and its
influence on Darwin’s development. My thesis therefore seeks to trace the changes which
occurred in Darwin’s physical, social, economic, and political life during the years of
Commonwealth administration and attempts to assess how much or how little influence the
politicians and the bureaucrats in both Canberra and in Darwin had on those changes. As a
guide for my research I followed some advice I found in the *Cambridge Urban History of
Britain*. I ‘sought to pursue a wide-ranging agenda, aiming, so far as possible, to comprehend
communities in the round, to see the interrelation of the different parts, even if such
ambitions cannot always be fully achieved’. Within that framework, I pay particular and
critical attention to the role of the Commonwealth administration.

There are three aspects of Commonwealth administration of the Territory which must be
considered, and I have endeavoured to bear these in mind in each of the chapters which cover
the decades studied in this research. I have arranged them in the following categories:

1. Regional development. The first aspect covers government policies and financial investment in the economic development of the Top End. No city exists in isolation from its region. As a general rule, the economic development of an urban centre depends on the economic development of the region in which that centre is situated. There are two possible exceptions to that rule: The first is the case of military outposts which are established, financed and peopled by a distant authority. The second exception may be made for administrative/government centres such as Canberra.

Darwin was initially established as an administrative centre, but the South Australian authorities were confident that, as the prosperity of the region grew, the town would follow the path of most other Australian towns and cities and become self-supporting within a decade or two. Unfortunately, the people who bought land in the Territory had no interest in actually settling in the region and the government’s parsimony in providing the necessary infrastructure to encourage economic enterprises meant that this expected prosperity did not eventuate. Whether assistance from the national government, a colonial/state authority or a private company would have been sufficient to enable the Territory to achieve economic independence and stability in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a moot point. The quality of the land is generally poor and the great distances to markets allied with the extremely high cost of living all militated against economic success. Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate on whether a north-south continental railway, for example, would have stimulated the economy to such an extent that the region became a viable economic unit after it was settled by Whites in 1870.

By the end of the nineteenth century, South Australia was deemed to have failed to successfully settle the Northern Territory. In spite of the federal government’s avowed intention of doing a better job than South Australia, it repeated many of the same mistakes made by that colony/state. Mistakes were committed on many levels. Federal politicians of all persuasions never fully came to grips with the realities of their responsibilities regarding the Northern Territory. They accepted the need for federal control of the region; they wanted to show other countries that they were developing the area and were therefore entitled to lay claim to it; and they realised that the north of Australia had to be populated as part of the government’s defence strategy. They even acknowledged that successful settlement of the Territory would entail a great deal of money. However, they never developed a bipartisan, long-term policy which would have allowed the bureaucrats and Territory residents to plan...
ahead, and, at least until the 1950s, they were unwilling to arouse the wrath of the States by expending the necessary amount of money to encourage settlement and economic development.\textsuperscript{42}

2. Urban development. The second aspect of Commonwealth administration to consider is how the Commonwealth bureaucrats treated the local residents in Darwin and how the government contributed to the physical, economic and social development of the city. The lack of development in the hinterland meant that Darwin itself did not develop ‘naturally’. During the first four decades of Commonwealth administration, the authorities showed little interest in making Darwin a comfortable town which would attract people to settle there.\textsuperscript{43} The events of the Second World War graphically demonstrated that, in the interests of national security, it was essential to have a vigorous settled community in the Top End. Thus matters improved to a considerable extent after the war. The government’s new determination to develop the Territory combined with an economic upturn caused principally by the fishing, tourism and mining industries, gave Darwin a measure of economic prosperity, increased the city’s population and improved living conditions. The government also deserved commendation for its immediate and positive response to the disaster caused by Cyclone Tracy. Even with this interruption in the city’s development, by the time self-government was granted in 1978, the city’s facilities and infrastructure equalled the amenities available in southern cities of a similar size.

3. Social Dynamics. The last aspect of Commonwealth administration that I wished to explore in my research was the way in which the government in general and the local bureaucrats in particular interacted with the permanent residents. It must be recognised that many residents, especially among the Aboriginal, Asian and Coloured people, were indifferent about the nature of the administration of the Territory. The majority of white residents and the Chinese merchants and entrepreneurs however, eagerly anticipated the

\textsuperscript{42} Individual politicians were aware of this failing. MHR Sampson, for example, announced that the government must pursue a continuous policy for 10 to 20 years and must be ready to spend £10 million, £20 million, or even £40 million, and he pointed out that small Victoria incurred a public debt of nearly £60 million in its development. See Australia. Parliament, \textit{Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)}, 13 December 1916, vol. LXXX, p.9735. [The Debates are commonly cited as ‘Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates’ with ‘CPD’ as the abbreviation. Hereafter, my thesis will follow this convention].

\textsuperscript{43} When he became Administrator in 1937, Abbott noted that, after twenty-six years of its control, the Commonwealth had not erected one ‘really substantial building, though some houses, nearly all of the same type, had been built for a certain number of government officers’. See C.L.A. Abbott, \textit{Australia’s Frontier Province} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950), p.47.
transfer to Commonwealth control in 1911. They were quickly disappointed on many fronts after the new system was established.

One of the first matters of concern was the fact that, by the transfer to the Commonwealth, Territory residents had been disenfranchised. After a vigorous campaign by politically active residents in the previous century, the Territory was granted separate representation in the South Australian Parliament in 1887. The federal constitution, however, did not authorise the Commonwealth to grant the vote to people who did not reside in a State. Not only were the people of the Territory unable to elect a parliamentary representative to protect their interests, but they could not vote in any national referendum. This issue remained a focus for community resentment for many years.

Territory autonomy was compromised on the local scene too. The Palmerston District Council was established in 1874 to deal with municipal matters. It was admittedly a somewhat ineffectual body, mainly because of its chronic shortage of funds. Only a small proportion of the population of Darwin were property owners, and most of the absentee landlords tended to ignore demands that they pay rates. Nevertheless the existence of the Council demonstrated that the residents of Darwin had a degree of self-determination in the town. Most Commonwealth politicians and bureaucrats showed little if any desire to co-operate with the Council, and many community feuds began with conflict between the Council and the NT Administration.

The Commonwealth’s practical strategies to set up a workable administrative structure also caused conflict in the community. The administrative arrangements were flawed from the start. While the Administrator was officially the head of the NT Administration, a significant number of departmental branches which did not answer to his authority were established in Darwin. The heads of these branches answered directly to their senior officers stationed in southern capitals. The Administrator’s authority was compromised and time was continually wasted in negotiations between the NT Administration and other government departments, and these negotiations often degenerated into a power struggle. Despite repeated requests

44 De La Rue, Evolution of Darwin, pp.87-8.
from each Administrator in turn that he be given overriding control, the government was either unwilling or unable to agree.\textsuperscript{45}

Over the years of Commonwealth administration, Ministers controlling the Territory frequently assured the general public and the public service that the decisions were to be made in Darwin and subject to ministerial oversight. This never actually happened. In reality, many day to day decisions were made by bureaucrats in Melbourne and Canberra who had very little practical knowledge of conditions in the Territory. Local bureaucrats and citizens were subjected to daily frustrations as the public service in Canberra delayed implementing requests, overturned decisions made in the Territory, and rewrote reports and requests to the Minister to suit their own particular plans. The only time when problems of this nature were reduced was when Paul Hasluck was Minister. His frequent visits and his habit of travelling through the country to see conditions for himself gave local people ready access to him and they took full advantage of it.

Many other administrative mistakes were made during the years of Commonwealth administration and these are described in the relevant chapters. Perhaps particular mention should be made here of the unfortunate attitude taken by politicians and bureaucrats towards the permanent residents of the Territory. People like Gilruth and Abbott made no secret of their scorn and dislike of the Darwin community and many of the public servants who worked in the Territory also expressed their contempt of the ‘locals’, especially in the earlier years. In the first years of Commonwealth rule, the NT Administration outraged local residents because it refused to advertise government staff positions in the Territory and only reluctantly employed local workers. There was always an element of tension between the bureaucracy and the residents and this ‘them’ and ‘us’ attitude occasionally broke out into open conflict.

Darwin had always been a contentious community. It is not surprising when one considers factors which affected it. This little enclave was confined, not by space but by the vast distances which separated it from any other town in Australia. It was perched on the edge of

\textsuperscript{45} See, for example, NAA: A2, 1917/1753, which contains a telegram from Administrator Gilruth to the Prime Minister, dated 4 January 1916, where he complained about his lack of authority over the Railways department. These issues were raised many times in Parliament. MHR Sampson, for example, claimed that it was impossible to properly govern the Territory while ‘control of its public affairs is divided among half-a-dozen Ministerial Departments in Melbourne’. See CPD, 13 December 1916, vol. LXXX, p.9735.
the Australian continent, its economic base was fragile and it frequently faced the danger of famine or worse when ships failed to arrive at the designated time. Until the late 1930s it had no protection against acts of foreign aggression, and the difficult climate and lack of infrastructure created difficulties which people in the south did not experience. The bureaucracies in South Australia and later the Commonwealth government which should have supported and protected the community often showed that they regarded the people and institutions in the north as an unwelcome distraction from the more important people and affairs in the south. The insecurities this engendered in the residents were enhanced by factors such as extreme weather events and the fact that the multicultural nature of the population fragmented the community and reduced the size of the social milieu which supported each individual in his or her daily life. Territory residents in general, and Darwin people in particular, developed a conviction that they were different from other Australians. The general perception that people in the Territory did not conform to ‘normal’ Australian standards was largely accepted by southerners and it was often regarded as a matter to be deplored. In effect, the people of the Territory were often regarded as ‘second-class citizens’ and the Commonwealth government tended to treat them that way. In response, Territory residents often displayed their ‘otherness’ with defiant pride, and a tradition of suspicion towards ‘outsiders’, and resentment against the distant seat of government grew up in the nineteenth century and tends to linger today, although in a much diluted form.

**Literature Review**

Many histories have been written about the other capital cities of Australia. The history of Darwin as a whole has been the subject of only three published works. *The Front Door* was written by Douglas Lockwood and first published in 1968. Lockwood adopted a thematic approach and each chapter deals with a different subject, such as the Chinese, the Larrakia people, the pearling industry, and so on. While the book is entertaining and interesting to read, it gives a fragmentary view of the history of the city, and the reader is left without a comprehensive picture of its development over the years since the first Europeans settled there in 1869-70. Unfortunately, as a history it also fails in that Lockwood, (who was a

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46 In my opinion, the most notable of these include Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, 2nd ed. (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Jenny Gregory, *City of Light: A History of Perth Since the 1950s* (Perth: City of Perth, 2003); Grace Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney* (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1997); and J.G. Steele, *Brisbane Town in Convict Days, 1824-1842* (St Lucia Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1975). In a survey covering Europe, the UK, Canada, the US, and Australia, Davison’s book was listed as one of the ‘key books for learning about national/regional urban histories’. See Carl Abbott, “Reading Urban History,” p.37.

journalist, not an historian), does not provide endnotes or a bibliography, and tends to rely on unsubstantiated rumours and myths perpetuated by Darwin’s inhabitants.

The second is my book, *The Evolution of Darwin, 1869-1911*, which was published in 2004. The years covered in this book comprise the period during which South Australia administered the Northern Territory. I adopted a chronological approach for this work, and divided the book into chapters covering each of the Government Resident’s term of office. I tried to give the reader a clear understanding of the physical and social development of Darwin during the South Australian years, and to offer some ideas on what factors influenced that development.

David Carment’s *Australia’s Northern Capital: A Short History of Darwin* is the most recent of the three general histories of Darwin. Published in 2005 by the Historical Society of the Northern Territory, the book was designed to supply a need expressed by tourists and other visitors who wanted a very brief outline history of the city. Photographs occupy twenty-one of its thirty-seven pages, and the accompanying text, supplemented by a map and a bibliography for further reading, provides a satisfactory coverage of the main points of Darwin’s history since European settlement.

My research for this project has involved a comprehensive search of archival material in the National Archives of Australia (NAA), the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) and the Northern Territory Library (NTL) and elsewhere. I have however been assisted by what could be termed ‘an embarrassment of riches’. There are literally dozens of books, book chapters, journal articles, theses and other papers on specific aspects of the history of Darwin and its suburbs. They are far too numerous to be discussed in detail here, although they are all listed in the bibliography. It is, however, worth mentioning a few in order to provide an idea of the range of secondary material available to the researcher.

It is only natural that the two great dramas which Darwin experienced in the twentieth century have attracted the most attention from writers and historians. My list of books and papers dealing with the bombing of Darwin and other aspects of the war in the Top End covers almost three pages, even though each entry takes up only two lines at the most. Some

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48 David Carment, *Australia’s Northern Capital: A Short History of Darwin* (Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory [hereafter HSNT], 2005). David Carment has written many other books covering specific aspects of Darwin’s history and heritage. See the bibliography below.
of these works are simple memoirs; others are unit histories, such as Sid Grantham’s book on the 13 Squadron\textsuperscript{49} and Walter Venn’s book on the 4 RSU-482 Maintenance Squadron.\textsuperscript{50} Robert Raynor’s weighty tomes\textsuperscript{51} give a technical, detailed, almost step-by-step account of military activities in the Top End during the war years, but, to my mind, the most comprehensible general history of the war in the Northern Territory is provided by Alan Powell’s book, \textit{The Shadow’s Edge},\textsuperscript{52} first published in 1988.

A number of books and papers have also been produced on Cyclone Tracy which devastated Darwin on Christmas Day, 1974. Major-General Alan Stretton, who, as Director-General of the Natural Disasters Organisation, was given control of Darwin immediately following the cyclone, published his account\textsuperscript{53} of the events of the six days in which he was in complete command of the city and its inhabitants and responsible for helping them set to work on its reconstruction. His book was followed by Keith Cole’s \textit{Winds of Fury},\textsuperscript{54} by Bill Bunbury’s book consisting mainly of reminiscences of those who lived through the cyclone,\textsuperscript{55} and by various journal articles and book chapters.

There are also numerous writings on Darwin in less turbulent times. A few useful books and papers on various suburbs and other places in Darwin have been produced over the last three decades. Leith Barter led the trend with his history of Nightcliff and Rapid Creek\textsuperscript{56} which was published in 1994. This was followed by Thomas Mitchell’s paper on Bullocky Point,\textsuperscript{57} and by Rosalind Henry’s paper on the history of Ludmilla.\textsuperscript{58} In 1999 Donal Raethel

\begin{footnotes}
\item[50] Walter Venn, \textit{Restore to Service: Unit History of No 4 Repair and Salvage Unit (1942-1944) and No 4 Repair and Servicing Unit (1945-1946)} (Loftus, NSW: Australian Military History Publications, 1999).
\item[54] Cole, \textit{Winds of Fury}.
\item[55] Bill Bunbury, \textit{Cyclone Tracy: Picking Up the Pieces; Talking History with Bill Bunbury} (South Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994).
\item[56] Leith Barter, \textit{From Wartime Camp to Garden Suburb: A Short History of Nightcliff and Rapid Creek} (Darwin: HSNT, 1994).
\end{footnotes}
produced two well researched reports: a landscape history of Stuart Park59 and a heritage survey prepared for the Northern Territory government on the Berrimah/Winnellie area.60

A significant amount of work has been done on the history of specific buildings in Darwin. Both Barbara James and Paul Rosenzweig published books about ‘The Residence’61 while Mickey Dewar’s social history of the Fannie Bay Gaol62 is supplemented by Troppo Architects’ report on its structural history.63 Troppo Architects also wrote a useful report on the ‘Sydney Williams Hut’64 which was used extensively by the military in the Top End during the Second World War and later by civilians faced with a serious housing shortage when they returned to Darwin after the war. More general works on Darwin’s heritage are also available. Welke and Wilson’s unpublished report65 on their survey of historical buildings in Darwin, which they prepared for the National Trust (Northern Territory), is an invaluable resource, and Carment’s publication Looking at Darwin’s Past66 provides a readily accessible and very informative and comprehensive overview of Darwin’s ‘built history’.

David Bridgman deals with the architecture of buildings in the tropical north in his book67 and his PhD thesis,68 while Sue Keys and Jan Whitehead dealt with the problems of providing

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60 Donal Raethel, “Berrimah/Winnellie Heritage Survey: Report Prepared for the Heritage Conservation Branch Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment with Assistance and Supervision by the National Trust of Australia (NT) and funding by the Northern Territory Heritage Grants Program” (Casuarina, NT: D. Raethel, 1999).
61 Barbara James, The Residence and its Residents 1870-2003: Government House Darwin, Northern Territory (Darwin: Office of the Administrator, 2004); and Paul Rosenzweig, The House of Seven Gables: A History of Government House, Darwin (Darwin: HSNT, 1996). The official home of the Government Resident, the building was also called ‘The Residency’ during the South Australian years. When the Commonwealth took control of the Territory, its name became ‘Government House’ and it was, (and still is), the official residence of the Administrator.
64 Troppo Architects, “The ‘Sydney Williams Hut’: An Information Base on Sydney Williams & Co & the Comet Building” (Darwin: Troppo Architects, 1992) (photocopy).
65 A. Welke and H.J. Wilson, “Darwin Central Area Heritage Study: Report to the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory through the National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory), Darwin, 1993” (NTL photocopy).
housing for Darwin’s citizens in their writing.\(^{69}\) The town planning aspects of the physical landscape of Darwin and its suburbs are extensively covered in Eve Gibson’s book,\(^{70}\) her various journal and conference papers, and her thesis.\(^{71}\) A final aspect of the built environment that needs mention is the work carried out by Bev Phelts on the town’s electricity\(^{72}\) and the Northern Territory’s water supply.\(^{73}\)

I am greatly indebted to both Alistair Heatley and Dean Jaensch whose publications provide such a wealth of information on Northern Territory politics. While much of the material deals with the period following self-government, these writers also dealt with the political scene as it evolved over the decades preceding self-government. Also, as far as the story of local government in Darwin is concerned, Alistair Heatley’s book on this subject\(^{74}\) is invaluable. According to Heatley, although it was commissioned by the Darwin City Council in 1983 to commemorate the first twenty-five years of the Council’s post-war history, there were ‘no restrictions whatsoever’ placed on his freedom to ‘write the history as he saw fit’.\(^{75}\)

As yet, no comprehensive work on the history of the Commonwealth administration of the Northern Territory has been written. Valerie Fletcher covered the events leading up to the transfer of the Territory to Commonwealth control in her thesis and her book,\(^{76}\) while John Mettam’s thesis deals with the history of the Commonwealth administration during the years from 1911 to 1926.\(^{77}\) Jill Baillie dealt with specific aspects of the administration in her paper


\(^{75}\) Ibid, p.v.


on the North Australia Commission,\textsuperscript{78} as did Geoffrey Helyar in his book on the Lands and Survey Department.\textsuperscript{79}

Various aspects of the question of industrial relations and the growth of trade unionism in the Northern Territory have been researched. Bernie Brian’s thesis examines ‘the origins and evolution of the largest and longest surviving trade union, the North Australian Workers’ Union (NAWU)’ \textsuperscript{80} which was formed in 1927. Frank Alcorta wrote extensively about the early years of trade unions in the Territory and the turbulent events which led to the ‘Darwin Rebellion’,\textsuperscript{81} while Murray Norris’s book chapter deals with the rebuilding of the union after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{82}

When considering the subject of Darwin’s social history, J. Cross’s 1956 honours thesis, was perhaps the first serious attempt to come to grips with the topic. Cross contended that isolation and an unproductive hinterland which engendered loneliness and poverty, an unsuccessful struggle for greater democratic freedom, and the growth of a cosmopolitan community led to a marked provincialism in Darwin society.\textsuperscript{83} Keith Willey’s book \textit{Eaters of the Lotus} \textsuperscript{84} was the next work dealing with Darwin’s social history to appear. Barbara James’ report issued in 1989 for ‘People on the Move,’ a project sponsored by the National Trust (Northern Territory) for Australia’s bicentennial celebrations, heralded a small rush of publications dealing with Darwin’s social life and institutions. These included, for example, Charles Brister’s paper on the history of the Star Theatre in Darwin,\textsuperscript{85} and Eric Sager’s book on the social life of Darwin in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{86} Sager relied heavily on oral history interviews in

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\textsuperscript{79} Geoffrey Helyar, \textit{They Led the Way: A Short Account of the Lands and Survey Department of the Northern Territory 1869-1978} (Darwin: NT Dept. of Lands and Housing, 1990).
\textsuperscript{81} See for example, F.X. Alcorta, \textit{Darwin Rebellion, 1911-1919} ([Darwin]: NTU Planning Authority, History Unit, 1984).
\textsuperscript{84} Keith Willey, \textit{Eaters of the Lotus} (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964). Whether this can be called a ‘history’ is a moot point: it is more a snapshot of what Darwin was like during the years Willey worked as a journalist there from the late 1950s, and is full of vivid pen portraits of the more colourful inhabitants and their sometimes bizarre activities.
\textsuperscript{86} Eric W. Sager, \textit{Discovering Darwin: The 1930s in Memory and History} (Darwin: HSNT, 1993).
\end{flushleft}
this work and saw himself as ‘a collaborator ... leaving the voices of Territorians to weave most of this history’.\(^87\) The result provides a vivid picture of Darwin’s people and their way of life during that decade.

A few histories of specific institutions in Darwin help to round out the story of the social life of the town. Some of these institutions serve the whole of the Northern Territory, but, as their head offices are almost invariably in Darwin, a significant amount of information on the local inhabitants and their lives can be gleaned from these works. A history of the St John Ambulance in the Territory, written by Bill Wilson,\(^88\) for example, has been a useful addition to the Territory’s historiography, while Christine Doran’s book and journal article dealing with women and the history of the Country Women’s Association (CWA) in the Northern Territory\(^89\) provides some useful information. Barbara James contributed a great deal to our knowledge of women in the Northern Territory, most particularly in her book No Man’s Land.\(^90\) She also collaborated with Helen J. Wilson to produce a rather unusual history of significant sites in Darwin interspersed with various snippets of information about the women who lived there.\(^91\)

No comprehensive urban history could be complete without some reference to the churches in the town, although they seemed to have less influence on the early Darwin society than they did in other Australian towns. The history of the Wesleyan Church, the first church to be established in Darwin, is covered by Arch Grant’s book Palmerston to Darwin,\(^92\) while aspects of the Catholic Church’s history has been revealed in autobiographies by Bishop F.X. Gsell\(^93\) and Father Frank Flynn.\(^94\)

\(^{87}\) Ibid, p.3.
\(^{88}\) Bill Wilson, ‘To Be Faithful, True and Brave’: A History of St John Ambulance in the Northern Territory from 1928 to 2002 (Casuarina, NT: St John Ambulance (NT), 2003).
\(^{90}\) Barbara James, No Man’s Land: Women of the Northern Territory (Sydney: Collins Australia, 1989).
\(^{91}\) Helen J. Wilson and Barbara James, in association with Mickey Dewar, ‘Fit for the Gentler Sex’: A Social and Site History of the Settlement of Port Darwin and its Environments; A Commemoration of the Contribution Women Have Made to the Territory. Prepared for the NT Women’s Advisory Council (Darwin: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory [hereafter MAGNT], [1997]).
\(^{92}\) Arch Grant, Palmerston to Darwin: 75 Years Service on the Frontier (Dee Why, NSW: Frontier Publishing, 1990).
\(^{93}\) F.X. Gsell, ‘The Bishop with 150 Wives’: Fifty Years as a Missionary (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956).
\(^{94}\) Frank Flynn and Keith Willey, Northern Gateway (Sydney: F.P. Leonard, [1963]).
The basic references for biographical information on people connected with Darwin’s history are, of course, the *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* and the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. I found these two publications invaluable in my research. Other biographies, such as the works on Jessie Litchfield and V B Perkins, provide interesting insights into various aspects of Darwin’s history. Former public servants Gayle Carroll and Ted Egan have produced somewhat fragmentary but entertaining and informative reminiscences of their time working for the NT Administration, while Peter Elder’s thesis introduces a more serious note with his biography of C.L.A. Abbott, who was Administrator in the Territory during the war years.

I am very grateful that my list of biographical works includes a few books written about non-European citizens of the Territory. Former Darwin Mayor Alec Fong Lim presented a lecture at the State Reference Library in Darwin that was later published. It is one of the very few autobiographical works written by a local Chinese person, but Diana Giese has spent many years conducting oral history interviews with Chinese residents of Darwin and elsewhere and her books and papers are an important source of information on this section of the Darwin community. There is also a respectable number of other works dealing with the Chinese in the Top End of the Territory, including Timothy Jones’ comprehensive book and a Master’s thesis by Christine Inglis entitled “The Darwin Chinese: A Study of Assimilation”. This thesis was written as part of the requirements for a degree in Sociology and is based on ‘structured interviews’ conducted during a two-month stay in Darwin in May-June 1966. Of particular importance is the book written by Glenice Yee, a

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95 Various volumes of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, [hereafter ADB] have been published over the years since 1959. It is now available online at [http://adb.anu.edu.au](http://adb.anu.edu.au). The first volume of the *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* [hereafter NTDB] was first published in 1990 and a further two volumes were issued later. An amalgamated version is now available. See David Carment, Christine Edward, Barbara James, Robyn Maynard, Alan Powell and Helen J. Wilson, eds. *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, rev. ed., [compact disc] (Darwin: CDU Press, 2008). All versions of these titles have been used in this thesis.

96 Janet Dickinson, *Jessie Litchfield: Grand Old Lady of the Territory* (Blackwater, Qld: J. Dickinson, 1982).


Darwin born Chinese historian, who explored the Chinese-Aboriginal connection which other historians often ignored.  

Other non-British residents of Darwin have not been studied to this degree. There have been a few works written on the Japanese residents of the Top End, one of the most notable being Mella Parshen-Kempfer’s thesis, while Julia Martinez has written a journal article on the ‘Malay’ community of Darwin. For those residents who came from other European countries, Peter and Sheila Forrest’s book on the Italians, and Michael Christie’s paper on the Greeks supply some information on a neglected aspect of Darwin’s history.

As a contrast to that meagre store, there is a large body of work on Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. In addition to some important works on Aborigines in the Territory as a whole, including theses by both E G Docker and Colin Tatz on Aboriginal administration in the Northern Territory, there are a considerable number of works dealing specifically with Aborigines in Darwin. These include a paper by Sue Stanton, and books by Barbara Cummings, Bill Day, and Basil Sansom, to mention but a few. There are also a few autobiographical works on people of Aboriginal descent, including reminiscences written by Maisie Austin, Sheila Clarke, Joe McGinness, and Hilda Muir.

107 Peter Forrest and Sheila Forrest, in collaboration with Anna-Maria Sacilotto, In the Hope to do Better: An Introduction to the History of the Italian People in the Northern Territory (Darwin: Italian Club Darwin, 2003).
115 Maisie Austin, The Quality of Life: A Reflection of Life in Darwin During the Post-War Years (Darwin: M. Austin, 1992); Sheila Clarke, Looking Back ([Darwin?: S. Clarke], 1991); Joe McGinness, Son of Alyandabu: My Fight for Aboriginal Rights (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1991); and Hilda Jarman Muir, Very Big Journey: My Life as I Remember It (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004).
Relationships between the various ethnicities in Darwin are the subject of theses by both Julia Martinez,¹¹⁶ and Christine Karlsen¹¹⁷ while Regina Ganter and her co-authors widened the context to include the whole of North Australia in their book on Asian-Aboriginal contacts.¹¹⁸ This book contains a wealth of oral history linked by an historical narrative. Julia Martinez contributed one chapter and Greg Lee provided a six-page history of his family. Despite its occasional historical inaccuracies, the book offers a very informative glimpse of the relations between the various races. Claire Lowrie focussed her attention on interracial domestic relationships in her analysis of ‘male and female domestic servants from a variety of ethnic groups – including Chinese, Malay and Australian Aboriginals – working in Chinese and European homes’¹¹⁹ in Darwin and Singapore.

It is obvious that one cannot write a history of the city of Darwin without reference to the wider pictures of the Northern Territory and of Australia and of the world. I am particularly indebted to both Alan Powell¹²⁰ and P. F. Donovan¹²¹ for their books on the history of the Northern Territory as a whole. Other books and papers that expound on specific aspects of this region and its history, such as Ellen Kettle’s two-volume work on the Territory’s health services¹²² have also been of great use to me. Various books on Australian history in general and on national politics and government, and the country’s administrative history, and other subjects, have been consulted when the need arose.

Dealing with Racial Bias

With such a wealth of primary and secondary sources to draw on, I should have had no problem in tracing Darwin’s history and the role the Commonwealth played in its development. There is however, a serious danger of writing a European history of Darwin, and neglecting to include the story of the people of other races in what is generally

¹¹⁸ Regina Ganter, Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia (Crawley, WA: University of WA Press, 2006).
¹²¹ P.F. Donovan, At the Other End of Australia (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1984).
acknowledged as one of the most multicultural cities in Australia. I faced the same problem with *The Evolution of Darwin*, but there was little I could do about it there. Apart from the Chinese ‘problem’ which very occasionally appeared in archival material and newspapers, and the court records dealing with Aboriginal, Chinese and other Asian miscreants, there was almost nothing written about the non-European population. With this present work, I am more fortunate in that there are many oral histories of people of most races held in the Northern Territory Archives Service and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the amount of primary and secondary material dealing with the European section of the Darwin community is far in excess of what is available on the rest of the population and it has been difficult not to treat the Asian and Aboriginal people as an afterthought in the narrative.

One of the questions raised in debates on the nature of history is the way in which historians deal with moral judgements on historical attitudes and events. I believe that the only way historians can write about the past is in terms of the present. At the same time they have ‘an overriding obligation to understand the past, as far as possible, in its own terms’.123 We are ‘not entitled to measure people in the past by standards worked out in the present’.124 Most modern Australians unequivocally condemn the racist behaviour and attitudes exhibited by white settlers and bureaucrats towards the Aboriginal and other non-Caucasian inhabitants of the Northern Territory. The practice of removing part-Aboriginal children from their families is regarded with particular abhorrence, but, as McCullagh points out, ‘to portray them [the bureaucrats] as heartless violators of Aboriginal families ... and say nothing about the way they interpreted their own actions, would be to demonize them unjustly’.125 When speaking about his staff who carried out many child removals, Minister Paul Hasluck also warned that while the historian should ‘examine critically their plans and their practices ... he should be careful about assuming that they did not care about Aborigines and had not thought about what they were doing’.126

I therefore try to avoid voicing any moral outrage at instances of racism in the following history. This does, however, create a problem over racist language. Terms such as ‘blackfellow’, ‘yella-fella’, ‘octoroon’ and ‘quarter-caste’ which were in common use in

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124 Elton, *Return to Essentials*, p.68.
social conversations and in official reports, are both pejorative and hurtful. To maintain historical accuracy, and to remind readers that such racist language was considered normal at the time, these terms are retained in contemporary quotations used in this thesis. When choosing my own terminology, I consulted a thesis written by Sue Stanton,\textsuperscript{127} who is herself a member of a prominent Coloured family in Darwin. Although she expressed reservations about the terms ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Black’, and ‘White’, Stanton used them in her thesis, along with ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indigenous’. I therefore consider these terms acceptable and use them with initial capitals throughout the thesis. When I use terms which are considered derogatory, I enclose them in quotation marks.

\textbf{The Structure of the Thesis}

As with my book on the South Australian period of Darwin’s history, I adopted a chronological approach for my thesis. I strongly believe that if one is tracing the changes which have occurred over time to a place and the people who live there, one must deal with it chronologically. Indeed, Davison lists as one of the abuses of history ‘the failure to observe chronological sequence’.\textsuperscript{128} The length of the period covered by each chapter is dictated by the events which are covered in that time frame. Thus Chapter Three covers only the first year of the Commonwealth’s administration while Chapter Nine deals with the eighteen years leading up to the transfer of government to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. Occasionally, I do not deal with a topic within its correct period but carry it over to the following chapter. I use this tactic to avoid fragmenting the narrative too excessively when there is little to say about the topic in that particular period.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two provides a background on the history leading up to the transfer of control from South Australia to the Commonwealth government. The first half of the chapter is a history of the Northern Territory as a whole covering its exploration and annexation, Goyder’s survey expedition, the construction of the Overland Telegraph line, and the economic development of the region. The second half of the chapter deals with details of Darwin’s development under the South Australian administration.


\textsuperscript{128} Davison, \textit{The Use and Abuse of History}, p.242.
Chapter Three deals with the first year of Commonwealth control when the residents of Darwin realised that the transfer to a new administration was not going to provide a magic solution to the problems facing the town and the region. It describes the transfer negotiations, the new administrative arrangements, and the problems which soon began to appear as the new bureaucracy took over. The fact that Territorians lost any political representation when the Commonwealth took over became a contentious issue.\textsuperscript{129}

Chapter Four covers the years during which the first Administrator, John Anderson Gilruth, was in charge of the local administration. These were crucial years in Darwin’s history because Gilruth’s antagonism to most of the residents and his bitter struggle with the unions, which grew in power during the period, left a legacy which changed the social and political dynamics of the community.

The years between 1919 and 1931, which are dealt with in Chapter Five, was a period of economic stagnation in the Northern Territory. The great hopes which were raised with the erection of Vesteys meat works were dashed when it closed after only three seasons, leaving hundreds of men out of work. Much of the unions’ power collapsed as industrial development and the construction industry dwindled. One of the most notable events during this period was the Commonwealth government’s unsuccessful attempt to improve matters by splitting the Northern Territory into two separate regions. Two issues arose which relieved the gloom to some extent. Firstly, the Territory at last gained representation in the federal parliament, although the new Member of the House of Representatives was not given the right to vote on any issue. Secondly, the development of aviation brought Darwin to the notice of the world as it became the first landing place in Australia for flights from Britain and the European continent.

The continued depression which affected the developed world, followed by the military build-up in Darwin during the 1930s is the subject of Chapter Six. Further developments in aviation saw the establishment of regular passenger services to Britain and also on domestic air routes. The unions once again became a powerful influence in the town, and the Indigenous residents began to voice their discontent with the Administration. The growing power of the defence forces and the resumption of land for military purposes began to cause

\textsuperscript{129} The Palmerston District Council remained in operation but had little real power as it was chronically short of funds and depended on the government’s assistance to provide basic municipal services to the community.
problems with the town plan and its infrastructure. Proposals to redesign the town and to implement ideas such as the assimilation policy had to be deferred as the threat of war loomed ever larger.

Chapter Seven opens with an account of the evacuation of women and children which was initiated in December 1941. The first two air raids on 19 February 1942 are dealt with in detail. The chapter then deals with the report issued by the Royal Commission headed by Mr Justice Lowe which was appointed to inquire into the disastrous events of 19 February. The last section of this chapter describes the activities in Darwin and the Top End for the duration of the war.

At the end of the war the civilians returned to find Darwin in a parlous state. Chapter Eight covers the period of reconstruction following the war. It gives details of the problems faced by both the residents and the authorities. The government’s compulsory acquisition of all land in the greater Darwin area solved some long standing problems caused mainly by the absentee owners but many difficulties remained. These included problems with the shortage of accommodation, the dearth of construction materials and the labour to build offices and homes, town planning problems, and transport difficulties. The Labor government’s commitment to a new town plan complicated the problems, but, when the non-Labor coalition was elected in 1949, cherished policies were disregarded and practical solutions were found to many issues. The hardships were gradually overcome, and by the end of the 1950s the future for Darwin looked more positive than it had been for more than half a century. The growing demand by Territorians to have some effective say in the way in which the region was administered was a feature of the latter part of this period.

Increased prosperity and improvements to the physical and social fabric of Darwin continued into the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter Nine details how the government’s continued commitment to developing the Territory assisted Darwin in many ways. As the town’s infrastructure was successfully upgraded, the residents had time to look at issues not directly related to their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, education and health. Residents participated enthusiastically in the social life of the town, and the political lobbying for constitutional change gathered momentum. The dynamic growth of the city was suddenly cut short by the arrival of Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Day 1974. The chapter then deals with the reconstruction of Darwin following the cyclone, and continues with the political
developments which finally led to the formal transfer of power to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on 1 July 1978.

The thesis ends with Chapter Ten, where I provide a summary of significant events in Darwin’s history, and an assessment of the Commonwealth government’s contribution to the city’s development.

Many urban historians claim that their ultimate aim is to write one or more comparative urban histories. These works would certainly elicit much valuable information for social scientists, but before any in-depth comparative urban histories can be written, it is necessary to amass a wide collection of well-researched, authoritative histories of individual cities. I hope that this thesis will add to the historical works on the city of Darwin and will contribute to the body of knowledge on Australian capital cities.
Chapter Two

The South Australian Years, 1863-1911

The Northern Territory had suffered more than twenty years of stagnation when the Commonwealth took control in 1911. In spite of the federal politicians’ avowed intention to do a better job of developing the region, many of the Commonwealth’s mistakes were exactly the same as those committed by the South Australian government during its administration of the Northern Territory from 1863 to 1911. This chapter provides the background to the events leading up to the transfer of the Territory to the Commonwealth. The first part gives an outline of the history of European settlement of the Territory and the second part traces the growth of Darwin as the main commercial and administrative centre of the region.¹

Exploration and Annexation of the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory was the last region of Australia to be permanently occupied by white settlers, although a few short-lived British outposts were established on the northern coast during the 1820s and 1830s. In the south, the 1850s was the decade in which ‘the first railways were constructed, the first telegraphs began operating, [and] the first steamships plied between Europe and Australia’.² This was also the decade in which the eastern colonies achieved self-government, yet they remained comparatively small enclaves in a vast land mass which was still unknown.

Many explorers played their part in opening up the interior of the continent. The most important, as far as the Northern Territory is concerned, was the South Australian explorer John McDouall Stuart. After two failed attempts at crossing the continent, Stuart left Adelaide in October 1861 to try once again to reach the north coast. He and his party travelled in a more or less straight line through the centre of Australia, and on 24 July 1862 they reached the sea at Chambers Bay, east of the mouth of the Adelaide River on the north coast of what was then an isolated region of New South Wales.

¹ This chapter uses material from my book, The Evolution of Darwin 1869-1911.
Stuart’s estimate of the Top End’s potential was extravagantly optimistic. He predicted that ‘if this country is settled, it will be one of the finest Colonies under the Crown, suitable for the growth of any and everything’. He rhapsodised over the quality of the country, deemed the climate ‘suitable’ and suggested that the quartz deposits might indicate that there was gold in the region. Stuart’s report was the spur that the South Australian authorities needed, and the colony’s Governor Daly set about lobbying Great Britain in a bid to gain control of the region.

In 1862 the reluctant British government gave in to the pressure, thus acquiescing in ‘the biggest land grab in Australian history’. The SA government then set about defining the terms by which would-be settlers could occupy the new region, now called the ‘Northern Territory of South Australia’. The Northern Territory Act, passed in 1863, provided for the sale of so-called land orders for agricultural blocks of 160 acres each. For each land order the owners was entitled to a half-acre town lot. The money raised from the sale of land orders was to pay for the survey of the country, and the Act stipulated that the land order holders must select their land within five years of purchase. Simultaneous sales of land orders were held in Adelaide and London on 1 March 1864. All available land orders were taken up. The authorities decided that the capital of the new province should be called ‘Palmerston’ and suggested that it should be sited at Escape Cliffs at the mouth of the Adelaide River.

Lieutenant-Colonel Boyle Travers Finniss was appointed Government Resident of the new Territory, and he and his party of administration staff and surveyors arrived at Escape Cliffs in June 1864. Unfortunately, Finniss was not a good manager of men, and ‘grievous

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5 Ibid, p.390.
7 Conversion to metric measurements makes this explanation very cumbersome. The approximate metric equivalents are: a half-acre = 0.2025 hectares; one acre = 0.405 hectares; 160 acres = 64.8 hectares; a quarter-million acres = 101,250 hectares.
8 The early Darwin residents referred to their town indiscriminately as ‘Darwin’, ‘Port Darwin’ and ‘Palmerston’. In order to avoid confusion with the modern city of Palmerston, unless quoting from another source, I refer to the Territory’s capital city as ‘Darwin’ throughout this thesis.
9 ‘Government Resident’ was the title given to the senior public servant in the Territory administration.
dissensions'\(^{10}\) arose in the party. Members of his staff were appalled at the thought of situating the Territory’s capital on what was essentially a flood plain. Some of the land order holders entered the dispute and after thirty months of fruitless work and bitter arguments, the government recalled the whole expedition. Unfortunately the bureaucrats and politicians could not decide on an alternative site for the capital, so they appointed first one explorer (John McKinlay) then another (Francis Cadell) to explore the country with the specific aim of finding a place which would provide both a ‘secure port or harbour’ and a ‘healthy site for a capital at or near to the port’.\(^{11}\) Both explorers failed.

After a prodigious waste of time and money, the government was in no better position to make a decision, and time was running out. The five-year time limit for the selection of land was fast approaching and the survey had not yet been started. A large group of land order holders in Britain had already started legal proceedings against the government, demanding not only the return of their capital but the interest thereon as well.

The South Australian parliament debated the matter in August 1868. The situation was grim. The Treasurer gave a summary of the cost to date of the Northern Territory fiasco. From a total fund of £88,075 collected from the sale of land orders, the Escape Cliffs expedition had cost, in round figures, £40,520. The cost of the withdrawal of the settlement at Escape Cliffs added a further £3,000 to the total. McKinlay’s expedition cost £8,000 and Cadell’s depleted the fund of another £10,000. The balance in hand was just over £10,713.\(^{12}\) The parliament debated the wisdom of returning the money to the land order holders, which would cost a minimum of £90,000 as opposed to spending anything from £20,000 to £50,000 on another survey. In the end, a combination of the two options was agreed upon. Land order holders could choose whether to have their money returned to them, or to accept blocks of 320 acres\(^{13}\) in place of the original 160-acre rural blocks, and they were offered a further five years in which to select their land.

\(^{10}\) Edwin Hodder, *The History of South Australia from its Foundations to the Year of its Jubilee: With a Chronological Summary of All the Principal Events of Interest Up to Date*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1893), vol.1, p.375.


\(^{12}\) *South Australian Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter SAPD], 19 August 1868.

\(^{13}\) 129.6 hectares.
Goyder’s Survey Expedition

Influenced by promptings from the general public and the press, the government decided to ask the colony’s highly respected Surveyor-General to conduct the survey. George Woodroffe Goyder was reluctant at first but he relented and submitted a tender amounting to £28,000 plus the cost of transit to and from the Territory and the purchase of the small boats needed in the survey. The total may have been a shock to the authorities but, according to Bauer, Goyder ‘could write his own ticket in the matter of surveys’\(^\text{14}\) and the tender was accepted.

*The Camp with the Gulnare at anchor. Fort Hill is in the background*

Before leaving Port Adelaide on the *Moonta* on 23 December 1868, Goyder decided that Darwin harbour was to be his destination. After an uneventful voyage, the ship dropped anchor in the shallows beside the peninsula jutting into the harbour on 5 February 1869. Goyder and his team of 138 men\(^\text{15}\) set up a base camp on the low saddle between Fort Hill and the main plateau.\(^\text{16}\) The surveyors and chainmen then set to work on the plateau marking out the town site which was to become the capital of the Northern Territory. After that project was completed, four survey teams were sent inland to lay out the rural blocks. The teams managed to survey a total of 269,684 hectares,\(^\text{17}\) comprising four townships (Darwin,


\(^{15}\) See De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p.9 for a discussion on the number of men in the survey party.

\(^{16}\) This area became known as ‘The Camp’ and was used extensively for government accommodation and offices until taken over by the Navy just before the Second World War.

Southport, Virginia and Daly), 2,236 rural lots plus roads and reserves, all in the space of seven months. With the job completed, Goyder returned to Adelaide in September 1869, leaving behind most of his expedition team, a flourishing garden, and a collection of log cabins and iron huts, stables, store houses, and various workshops at The Camp, and the tiny community settled down to await the arrival of the Government Resident and other public servants.

*Goyder’s Camp, 1869. The building in front of the tents was dubbed the ‘Theatre Royale’ and was used to stage entertainments for the survey party*

*The road from The Camp up to the town site, 1873*
Figure 4: The township of Darwin dated December 1900, showing Goyder’s original town plan with additions, such as the railway, the location of the submarine cable, and the addition of waterfront lots.
The Overland Telegraph

Ultimately, of course, Darwin’s prosperity depended upon the successful establishment of viable industries in the region. Its actual survival however was assured when South Australia persuaded the British Australia Telegraph Company\(^{18}\) that its submarine cable stretching from England to Australia should be brought ashore at Darwin. In return, South Australia promised to build a telegraph line 3,178 kilometres in length\(^{19}\) over a largely unknown route, through harsh terrain and in a punishing climate in a little over two years.

The colony’s Postmaster General, Charles Todd, who was responsible for organising the construction of the line, divided the route into three sections. The government was to complete the central section, which Todd expected to be the most difficult, while the sections south from Darwin and north from Port Augusta were contracted out. The southern and central sections were completed with little difficulty, but the Wet season caused serious delays in the northern section. The two ends of the Overland Telegraph line\(^{20}\) were finally

\(^{18}\) This company was commonly referred to as ‘the BAT’ in Darwin even after its name was changed to the ‘Eastern Extension China and Australasia Telegraph Company’. The term ‘the BAT’ will be used hereafter in this thesis.

\(^{19}\) The official distance according to the plaque at the GPO in Adelaide which was unveiled on 22 October 1999.

\(^{20}\) The Overland Telegraph line is usually referred to as the ‘OT line’. My thesis will follow this convention.
connected on 22 August 1872 at the staggering cost of £470,720 which was almost four times the original estimate of £120,000.21

**Economic Development: Mining in the Northern Territory**

During the construction of the OT line fairly substantial deposits of gold were found by men digging post holes some 190 kilometres from Darwin. As a result, the Northern Territory Gold Prospecting Company was floated in 1871. The company’s prospecting party arrived in Darwin in April 1872 and a few months later the men discovered the substantial Priscilla Reef at Yam Creek. Their telegraph message announcing this news initiated a speculative boom which severely damaged the Territory’s reputation. The frenzied eagerness with which ‘hundreds of innocent investors’22 sought to buy shares gave rise to ‘one of the worst scandals in Australian history’.23 Terse telegrams, many containing highly exaggerated and even fraudulent reports of new discoveries, fuelled the speculators’ enthusiasm, and by 1874 about sixty companies had been floated. Many of these were bubble promotions created by men who had no intention of developing claims in the Territory. It was estimated that only about a dozen companies were genuine,24 and a number of these were badly served by their managers who proved to be lazy, incompetent or dishonest.

By 1874 the mining boom was fading. Some impressive reefs were discovered during the early 1870s, but many of them tended to peter out quickly, or were fractured and the miners lost track of them. The results from the stamper batteries on the fields were disappointing as most of them averaged only one to three ounces per ton of ore.25 Jones pointed out that this was a respectable result,26 but it was far below what the shareholders expected, and a higher yield was necessary to offset the costs of working a mine in the Top End, where wages were

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25 28g to 85g per tonne.

high and the cost of transport, materials and essential supplies was exorbitant. The speculative bubble burst, investors decided to steer clear of Territory mining, many companies collapsed through lack of capital, and disgruntled prospectors left the Territory.

In spite of this unpromising start, mining has remained one of the Territory’s major industries since the 1870s. While the telegraph line and its isolated stations provided a route – and sustenance – through the centre of the region, the mining industry opened up other parts of the country, not only to the miners themselves but also to small businessmen who settled in the townships which served the mining communities.

**Economic Development: The Pastoral Industry**

It was not until the 1880s that any serious attempts to stock the pastoral leases occurred, and the Australia-wide recession of the 1890s marked the end of the boom years for the industry. Pastoralists in the Territory were faced with a particularly difficult task. The natural pasture itself was of poor quality, especially in the Top End, and the pastoralists had to cope with a difficult climate and hostile Aborigines. The local market for beef was extremely limited; the costs of labour, commodities and transport services were very high; and the distances to markets in the Australian colonies and overseas made it difficult for Territory pastoralists to sell their produce at competitive prices. These problems were exacerbated by the appearance of ‘red water’ or tick fever in 1882, which caused serious stock losses for about a decade before it was brought under control.

Nevertheless, the pastoral industry survived the economic vicissitudes and overcame the practical problems of raising stock in the Territory to such an extent that it rivalled and at times surpassed the mining industry as the region’s most profitable enterprise during the South Australian years of administration. Donovan’s claim that the industry opened up the country may have some merit, but pastoralism had little effect in actually populating the region. The large cattle runs were operated with Aboriginal labour, with, at most, one or two white families on them, and they did little to stimulate local trade and commerce.

**Economic Development: Pearling**

While never as important as the pastoral or mining industries, the pearl shell industry made a significant contribution to the Northern Territory economy. According to the *Northern

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Territory Times, pearling operations were carried out on the ‘banks opposite Port Darwin’ as early as 1874 by ‘Mr Bell and other pearl fishers’. However, on 27 March 1875 the newspaper noted that ‘After some months of listless activity, the “fleet” of the Australian Fishery Company has departed. We shall miss the dirty picturesqueness of the legion of the Malay crew members hovering about our streets’. Nine years later, the divers on the pearling schooner Sree Pas Sair managed to raise about one and a half tonnes of pearl shell in a few days in the harbour. Interest was aroused and within a short period of time five boats equipped with ‘diving dresses’ arrived. But the huge tides and strong currents in the harbour muddied the waters and pearling could only be carried out for short periods during each day. By 1887 the industry had once again lapsed and it was not until 1892 that it was revived, with the pearlers fishing around the Tiwi Islands and further afield and using Port Darwin as their home base. Donovan pointed out that pearling was ‘a steady export earner’ although ‘it received little support from government, principally because it employed so few Europeans’.

Economic Development: Agriculture

South Australia’s dream of establishing a flourishing agricultural industry in the Territory was never realised. Initially, the authorities had envisaged a community of yeoman farmers populating blocks in the Darwin hinterland, but it soon became clear that the owners of the land orders had no intention of settling in the Territory. In 1872 the government changed its tack and started promoting the idea of large scale tropical plantations worked by coloured labour.

In spite of liberal inducements offered to would-be planters, it was not until 1879 that the first serious application for land for a sugar plantation appeared. It came from a Melbourne consortium headed by W. Owston who took up land on the Daly River. Shortly afterwards, B.C. De Lissa successfully applied for land on the Cox Peninsula across the harbour from Port Darwin. Others followed, and by 1881 over 40,000 hectares had been applied for under new land regulations promulgated in 1880. By 1884 the Daly River plantation had failed and Delissaville had produced less than twenty tonnes of sugar for a capital outlay of £20,000. In his report of March 1885, Government Resident Parsons recorded that only a relatively small

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28 Northern Territory Times and Gazette [hereafter NT Times], 6 February 1874.
29 Donovan, Other End of Australia, p.5.
plantation at Shoal Bay owned by Otto Brandt remained in operation. After the collapse of
the sugar industry, capitalists shied away from investing in Northern Territory agriculture and
the provision of fresh fruit and vegetables for the local population was left in the hands of the
Chinese market gardeners, while larger-scale agriculture dwindled to a small number of
mixed farms and Otto Brandt’s plantation which survived until 1891.

The Population of the Territory

The slow and difficult development of these few industries in the Northern Territory meant
that there was a corresponding slow and difficult growth of the non-Aboriginal population in
the region. After forty-one years of South Australian rule, it totalled a mere 3,271 persons,
excluding Aborigines when the Commonwealth took control in 1911. The figures would
have been considerably less if the gold fields had not attracted a large number of Chinese
immigrants. The stimulus for this situation occurred when the mine proprietors and managers
complained at the scarcity and cost of labour in the Territory. The idea of importing ‘coolie’
labour was raised and ex-Government Resident Douglas was sent to Singapore where he
managed to recruit 187 Chinese men, who arrived in Darwin in August 1874. When their
two-year contracts expired, they were offered a £5 incentive to remain in the Territory. Only
about fifty men decided to return to Singapore, and the Chinese who remained formed a

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nucleus of miners, artisans, gardeners, domestic servants and businessmen who transformed both the social and physical landscape of the Northern Territory in general and Darwin in particular. The Chinese who returned home took word with them about the Territory goldfields, and a small but steady stream of Chinese began to trickle into Darwin en route to the hinterland. That this stream was becoming a flood was indicated on 16 March 1878 when the newspaper reported the arrival in Darwin of 384 Chinese miners. Over the next few months between two and four hundred Chinese arrived each week. By the end of the 1870s the Chinese outnumbered the European population by more than six to one. It was not until the South Australian Parliament bowed to public pressure and passed the *Chinese Immigration Restriction Act* in 1888 that the numbers gradually started to equalise. By 1911, the number of Chinese in the Territory was only about two hundred more than the number of Europeans.\(^{31}\)

**The Railway**

From the first, men of vision had advocated that South Australia should build a transcontinental railway line from Adelaide to Darwin, which would not only assist Territory development, but would also open up trade routes from the southern colonies to Asia and beyond. But the cost was staggering, and South Australia was unwilling to take on that burden of debt, especially after paying for the construction of the OT line.

While debates over a transcontinental line continued, the transport problems of those living and working in the Top End gave rise to the suggestion that a short railway be built from Darwin to the mining centre of Pine Creek. The tracks from Darwin to the hinterland were difficult to negotiate with horses or bullocks and carts at the best of times during the Dry season. They were almost impassable in the Wet season, with mud deep enough to trap the strongest bullock team and raging rivers which were often impossible to cross.\(^{32}\) South Australia eventually gave way to the demands of various lobby groups which had been formed and reformed since 1872 to promote this project, and it passed the *Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway Bill* in 1883. Territory residents were overjoyed at the news, but the project was inexplicably delayed for two years. This caused serious financial distress among

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\(^{31}\) Donovan, *Land of Possibilities*, p.173. See Appendix 1 for a graph of the population of the Northern Territory between 1871 and 1911.

\(^{32}\) Hugh May, a mining company employee, took 41 days to travel from Darwin to the Howley Creek mine during the Wet season. In the Dry it normally took 3 days. See Hugh C. May, “Diary of a Visit to the Northern Territory (1872-1873)” (NTL, photocopy).
business people who had made commitments on the understanding that railway construction would commence within months of the Bill becoming law.

A tender from the Millar brothers was finally accepted in May 1886, and two years later the first passenger trains began to run between Darwin and Adelaide River. The completed line was eventually handed over to the government on 30 September 1889. The railway almost invariably ran at a loss, but it was a great boon to the populace, especially to those living and working in the hinterland.

**Darwin and the Civil Administration**

The first members of the administrative staff arrived at The Camp at the end of 1869. They included Dr Millner, the acting Government Resident, Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines, and Paul Foelsche, the Sub-Inspector of Police, who joined the six police officers transported to Darwin by the *Gulnare* some three weeks earlier. After some difficulties, South Australia finally managed to find someone willing to take on the job of Government Resident in Darwin. Captain William Bloomfield Douglas accepted the position and he arrived with his family on 24 June 1870. He landed ‘in great state. There were seven guns fired from shore, and returned from the “Gulnare”, and troopers and men arranged on the shore as guard of honour’.

![The Senior Surveyor’s and the Medical Officer’s quarters, 1870](image_url)

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33 Elizabeth Sweet, “Mrs E. Sweet’s Account of the Roper River & Voyages to and from Port Darwin,” [1907] (CDU Library Special Collection, photocopy), p.1. Elizabeth was the wife of the *Gulnare*’s captain, Samuel Sweet.
The barque *Bengal* arrived on the same day as the *Gulnare*. Its passengers included some more government officers, ‘intending settlers’\(^{34}\) and seven land order holders or their agents who were eager to inspect the land before choosing their allotments. While Douglas was assisting these men, many of his officers were fully occupied in setting up some accommodation for his family.

There were only about eighty to one hundred white people in the settlement at this time,\(^{35}\) and with so few people to govern and such a restricted social milieu, there was little occupy the administration staff. Construction of essential government buildings continued, but if Douglas’s diary is anything to go by, he, for one, found life very tedious.\(^{36}\) Welcome interruptions occurred with the arrival of the OT construction team and the later arrival of both the BAT and the OT staff. Less welcome disturbances occurred with the appearance of gold prospectors, and the eagerly expected permanent settlers owning land orders never arrived. The administrative staff had little to do and their standards began to slip. Douglas was not a success as Government Resident. According to Burns, he governed like a white rajah but lacked the competence to introduce a suitable administration. He squandered money, ignored instructions and quarrelled with his subordinates.\(^{37}\)

As gold mining commenced in earnest, Douglas and most of his senior staff took out miner’s rights and frequently abandoned their posts to go fossicking in the bush. The complaints sent to Adelaide became so numerous that the Minister in charge of the Territory, travelled to Darwin to investigate matters personally. He arrived on 17 April 1872 and was appalled at ‘the shamefully disorganised state of things’.\(^{38}\) He had to travel to the goldfields to confront

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\(^{34}\) W. Cavenagh, *Instructions to Government Resident*, SAPP 26/1870-71 [Adelaide: Govt. Printer], 1871. (CDU Library Special Collection, photocopy), p.1. Unfortunately, this paper does not give any more details about these ‘intending settlers’.

\(^{35}\) See Cavenagh, *Instructions to Government Resident*, pp.1-2. Government staff totalled forty-four, plus thirteen men manning the government schooner (the *Gulnare*). Twenty-four women and children had arrived in January 1870. Mrs Douglas and her children added another eight, and the Land Office clerk, R E Gardiner and Police Trooper Todd also arrived in Darwin with the Douglas family, making a minimum of seventy-eight persons. An unknown number of ‘intending settlers’ must be added to this total.

\(^{36}\) NTAS, NTRS 541 PC5, “Bloomfield Douglas’ Diary 1872.”


Douglas about the situation and the meeting ended with Douglas resigning his post and floating his own mining company.

The new Government Resident, George Byng Scott arrived on 1 November 1873 and Darwin’s leading residents greeted him enthusiastically. Scott found that many of the public servants were ‘given to drink, and ... considered their only mission in life was to “eat, drink and be merry”, do no work, and plunder the Government’ 39

He was undoubtedly a very efficient man, but he too was not a success and it was not long before conflicts arose. Almost immediately after Scott arrived, the leading citizens of Darwin began demanding a voice in the way in which the town was administered. This campaign resulted in a public meeting being held at the beginning of 1874 and a memorial being sent to Adelaide requesting that the town be gazetted as a District. On 18 July 1874, the newspaper announced triumphantly that ‘the Palmerston District Council is now an established fact and “representative government” – in a small way – has made a beginning in this remote region’.

Almost immediately disputes between Scott and the Council erupted over such matters as who controlled facilities such as the cemetery, the government gardens, and the public wells40 in Darwin. The government gardens were a particularly vexatious issue as Scott used them to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to the public servants and, not unnaturally, the private citizens resented this. To be fair to Scott, the Councillors were prone to claim ownership of these facilities until they were faced with a problem they could only rectify by spending significant sums of money, and then they demanded help from the government.41 On the other hand, Scott consistently refused to concede that the cemetery and the wells were the Council’s responsibility while at the same time he neglected to ensure they were maintained.

The District Council may have been a perpetual thorn in Scott’s side, but it was the contretemps over the Hospital Management Board which crystallised the citizens’ resentment towards the administration. Funds for the hospital were raised by the community and

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40 Like many of the more affluent citizens, the Government Residents were not dependent on the public wells. In his diary entry of 1 February 1872, Bloomfield Douglas listed all the tanks at the Residence. There were a total of forty-nine, of which thirty-eight were full. See NTAS, NTRS 541 PC5, “Bloomfield Douglas’ Diary 1872-“. It was the poorer people who depended on the public wells for their water.
41 Such was the case, for example, when a horse fell into the well in Cavenagh Square and had to be removed.
matched by the government. The authorities also promised to provide furniture, equipment and staff. The building was erected on a block of land on the cliffs above Doctor’s Gully. It was completed in June 1874 and a management board comprising three government and three community members was set up to administer it. But Scott frequently overrode the board’s decisions, and, at the end of its first year of operation, he disbanded the board without warning and handed control of the hospital to the Medical Officer, assisted by a Board of Advice. The community was outraged and the Reverend Archibald Bogle, for one, never forgave Scott for this betrayal.

Petty local disputes were quickly forgotten on 6 March 1875, however, when the news of a great disaster reached Darwin. On 24 February, the steam ship *Gothenburg*, which was on a voyage from Darwin to South Australia, and which was carrying many of Darwin’s residents, sank off the Queensland coast near Bowen and only twenty-two people survived. For a short time, Darwin community was united in grief, but it was not long before hostilities between Scott and many of the leading residents resumed.

Relations between the local administration and the general public in the Territory improved with the next Government Resident. Edward William Price, the original Resident Magistrate in the Northern Territory, took up a position in Adelaide at the expiration of his six months’ compassionate leave following the death of his wife and five children in the *Gothenburg*

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wreck. He accepted the post of Government Resident and arrived at Darwin just before Scott left in 1876. He and his successors managed to maintain reasonably harmonious relations with what was a remarkably contentious community. Henceforth, residents’ anger with the government over many of its decisions, and their resentment over the government’s neglect at other times was mainly directed towards the politicians and bureaucrats in Adelaide.

**The Development of Darwin**

The first settlers to arrive in Darwin were housed in the crude huts built of bush timber or iron which were erected by Goyder’s team in The Camp. When Bloomfield Douglas arrived six months later there must have been a certain amount of consternation at The Camp when it was discovered that his family consisted of a wife, seven children and a maid. It was obviously necessary to provide more suitable accommodation for the senior government officer in the Northern Territory. A site of just under 1.5 hectares was chosen on the plateau overlooking The Camp and with a panoramic view of Darwin harbour, and construction began immediately. The ‘Residence’ as it was called, contained a long central room built of stone with wooden bedrooms and verandahs along each side. Just before moving in, Douglas announced that the central room would also be used as a courthouse and for other public purposes.\(^{43}\) The building underwent many repairs, alterations and additions in succeeding years, but the central room still survives and is ‘the oldest known non-Aboriginal structure in Darwin’.\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) James, *The Residence and its Residents*, p.3.

\(^{44}\) Carment, *Looking at Darwin’s Past*, p.23.
Further government offices and homes for the public servants were erected in the town site above The Camp. The private settlers, most of whom were men hoping to establish businesses in Darwin, also constructed shops, offices and homes. Many of them had great difficulty obtaining land as the land order holders either refused to sell or lease the lots, or demanded exorbitant amounts for their holdings. As a result of the absentee owners the buildings of the town were interspersed with vacant lots which fast became unofficial rubbish dumps and a breeding ground for noxious weeds.

Developments in the hinterland contributed to changes in Darwin landscape and social structure. The arrival of the OT construction team, briefly transformed the little town. The team, which arrived in September 1870, consisted of six officers and about eighty men under the command of W.A. Paqualin. They settled themselves, their seventy-eight horses, ten bullocks and an enormous mound of equipment in a camp on the Esplanade at the end of Cavenagh Street. A few months later, however, the line had moved so far inland that it was more convenient for stores to be landed at the Roper River and the camp in Darwin was dismantled.

The Overland and British Australia Telegraph offices, 1872

The next addition to the population was more permanent. In September 1871 the Bengal arrived with the BAT staff and the government’s OT personnel. The contractors for building the cable and OT stations were also on board. These buildings, which were completed about June 1872, were substantial stone structures later described by the

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45 The South Australian Advertiser [hereafter SA Advertiser], 11 September 1871.
46 Wilson and James, ‘Fit for the Gentler Sex’, p. 22. The combined BAT and OT offices were built on the site now occupied by Parliament House.
government architect as the only ones ‘having any pretensions to permanence in the Territory’, but which outraged the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Thomas Reynolds, because they faced the sea ‘as if the business would be with the ocean instead of Palmerston’.

A more chilly reception awaited the next flood of people to arrive in the town. Darwin was unprepared for the influx of prospectors following the discovery of payable gold deposits in the hinterland, and the prospectors were unprepared for the conditions they faced in Darwin. There was no wharf or jetty on which they could easily land themselves and their equipment; there were no well-stocked stores in town; the cost of both sea and overland freight was exorbitant; and the climate was uncomfortably hot during the Dry season and intolerably hot and humid during the Wet, when it was almost impossible to travel inland at all. Many of the prospectors were so dismayed by the conditions that they did not even attempt to reach the goldfields. They set up bark huts, tents and humpies on any unoccupied land on the plateau, and protested vociferously when the authorities attempted to dislodge them because they were trespassing on private property belonging to land order holders. Many of the independent prospectors had arrived in Darwin expecting to find enough gold to finance their return trip south. They were destitute, desperate and angry. The government provided them with rations until they could obtain passages south to less hostile climes.

The plateau above The Camp was transformed in the four years after Goyder left. In November 1873, a ‘Special Reporter’ for The SA Advertiser claimed that

> Palmerston has lately made rapid strides in the way of progress. Three of the streets are assuming a uniform appearance and tents are dotted around the bush in every direction. Just now it is all stir and bustle and publicans, storekeepers and mechanics are doing a thriving trade. The public houses are two, the general stores eleven, bakers two, and blacksmiths two. There is one chemist and some talk of a butcher’s shop being opened. The only stone and lime buildings are the Telegraph and Post Offices, but the mangrove sapling is gradually giving place to soft wood and sawn timber buildings.

The ‘Special Reporter’ was not so enthusiastic about the sanitary conditions of the town. He pointed out that the ‘hot sun and improper cesspool conveniences cause a disagreeable

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47 John George Knight, “Report on Government Buildings and Works at Palmerston, 1874,” State Records, South Australia. Correspondence to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory [hereafter SRSA, CMCNT], GRS 1, 137/1874, p.15.
49 SA Advertiser, 5 December 1873.
smell’. He also mentioned the presence of the ‘dreaded fever and ague’ and he was ambivalent about the local Indigenous people, describing them as both ‘very friendly’ and ‘troublesome’ and explaining that the Aboriginal women frequented the town more than the men, helping the residents ‘wash [clothes] and carry wood and water in exchange for “tom tom”, their name for bread’.

Smith Street, 1875.

The Advertiser’s correspondent was describing the township at the height of the mining boom, when great expectations were held concerning the economic future of the Territory. As the situation settled and the real state of affairs emerged, the number of stores dwindled to three or four, the chemist closed his doors and, if the butcher’s shop were established, it did not last for long.

In spite of this, other signs of a developing community were evident. The Reverend Bogle and his wife arrived in 1873 and erected a Methodist Church designed to accommodate two hundred people. This remained the only church in Darwin until the Roman Catholic chapel was completed in 1888. Another sign of progress was the establishment of the Northern Territory News. The editor, Richard Wells arrived on the same ship as Scott and issued his first paper six days later. By the end of 1873, William Whitfield had opened the first school in Darwin. He also offered adult classes in the evenings, but this was a private venture and it

\[50\] The fever (remittent malaria) made its first appearance inland among the OT construction workers, but it had been virtually unknown in Darwin until 1873. In that year, however, almost all Darwin’s residents were struck down with the disease, although it caused very few deaths in the town. It was the miners living and working in appalling conditions on an inadequate diet in the hinterland who suffered most from the annual appearance of the fever.

\[51\] The Anglican Church was not built until 1902.
did not provide an adequate income for Whitfield. His request for a government subsidy was
denied and the school closed in the following year. It was not until compulsory and secular
education became law in South Australia in 1876 that a government school was established in
Darwin.

The Chinese created the next major change in Darwin. At the end of the 1870s, unexpectedly
large numbers of Chinese arrived in Darwin. While most of these men moved into the
hinterland, hoping to make a fortune on the goldfields, an appreciable number settled in the
town. In 1879, there were about one thousand Chinese men in Darwin\(^{52}\) and many of them
were camped on the Esplanade at the end of Smith Street. On 1 May, the Medical Officer
alerted Price to the dangers of an epidemic disease taking hold in the camp and spreading to
the European section of the town.\(^{53}\) Price decided that the Chinese should camp ‘at the North
East side of town on the Park Land’.\(^{54}\) Thus the Esplanade at the end of Cavenagh Street
became the official Chinese camp in Darwin, and in a remarkably short time, the Chinese
were securing leases to blocks of land in this street. At first all these lots were occupied by
huts and humpies, but by 1883 Price was able to report that the area boasted a few substantial
stores and houses.\(^{55}\)

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1879.

\(^{53}\) NTAS, Government Resident’s Inward Correspondence [hereafter GRIC], File A3430.

\(^{54}\) NAA: A1640, 1879/145.

1883), p.3. Chinatown retained many of its huts and hovels, and remained a problem for the health authorities
until it was destroyed during the Second World War.
Chinatown may have added a picturesque element to Darwin landscape, but the Chinese caused far more significant changes to the town by providing abundant and cheap labour, especially in the late 1870s when many of them needed relief work to survive. Some long overdue projects were carried out in Darwin by the town’s destitute men and these improvements made a significant impact on the appearance of the town and the efficiency of its infrastructure. The causeway on the south-east side of Fort Hill, commonly called the Gulnare Jetty, was lengthened, and the mangroves on the waterfront between Fort Hill and Stokes Hill were cleared away. Another project which benefitted the residents was the removal of tree stumps from the town’s streets.

Gaol inmates also provided labour for the government and architect J.G. Knight was always ready to employ these men on his pet projects. One of the most popular facilities he instituted was the fenced bathing pool, constructed with prison labour in 1880 on the south-west side of Fort Hill. The *NT Times* explained that ‘a commodious dressing room has ... been erected for the exclusive use of the ladies’ and ‘bathing hours for gentlemen are up to half past six in the morning and after half past four in the afternoon. Ladies and children have the use of the water between the above hours.’ Knight also used prison labour to

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56 The men were arriving at the beginning of the Wet season and had no way of getting to the goldfields to start work. They were forced to use their meagre savings to buy food in Darwin.

57 There were also about a dozen European men who were in need of relief work at this time.

58 “News and Notes,” *NT Times*, 2 October 1880.
install terraced gardens on the slopes surrounding the Residence. About six hundred trees and shrubs and flowers were planted on the terraces in 1882, and the *NT Times* waxed enthusiastic about the ‘Champs Elysées of the Territory’. 59

The mood of optimism prevailing during Price’s term of office 60 infected the South Australian government, and some serious money was at last expended on public works in Darwin. One of the most urgent projects was, once again, the repair of the Residence. This building had tried the patience of the authorities in both Adelaide and Darwin and, apparently, the general public in Darwin as well. There was finally enough money available to make extensive changes to the building, and in May 1879, the *NT Times* announced that ‘The House of Seven Gables known as the Residence is now finished and although it may not be considered a model of architectural skill, it may claim to be a comfortable house and well suited to the climate.’ 61

Most of the other public buildings in Darwin were either extensively repaired or replaced by the time Price left the Territory. New buildings included the police station, bachelor officers’ quarters at The Camp, a new ward and Matron’s and attendants’ quarters at the hospital, Darwin’s first public school, and married quarters for most of the senior public servants in the town. But perhaps the most significant sign of Darwin’s growth was the erection of the Town Hall. The townspeople of Darwin had always felt the lack of a building suitable for

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59 “News and Notes,” *NT Times*, 14 January 1882.
60 Price was Government Resident from 1876 to 1883.
61 “News and Notes,” *NT Times*, 17 May 1879. The Residence, now called Government House, has only undergone minor alterations since 1879 and retains its seven gables.
public functions. For some time an old warehouse was used, in spite of being badly ventilated and very utilitarian in appearance, but that building eventually succumbed to the white ants and was demolished. After a number of years without a hall the Council finally succeeded in obtaining a grant from the government to match its own funds and Lot 528 Smith Street was purchased on 17 August 1882.

In such a tiny town, any major project caused tremendous excitement. The arrival of the railway construction team was a case in point. Six ships carrying railway material arrived in June 1886 and construction of the workshops and station on the Frances Bay side of the Darwin peninsula began. This area was known as McDonald’s Flat and the *NT Times* painted a vivid picture of the enterprise:

> The whole flat is alive with bustle and activity; the hum and whirl of machinery in motion, the steam and smoke from many engines and boilers, the clanging of hammers, the dash and roar of the Baldwin locomotive and her trucks as she darts in and out amongst the material roads of her stacking ground: this, together with the musical thump thump of the steam hammer, makes up a scene that gladdens the hearts of those who remember the stagnation of the past few years.\(^\text{62}\)

By 1887 Government Resident Parsons was able to report that reservoirs had been constructed at the station and at the locomotive workshop three miles from Darwin, and that

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\(^{62}\) “Messrs. C. & E. Millar’s Engineering and Railway Plant Works,” *NT Times*, 17 September 1887.
residences for staff and workers, offices and a general store had been built.\footnote{J. Langdon Parsons, Government Resident’s Report on Northern Territory for the Year 1887, SAPP 53/1888 (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1888), p.18.} The railway station itself was situated more or less at the junction of Bennett Street and Brooking Terrace, which caused some discontent among Darwin residents who wanted it sited at Cavenagh Square.\footnote{The practical difficulties of designing a line where the locomotive had to climb the cliff up to the plateau and back down again were too great, and the residents’ deep satisfaction about the railway meant that any complaints were muted.}

The railway and jetty changed the morphology of Darwin considerably. Prior to their construction, the town was oriented towards Fort Hill. The little Gulnare Jetty was located on the south-east corner of this hill and goods and passengers moved up to the plateau via Goyder’s original road from The Camp. European houses, offices and shops were clustered around the head of this road and along Smith and Mitchell Streets and the Esplanade. Chinatown, in Cavenagh Street was on the outskirts of the populated area. Now, the movement of goods and people was along the full length of Bennett Street to the Stokes Hill side of the plateau, and Chinatown was more or less in the middle of the occupied area of the town site.
Darwin in the 1890s

The construction of the railway and jetty tended to obscure the fact that affairs in the Territory were not going well during Parsons’s term of office. The pastoral industry suffered a severe setback with the appearance of the ‘red water fever’ and by the mid-1880s it was obvious that the sugar plantations were failing. Not long after this, the pearling fleet moved its operations away from Darwin harbour. South Australia was also suffering financial hardship and Territory public servants were forced to accept lower salaries and a reduction in their allowances. This meant that less money was flowing into the town from these residents.

Expenditure on public works, apart from the railway and jetty, was also drastically reduced. Nor was there much construction work undertaken by the private sector at this time. By 1888 Chinese entrepreneurs seemed to be the only ones with any faith in the future. In its review of that year the *NT Times* reported that ‘there have been a good many town improvements, mostly in Chinatown, where long ranges of shops, some of stone, but mostly of wood and iron, have been erected’.65


By the beginning of the 1890s the township of Darwin had taken the shape – physically, demographically and socially – that it was to retain during the rest of South Australia’s administration of the Territory. The built-up area extended across the port end of the peninsula, with the business area on the western side and the transport area on the eastern side. European homes occupied lots on both sides of the peninsula, with Chinatown – a mixture of commercial and residential structures – marking the division between the two areas predominantly occupied by the Whites. Larrakia camps were situated at Lameroo Beach and on the cliffs immediately above (in spite of periodic attempts to shift them). The hospital, the cemetery, other Aboriginal camps, the government gardens and a scattering of Chinese market gardens were situated further back on the peninsula, and a ramshackle group of huts on the beach near Doctors Gully were occupied by Chinese fishermen. The Gaol and the recreation ground/racecourse were situated in the suburb of Fannie Bay.

‘Palmerston native camp’, December 1890

The parlous state of affairs in the Northern Territory prompted South Australia to appoint a Royal Commission in 1895 to investigate affairs in the province. The report was submitted but it contained little that was new and nothing was done to implement the recommendations. The authorities’ lack of interest was demonstrated when a cyclone demolished most of the town on the night of 6-7 January 1897. In contrast to the determined response to the destruction by Darwin’s private citizens, the South Australian government was less than enthusiastic about providing funds for the restoration of the government buildings, and many public servants had to endure leaky roofs and other inadequacies caused by ‘temporary’

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repairs for a year or more after the cyclone hit. This unsympathetic and niggardly reaction caused deep resentment amongst the already disillusioned residents of Darwin, but the South Australian government was by this time reluctant to spend any public moneys on the Northern Territory. The few funds available for public works were dedicated to repairing existing structures, most notably the railway jetty where the wooden piles were fast being consumed by teredo worms.

**Darwin’s Population**

By the time the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the Northern Territory, Darwin’s population was made up of many races – Aboriginal, European, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and other ethnic groups from South-east Asia. Darwin could only be regarded as a ‘community’ in so far as all residents shared the same geographical location. In other respects it is more accurate to describe Darwin as a collection of disparate groups of people divided by their ethnicity, their social standing, and, in some cases, their political views. There were, of course, connections between these groups, but they were limited, and only rarely did the entire population join together to participate in an activity such as a sports day or a formal event like the transfer ceremony in January 1911.

The Aboriginal inhabitants of the town lived in camps and humpies on the outskirts of the town. When it assumed responsibility for the Northern Territory, the South Australian administration undertook to protect these dispossessed people, but precious little was done for them in fact. In Darwin itself, they were moved on when the European inhabitants of the town complained too vociferously of their noise, their dogs and the perceived insanitary conditions under which they lived. They were not moved too far, however, because the Europeans depended on them as a source of cheap labour for menial work in their homes and

67 See for example, NTAS: GRIC, File 8025 containing a letter from Nicholas Holtze to the Government Resident dated 7 January 1898, exactly one year after the cyclone, which reported that the hospital roof was still leaking badly. He requested that the temporary repairs be replaced by something more permanent.

68 The cyclone caused ‘a break in the earthworks at the new jetty’. See “Terrible Hurricane at Port Darwin,” _NT Times_, 25 January 1897. The lack of interest amongst South Australian bureaucrats was clearly shown in the way in which the jetty was rebuilt. The original long curve was replaced by a right-angled bend which necessitated a turntable to allow railway trucks to be turned so they could be attached to the locomotive and taken to the Sorting Shed. This caused serious delays in unloading cargoes.

69 For an interesting debate on the meaning and significance of the word ‘community’, see G.A. Hillery, “Definitions of a Community: Areas of Agreement,” _Rural Sociology_ 20, no.2 (6 January 1955): pp.111-23; and R.A. Wild, _Community: Locality, Tradition or Sentiment?_ (Bundoora Vic: La Trobe University, 1979). In this thesis I use ‘community’ to refer to Darwin’s society as a whole, and also to specific ethnic and/or socioeconomic groups among Darwin’s inhabitants.
businesses. Their labour was usually rewarded by a few meagre rations and an occasional item of clothing.

The Whites occasionally organised corroborees to entertain passengers from visiting ships. The men on the left of this photograph are taking photos.

The Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians, most of whom resided in Chinatown, were numerically the most dominant group in Darwin. The political and administrative control of the town was in the hands of the Europeans, but the most influential Chinese quietly managed to make their presence felt by participating in any significant event in the town. It became a custom, for example, that the Chinese community would organise a banquet or reception for important visitors one or two days after the equivalent European celebration. Within their own community, the Chinese retained their own customs and traditional costumes, and the men belonged to various ‘tongs’ and ‘guilds’.

A Chinese procession along Cavenagh Street

In the main, Darwin’s European inhabitants regarded the Chinese with a mixture of resentment and respect. Most British-Australian residents in Darwin maintained an innate
antipathy towards people of other races and cultures. Many also felt resentment because Chinese stores successfully competed with the European stores, and Chinese workers threatened white workers’ jobs. In spite of this, many Europeans had a reluctant respect for the Chinese inhabitants’ frugal, hardworking way of life. They also had to admit that they depended on the Chinese for many necessities of life, such as tailored clothes, barbered hair, and supplies of fish and fruit and vegetables. Less openly, many Europeans also patronised the brothels, and the gambling and opium dens situated behind the respectable facade of store fronts in Cavenagh Street.

Darwin’s European community was strongly hierarchical in character. The ‘elite’ comprised the senior public servants,70 the BAT staff, the leading storekeepers or their managers, and the lawyers and other professionals in the town. There was an occasional wry comment in the newspaper about the social divisions amongst the white population. When reporting on the Queen’s birthday celebrations in 1881, for example, an article described the dance at the Residence attended by ‘the “Upper Ten” in severe evening dress’ and the ‘hijinks’ held by the ‘Medium Twenty’ at the Hospital, ‘the patients having courteously offered to take up temporary quarters in the Dead House’71 to make room for the function.

Much of the local news reported in the NT Times related to the activities of the elite. We can learn a great deal about the dances, the concerts, the picnics, the debates, the ‘smoke socials’, the billiards and the sporting activities of these people. Information about the activities and

70 Often referred to as ‘silvertails’.
attitudes of the more humble people amongst the white community is less easy to obtain, but it seems more than likely that they organised their own social and sporting events to occupy their leisure time.\textsuperscript{72}

There was also a clear differentiation between Darwin’s permanent settlers and the public servants, although during the years of South Australian administration, many of the latter remained in town for the whole of their working lives.\textsuperscript{73} In the earlier years, the townspeople were inclined to blame every setback to their progress on the locally based public service, but, with the advent of the popular Government Resident Edward Price, in 1876, much of their anger and their criticism was redirected to the bureaucrats and politicians in Adelaide.

\textbf{Conclusion}

By the turn of the century, public opinion throughout Australia deemed the South Australian attempt at colonisation a failure. Admittedly, there were two outstanding successes to acknowledge. Goyder’s survey expedition and the completion of the Overland Telegraph gave South Australia enormous prestige in Britain, in Australia and elsewhere, but the Territory had not progressed as expected and Territory residents had numerous reasons to complain of South Australia’s ineptitude in administering the province.\textsuperscript{74} The disastrous attempt to establish a settlement at Escape Cliffs, for example, added to the enormous debt the Northern Territory incurred in the years 1869 to 1911. Even more damaging was South Australia’s decision to release the land with no provision requiring its development within a specified period. Darwin suffered badly from this mistake: no orderly growth outwards from the town centre was possible; the untidy undeveloped vacant lots were an eyesore; and the local Council had a perpetual struggle to get absentee owners to pay their rates. The lack of consistency in South Australia’s administration of the Northern Territory caused more problems. Frequent changes of government meant equally frequent changes in policy. Land

\textsuperscript{72} See Matthew Stephen, “Contact Zones: Sport and Race in the Northern Territory, 1869-1953” (PhD thesis CDU, 2009), pp.68-184 for a comprehensive description of sport in Darwin during the years of South Australian administration.

\textsuperscript{73} Sub-Inspector Paul Foelsche was a case in point: he arrived in Darwin in December 1869. He held his post as senior police officer in the Territory until he retired in 1904. He died in 1914 and was buried in the Darwin cemetery.

\textsuperscript{74} Austin Asche, a former Administrator of the NT, denies this criticism on the basis that the achievements of Goyder’s survey team and the OT construction were remarkable, and, thanks to South Australia, the Commonwealth government inherited a province with a reasonably effective administration and a satisfactory infrastructure already in place. See Austin Asche, \textit{When We Were South Australian}, Occasional Paper, no. 60. NTL; [database online] available at http://artsandmuseums.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/114992/2007 ejecture_transcript_op60.pdf [accessed 22 October 2013].
release in particular was subject to the whims of successive governments. Perhaps even worse, was the periodic neglect of the Northern Territory by both politicians and bureaucrats. The willful disregard of the local Aboriginal people was perhaps the most serious failing of the administration.

It is now widely accepted that no administration, however enlightened, committed and wealthy, could have developed the Territory ‘successfully’ in the nineteenth century. It is however fair to say that South Australia’s incompetence in managing its northern province created many unnecessary difficulties for the early Territorians. Some of the mistakes were caused by inexperience; some were created by the lack of a consistent policy for the north and vacillations brought about by the frequent changes of government in Adelaide; but it is difficult to avoid the impression that many problems arose out of the selfish desire of politicians and bureaucrats in the south to make as much profit as possible, both personally and for South Australia in general, from the ‘vast resources of the north’. South Australia, in effect, wanted the milk and cream, but did not want to feed the cow.

Most of the government officers lived in Goyder’s Camp area during the South Australian era. The building in the centre foreground, often called the “Mud Hut” or “Knight’s Folly”, was built and occupied by John George Knight. The Residence is visible on the left of the photograph.
Chapter Three

The Commonwealth Takes Over, 1900-1911

Most people regarded the prospect of the federal takeover of the Territory with pleased anticipation, but disillusionment about the new regime set in quite quickly in Darwin. This chapter deals briefly with the negotiations leading to the transfer and describes the Commonwealth’s decisions and actions immediately following the transfer.

The Transfer Negotiations

By the 1890s South Australia was heartily sick of the problems posed by the Northern Territory. During this decade a number of members of Parliament suggested that South Australia hand the whole province back to the British, but these moves were always defeated when they came to a vote.¹ After federation the politicians’ focus changed and the South Australian government approached the Commonwealth in April 1901 with a proposal to transfer the Territory to federal control. According to Premier Holder, who made the initial offer, the Commonwealth could have the Territory as long as it also took over the Territory’s debt. But the business community in Adelaide suddenly raised strong objections to this proposal, and, with the new federal government engrossed in setting up the necessary national infrastructure, the matter was allowed to lapse. South Australians frequently exhibited a dog-in-the-manger attitude towards the Northern Territory and this occasion was no exception. They still did not wish to settle in the region, nor did they want to invest their money in it at the time, but they were also reluctant to let it go. Their main fear was that, if the Commonwealth took control of the Territory, the transcontinental north-south railway, which everyone expected would be built in the near future, would be diverted through Queensland and so down to Sydney and Melbourne, thus by-passing South Australia entirely.

It is not surprising that negotiations were protracted, but in February 1907, Premier Price and Prime Minister Deakin ‘bound themselves to a memorandum setting out the terms of their agreement’² over the transfer of the Territory to the Commonwealth. In this memorandum, Deakin agreed that the national government would not only take over the Northern Territory

¹ See, for example, SAPD, Wednesday, 10 October 1894.
² Donovan, Land of Possibilities, p.216. See also CPD, pp.10 passim.
and its debt, but would also accept the unprofitable Port Augusta to Oodnadatta railway line and extend it to join the line which ran from Darwin to Pine Creek.\(^3\) By December 1907 both Houses of Parliament in South Australia had ratified the Price-Deakin agreement, but once again the issue was shelved.

While disagreeing about the method, both the federal Labor government and the conservative Opposition were convinced that the Northern Territory must be taken over by the Commonwealth and must be settled and developed. There were two principal reasons for this attitude. They regarded the empty north as a serious threat to the security of the Australian nation, and they were afraid that other developed countries would criticise them for holding such a large amount of land without developing it into an economically viable settlement. Most of the federal politicians also considered that South Australia had done a poor job at exploiting the potential wealth which must exist in such a huge area of land, and they were convinced that they could do better. The more realistic parliamentarians also realised that the developmental work would take an extremely long time and cost the Australian taxpayer an enormous amount of money. Senator Millen, for example, warned the Senate that

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\text{in taking this Territory over, the Commonwealth will not be stepping into a lordly heritage -- something which, from the moment we get it, will pour money into our pockets. It is going for years to come ... to be a sink, into which public money will be poured.}^{\text{\(\text{4}\)}}
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The Federal *Territory Transfer Agreement* Bill was passed in the House of Representatives in 1909, but the Senate delayed acceptance of this Bill until it lapsed.\(^5\) It was not until Andrew Fisher was Prime Minister in 1910 that the second version of the Bill was introduced and passed, this time with breathtaking speed, with the date set for the transfer on 1 January 1911.

Because the transfer date fell on a Sunday, Darwin residents and many visitors from the hinterland gathered in the grounds of the Residence on Monday 2 January 1911 to witness the ceremony marking the end of South Australian administration of the Northern Territory. While it is probable that many members of the gathering knew little and cared less about the

\(^3\) South Australia made a serious error by not insisting on a time frame for the construction of the railway. This had been included in the 1907 memorandum but was deleted by the time the *Northern Territory Acceptance Bill* was passed by the federal parliament.

\(^4\) CPD, 8 September 1910, vol. LVI, p.2683.

\(^5\) Many politicians were also very wary of the commitment to build a north-south continental railway from Adelaide to Darwin. This would almost certainly create serious competition with the trading activities of the eastern States.
change, most of the Europeans and many of the Chinese inhabitants were well aware of the ceremony’s significance. After almost twenty years in the doldrums, it is small wonder that they looked forward to a new administration. The editor of the *NT Times* expressed their hopes in grandiloquent terms:

the Territory is now the adopted child of the six states constituting the Australian Commonwealth, each of which may be expected to take a natural paternal interest in the development of this backward portion of Australia until that time arrives when it shall have attained a strength and stature entitling it to take its place on an equal footing among the family of States.\(^6\)

\(\text{Justice Mitchell presiding at the transfer ceremony in Darwin, 2 January 1911}\)

**The New Administration**

Administrative control of the Northern Territory was handed to the Department of External Affairs under the leadership of the Secretary, Atlee Hunt, and the Minister, E.L. Batchelor, who was an influential politician in South Australia before Federation and was therefore familiar with the Territory and its problems. In spite of this, the bureaucrats seemed determined to start from scratch, and much valuable data amassed by South Australia was ignored. Even before the transfer was implemented, concern was expressed in Parliament and elsewhere about the difficulties of governing the Northern Territory from Melbourne.\(^7\) The Minister repeatedly assured the Parliament, the people of the Territory, and J.A. Gilruth himself when he accepted the appointment as the Territory’s first Administrator, that the

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\(^6\) “The Transfer of the Territory,” *NT Times*, 6 January 1911.
\(^7\) See, for example, CPD, 13 July 1910, vol. LV, p.369, when MHR Higgs stated that ‘I view with some anxiety the idea of the Commonwealth taking over the Territory if it is to be governed from Melbourne. We shall find considerable difficulty in governing a country some thousands of miles away from us’. (Before Canberra was established, most of the federal departments were based in Melbourne).
region would be governed from Darwin rather than Melbourne. By this he meant that Gilruth would make all practical decisions about developing the Territory and devise ways in which to implement them, while the Minister would be responsible for policy matters. The Melbourne staff of the Department of External Affairs would be used to provide practical assistance to the staff in the Northern Territory. This seemed highly satisfactory, but it never worked in practice, especially as the federal government made the same mistake as the South Australian authorities: the Administrator was head of the NT Administration, but there were other departments in the Territory where the staff were answerable to their head offices in the south. Thus, for example, the post and telegraph staff reported to, and were supervised by the Post Master General in Adelaide, and the Customs staff were also independent of the Administrator’s control.

**Unexpected Delays**

The appointment of a permanent Administrator and the formation of a specific policy for the Northern Territory were delayed for a considerable period partly because the Minister joined other senior Parliamentarians in attending both the coronation of King George V and the subsequent Imperial Conference in London, a trip which occupied many months. Meanwhile, the Department of External Affairs began their administration of the Northern Territory by recruiting scientific experts to visit the Territory, to report on its problems and its potential, and to give advice on development strategies. They also began recruiting senior public servants to take charge of branches of the administration in Darwin, and it was not long before Darwin was witness to many new arrivals.

Among the first was the former Director of Agriculture in New South Wales, W.S. Campbell, who arrived in May 1911 to investigate the possibility of establishing a viable agricultural industry in the Territory. He was followed in June by the so-called “Scientific Party” comprising anthropologist, Professor W. Baldwin Spencer, veterinarian, Professor Gilruth, geologist Dr Woolnough, and an expert on tropical medicine, Dr Breinl. Thus, the agricultural, mining and pastoral industries were covered and the health of the community was taken into consideration. The only business enterprise not investigated was the pearling.

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8 CPD, 3 July 1912, vol. LXIV, p.379.
9 This last issue was of great concern to the authorities because the question of whether white men, women and children could work and thrive in tropical climates was still in doubt. The debate continued until the 1920s. See P. P. Courtenay, “The White Man and the Australian Tropics: A Review of Some Opinions and Prejudices of the Pre-war Years” in Lectures on North Queensland History, Second Series, ed. B. J. Dalton (Townsville, Qld:
industry, but this was not surprising: the industry undoubtedly brought some income into the Territory, but it did not promote white settlement in the area, and the pearling crews were ‘Asiatics’. The current Labor government under Andrew Fisher was strongly committed to the White Australia policy and this industry represented a shameful breach in its pledge to stamp out the employment of non-white labour in Australia. The members of the Scientific Party made their inspections in Darwin and the hinterland and sent their reports to the Minister, who neglected to send copies to Acting Administrator Mitchell, a fact which he mentioned in his annual report.

New public servants also began to arrive in the middle of 1911. These included Superintendent of Works, W. Kellaway; the new Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines, Dr H. Basedow; Medical Inspectors J.T. Beckett and J.H. Kelly, who were attached to Basedow’s Department; the Stock Inspector J.C. Lewis; and the Railway Superintendent, H.V. Francis. Dr Basedow only remained in Darwin for forty-five days before leaving ‘in disgust’. According to federal parliamentarian Bruce Smith, the reasons he left so precipitately were ‘that he was expected to travel hundreds of miles at his own expense, and to provide an office at his own cost’. He was also dissatisfied with the unbusinesslike nature of the telegrams which came from the Department’s head office in Melbourne. Unofficially, as Fisher himself baldly stated in the same debate ‘he declined to take orders from the Administrator’, so it was clear that dissension had already infiltrated the ranks of the new public service in Darwin.

**Newcomers’ First Impressions**

A small number of the newcomers appreciated the charm of the little town perched on the plateau above one of the most beautiful harbours in Australia. Professor Baldwin Spencer was a case in point: in January 1912, on a morning following an overnight storm, he stood on
the balcony of the Hotel Victoria in Smith Street and surveyed an exotic and entrancing scene:

Darwin was looking its best. In front was an open space with trees like a little park, covered by tracks with stray natives going to their work and Chinamen jogging along with their great baskets hanging from poles across their shoulders. Beyond were scattered houses belonging to Chinatown … which though they are made of sheets of corrugated iron, looked very picturesque because they are jumbled together anyhow and painted all sorts of colours. Between houses I caught glimpses of the blue waters of an arm of the Harbour and, in the background, low hills rose covered with forest. The verandah is overgrown by a creeper with masses of pink flowers, amongst which big butterflies, four inches across their wings, jet-black with metallic-blue spots, and large bees, like the old-fashioned bumble-bee enjoy themselves all day long.\(^\text{15}\)

\[\text{The Hotel Victoria, 1915: Darwin’s most prestigious hotel at the time}\]

Many new arrivals, however, could only offer disparaging assessments of Darwin, and perhaps their opinions were coloured by their first impressions of the town as they arrived. After a journey by ship from Sydney which took at least twelve days,\(^\text{16}\) arriving passengers stepped ashore onto Stokes Hill wharf, which was always swarming with most of the town’s population when a ship arrived. The ‘silvertails’ were dressed immaculately in white trousers and jackets, and the Aboriginal, Asian and Coloured people were dressed in various styles according to their ethnic background. After disembarking, the newcomers were then faced with a lengthy walk along the wharf in daytime temperatures which were normally between

\(^{16}\) Annual Report, 1913, p.5.
twenty-nine and thirty-three degrees Celsius, dodging wharf labourers, cargo, railway trucks and their rails along the way. When they reached the right-angled bend in the wharf the little locomotive would be waiting patiently to take the trucks full of imported goods and luggage to the sorting sheds near the station.

The pathway from the jetty to the town, 1916

Occasionally there would be a carriage to take the passengers to the station. From there they would walk up an extremely steep path onto the plateau and trudge along Bennett Street, passing the occasional residence or office building belonging to the railway, and perhaps an Aboriginal humpy or two amongst the natural bushland. Their first sight of the more populated area of the town was, unfortunately, the backs of the blocks in Chinatown, which were crammed with a haphazard collection of insanitary shacks and shanties, although the buildings facing Cavenagh Street itself looked reasonably respectable. They must have felt some relief when they reached the familiar sights and smells of the European section of the town along Smith and Bennett Streets. Even here, however, the large number of undeveloped bush blocks scattered among the buildings gave the town an untidy, unfinished appearance. These blocks were a legacy of the land order holders who owned the blocks but had no intention of either occupying them, or selling or leasing them to people who were interested in settling in Darwin. They were a continual headache for the authorities, because they were used by all residents as convenient places to dump their rubbish, and were also a haven for
weeds such as horehound which flourished in the town and which blocked the rudimentary drains constructed and maintained by the Palmerston District Council.

Non-government buildings in the town at this time included

three hotels, several boarding houses, a convent school, Chinese and European stores, a newspaper office, two banks, market gardens and houses. Recreation facilities included a racecourse, tennis courts and an oval and grandstand.\textsuperscript{17}

A rather battered pool enclosure projected into the sea below Fort Hill. Private residences scattered throughout the town had a distinctive style owing to the wide verandahs enclosed by lattice ‘walls’ which were used as the main living area by their occupants. There were a number of official buildings in the centre of town, the most notable being the Government Residence, the customs house, the courthouse and police station, the post office, the town hall, and the school. Homes and single men’s quarters for government employees were also near the centre of town, or situated in The Camp area first set up by Goyder in 1869. The railway station and workshop were on the flat area below the escarpment near Frances Bay, and further away were the hospital, the botanic gardens and the gaol. Many of the government buildings were in a bad state of repair. Kellaway, the new Superintendent of Public Works blamed this on the 1897 cyclone when inadequate materials were used to repair the offices and homes in a hurry.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{center}
\textit{Smith Street, 1915}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{17} Carment, \textit{Australia’s Northern Capital}, p.11.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Annual Report}, 1911, p.57.
A further shock suffered by newcomers on arriving in Darwin was the standard of accommodation available to them. The government’s existing single men’s quarters were crammed full and the only other accommodation was a few boarding houses and the overcrowded hotels where the food was basic and monotonous and the surroundings were always noisy and, at times, extremely rowdy. It was common for three or four men to be crammed into hotel rooms designed to accommodate one or two people. Occasionally it became necessary to house newly arrived public servants in the shed at the government stables until more suitable accommodation could be found for them. Married couples faced the same problems: they were often forced to live in a single room at one of the hotels for months before they managed to find a house to rent at highly inflated rates.

An elite residence with wide verandahs and shutters to allow airflow and protection from the rain

The town’s infrastructure was also inadequate when judged by southern standards. There was no reticulated water: the residents relied on wells and water tanks, and shortage of water was a common problem at the end of each Dry season. There was no reticulated electricity in 1911. Lighting in the streets and at the hotels and other public places, such as the town hall, was supplied by acetylene gas, while families used traditional light sources, such as candles and kerosene lamps. Rubbish collection was haphazard and ‘night soil’ collection was sporadic and insanitary. Many of the roads in the town were overgrown with weeds and small saplings. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish the road reserve from the surrounding allotments. H.E. Carey, writing in 1937, claimed that in 1912 the new Administration discovered that ‘part of two streets had been leased for years to a Chinese gardener by a European who considered he owned the land’.

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19 Annual Report, 1912, p.3.
21 H.E. Carey, “Notes on Gilruth’s Administration,” 1937, Australian Academy of Science, Basser Library, Item 7/2, Series 8: Material relating to Dr Gilruth’s term as Administrator of the Northern Territory, 1912-20.
The supply of food was also a continuing problem for Darwin residents. It was very expensive and the stocks held in the local stores occasionally ran dangerously low if the arrival of the regular steamer were delayed or the unloading of the cargo were held up by strikes by the wharf labourers. The choice of food items was limited and fresh fruit and vegetables were often in short supply, especially after the anti-Chinese policies of both the South Australian and the federal governments resulted in the departure of many of the Chinese market gardeners in the Territory.

These conditions were a particular shock to the white public servants who came to the Territory at this time. It is difficult to ascertain whether non-European people who lived in Darwin found them equally daunting. Evidence available in oral histories dealing with later decades suggests that Darwin’s non-European population tended to form more closely-knit groups whose members co-operated to support each other in times of trouble, and participated in hunting and gathering activities to supplement the store-bought food available in Darwin. Many Asian and Coloured families also cultivated small vegetable gardens and kept hens and goats. The living conditions and climate were probably more familiar to them also, so the ‘culture shock’ would not have been so great. Certainly, most of the oral histories paint a picture of a vibrant community life where the people including the children, were both happy and healthy, in spite of the material hardships, privations and prejudice they faced.
**Darwin’s residents in 1911**

At this time, Darwin had a polyethnic population of 1,387 of which only 375 were of European extraction. Before the arrival of the new Commonwealth officers, there were about twenty-six white public servants in Darwin. The remainder of the Whites were either residents of long standing or people from South Australia employed in private enterprises, such as the banks, or Jolly’s store.

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**Figure 6: Population of Darwin, 1911. Source: NAA: A1, 1911/16191**

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22 It is interesting to note that the number of Aborigines in the town is listed in this report. Aborigines were not officially counted in Australian census figures until 1967.

23 NAA: A3, 1912/6353. This “Return of persons employed in the Northern Territory Department” was compiled by Acting Administrator Mitchell on 1 February 1911. The list includes the names of three Chinese employed at the Botanic Gardens, three employed at the hospital and one employed as a servant in the Residency.
W. Baldwin Spencer painted a dismal picture of the white community when he wrote to Gilruth from his office in Darwin while working as the Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1912. ‘Everybody seems to have got into a more or less hopelessly despondent condition [and] is content to go along the path of least resistance,’ he observed.24 Spencer also warned Gilruth of the duplicity of some of the leading merchants such as Jolly, Bell and Brown. They owned mines which were operated with Chinese labour and were inclined to ignore the White Australia policy when it suited them. As far as the administration in Darwin was concerned, he observed that ‘the place ... has been run by Holtze [and] one or two others for years past [and] new blood is badly needed.’25

In his letter, Spencer also gives us a glimpse into the problems of obtaining domestic help in Darwin. Spencer had ensured that the servant (Chee Quee) at the Residence was willing to work for Gilruth, but he was doubtful about satisfying Gilruth’s request for two more ‘boys’ to work as domestics for the family. Apparently suitable ‘boys’ were hard to find in Darwin, and Spencer also expressed his anxiety about obtaining ‘white maids’. He did not think them practicable, especially as there was no suitable accommodation for them in the Residence.26

![Gilruth’s Chinese servants outside Government House. Ah Chow (seated), Ah Bong, (table boy), Ah How (dhobi), and unnamed houseboy](image)

24 Basser Library, Item 7/2, Series 8: W. Baldwin Spencer to J. A. Gilruth, 4 March 1912.
25 Nicholas Holtze grew up in Darwin where his father was curator of the Botanic Gardens. He held many positions in the public service including that of Government Secretary and was also responsible for the Gardens. See Eve Gibson, “Holtze, Nicholas,” in NTBD, vol. 1, pp.152-4.
26 See Lowrie, “In Service of Empire” for a description of domestic servitude in Darwin.
In view of the prejudice expressed by both the government and the unions about employing Asian labour, this was a serious problem for Gilruth throughout the term of his administration.

The non-availability of domestic servants was apparently not the only labour problem in Darwin. While Spencer was writing his letter, Kellaway was superintending repair work on the Residence. ‘I am amused at your asking me to hurry up Callaway (sic) – he is willing enough to hurry but the workmen are not and as there is no one to take the place of anyone who may be turned off and as the whole lot would strike promptly if one were dismissed Callaway’s hairs are turning grey.’ Further information of labour problems in Darwin were provided by Kellaway in his first annual report. ‘The greatest handicap of all has been the impossibility to obtain skilled tradesmen in any numbers, the place is overrun – to my mind cursed – with a superabundance of handy men. The tradesmen I have are of a better stamp, but, unfortunately, some of them cannot be relied upon for a few days after pay day, owing to the tendency to drink.’ However, in this remote place ‘we must put up with them and await their pleasure to return to work’. Presumably, Kellaway was talking about white labour in his report. The Chinese and Coloured labour was cheaper and more reliable, but the Fisher government was adamant in its determination to employ white labour wherever possible.

Most of the non-European labouring class in Darwin lived in or near Chinatown in Cavenagh Street. A sketch map drawn up with the help of a former resident of Darwin and published in the *South Australian Register* after the 1897 cyclone shows a part of Cavenagh Street between Bennett and Knuckey Streets as ‘Malay Town’. It indicates that these people probably preferred to live within their own community although they had many links with their Chinese neighbours, patronising their stores, their gambling dens and their brothels, and working with them on construction and other labouring jobs in the town, and as domestic servants. It seems fairly certain, though, that they did not entertain one another in their homes, but limited social contact to general community events and celebrations where all the residents gathered together for a particular purpose. The white residents also attended these events, but otherwise kept themselves aloof and rarely fraternised with the Coloured and Asian population.

27 Basser Library, Item 7/2, Series 8: W. Baldwin Spencer to J.A. Gilruth, 4 March 1912. Spencer has misspelt the name of the Superintendent of Works, which is Kellaway, not ‘Callaway’.
28 Annual Report, 1911, p.56.
Acting Administrator Mitchell

In spite of the lack of a permanent head of the Administration in the Territory a considerable amount of work was accomplished in the first eighteen months after the transfer ceremony. The former South Australian Government Resident, now Acting Administrator, Judge Mitchell, was able to keep matters ticking over while he waited for the arrival of his successor, in spite of the difficulties put in his way by the Department’s bureaucrats in Melbourne. Mitchell was a popular man in the Territory. Since his election as a Northern Territory representative in the South Australian Parliament in 1901, he had won the respect and affection of his constituents through his energetic promotion of the Territory and his vigorous campaigning for the construction of a transcontinental railway from Adelaide to Darwin. His appointment to the position of Government Resident in 1910 was greeted with satisfaction in the Territory.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth government was determined to start afresh and rejected Mitchell’s bid to become the Territory’s first Administrator. The Department of External Affairs Secretary, Atlee Hunt, for example, referred to him as ‘poor little Mitchell’.

In his letter to Gilruth, Baldwin Spencer also referred to Mitchell as ‘the poor little G.R.’ and noted that the government ‘seems to me to have treated him with studied discourtesy’. Many details of this discourtesy have been lost, but on at least one occasion the Minister publicly humiliated Mitchell by rejecting his right to promise financial assistance to a group of miners.

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who wished to prospect in the Territory.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{NT Times} referred to this incident as ‘The hullabaloo raised by the Minister in the early days of his Honor’s (\textit{sic}) administration’ and stated that it ‘was only the first of a series of humiliations gratuitously heaped on the Acting Administrator’.\textsuperscript{32} This treatment incensed many local residents, and the Chinese and the European deputations who farewelled Mitchell when he left Darwin a year later each presented him with addresses which expressed sympathy for the trials he suffered following the transition to Commonwealth administration.\textsuperscript{33} Mitchell somehow managed to continue working in spite of these humiliations, and he did his best to assist the incoming public servants to find residential and office accommodation and to begin their designated work in the Northern Territory.

**The Administration and Indigenous Inhabitants**

Both the Chinese and the Aboriginal populations of Darwin were immediately and profoundly affected by the new regime. At the time of the transfer to Commonwealth control the federal government was coming under increasing pressure from benevolent societies who demanded that something be done to promote the welfare of the Aboriginal population of Australia. Yet another powerful lobby group, the Association for the Protection of Native Races, was formed in Sydney in 1911. This fact, along with the Administration’s concern over the increasing number of part-Aboriginal children in the region made it almost inevitable that one of the government’s first actions in the Northern Territory was to start work on the ‘protection’ of the Aborigines.

Shortly before the transfer the South Australian parliament had passed the \textit{Northern Territory Aborigines Act 1910} and the Commonwealth adapted this Act slightly and promulgated it as the \textit{Aboriginal Ordinance} in 1911.\textsuperscript{34} The authorities planned to take action on the matter immediately the appropriate staff was in Darwin. The unexpected resignation of Dr Basedow delayed matters somewhat, but by the end of 1911, Professor Baldwin Spencer had been contracted to act as Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines for a period of

\textsuperscript{31} Donovan, \textit{Other End of Australia}, p.10.

\textsuperscript{32} “Squeezing Out Process,” \textit{NT Times}, 5 April 1912.

\textsuperscript{33} NTAS: NTRS 324. MITCHELL, Samuel James. Album of appointments and official communications, 1884-1925, and “Departure of Mr. Justice Mitchell,” \textit{NT Times}, 12 April 1912.

\textsuperscript{34} Northern Territory ordinances were drawn up by the bureaucracy and endorsed by the Governor-General-in-Council. See Alistair Heatley, \textit{The Government of the Northern Territory} (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1979), p.49: ‘While in theory the ordinances were open to scrutiny and capable of being disallowed by parliament, in practice such controls were rarely used and never successful.’ Some Members of Parliament objected to this method of administering the Territory as ‘a Crown colony under the Imperial Government’. See for example, CPD, 13 November 1912, vol. LXVIII, p.5417.
twelve months, and he lost no time in transforming the lives of Darwin’s Aboriginal inhabitants.

Before the provisions of the Ordinance began to be applied, Aborigines in Darwin roamed more or less freely through the town. The Larrakia, the traditional custodians of the area, had one permanent camp at Lameroo beach and ‘one on top of the cliffs ... called the King Camp because the head man “King Solomon” lived there’. Spencer noted that while the top camp was squalid and dirty, the lower one ‘nestled quite picturesquely amongst the fig trees that covered the cliff sides down to the level of the beach’. Other Aboriginal groups set up their own camps on vacant lots on the outskirts of the built up areas. The population in these camps fluctuated on a daily basis as Aborigines came in from the bush to visit friends and relatives in town, but there was a significant core of what could be called ‘permanent’ residents in the camps. These people were employed by Chinese, white and some Coloured families and businessmen for domestic and other labouring duties for which they were usually paid in kind, with food and the occasional items of clothing, and an average of about two shillings per week. White residents freely admitted that they depended on the Aborigines for cheap labour, but this did not prevent them from complaining that their behaviour was noisy, their dogs were unruly, and their camps were insanitary.

Aborigines at their camp, ca.1911

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35 Spencer, Wanderings, p.610.
36 Ibid.
37 NAA: A1, 1912/10964.
38 Ibid.
There were other problems too, and the Administration was determined to prohibit the supply of alcohol and opium to Aborigines and to stamp out prostitution amongst the Aboriginal women and thus limit the number of Half-caste children in the town and reduce the incidence of venereal disease. In spite of acknowledging privately that many of these children had European fathers, white authorities publicly laid the blame for these problems directly onto the Chinese members of the community and Baldwin Spencer took swift action after he arrived on 15 January 1912. His diary entry for 9 February noted that Chinatown was now declared a prohibited area and Aborigines who had to go into Chinatown were issued with brass discs to ‘act as permits’.  

Over the years since white people had invaded Larrakia lands, the creation of compounds to house the Aborigines who lingered around the urban communities of Darwin and Pine Creek was occasionally suggested by authorities and interested citizens. Spencer himself recommended this strategy in the report he submitted as a member of the Scientific Party of 1911. A mere five days after arriving in Darwin the following year to take up his position, Spencer decided to choose a site for an Aboriginal compound. He decided

- it must be (1) far enough away to make it possible to isolate the Aboriginals when necessary as, for example, at night, but near enough to allow those in employment in Darwin to walk to and from their daily work;  
- must provide an upper and lower site as at Lameroo;  
- there must be enough land for a garden.

On 20 January 1912, he chose a 13-acre site incorporating Kahlin Beach and the area on the cliffs above the beach. There were market gardens in the area operated by two Chinese men, but they ‘were given notice to quit and simply disappeared’. By 1913, work had commenced on the site. It was fenced and sixteen bark and corrugated iron huts for families, plus dormitories for unattached men and women were built in the first year. Other buildings included a kitchen, laundry, office, store room, coach house, fodder room, and a fowl house.

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40 Samantha Wells, “Labour, Control and Protection” in *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, ed. Peter Read (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000), p.67. It would be very interesting to know how much Spencer was influenced by King Solomon and other family members when he formulated these criteria. Wells maintains that the Larrakia and other clans in Darwin were far more proactive than most historians give them credit for. With the absence of adequate documentary evidence, or oral history records this cannot be proven, but the first people to move to the Compound apparently did so willingly. It seems that, initially at least, the Kahlin Compound was acceptable to the Larrakia people.
41 5.26 hectares.
42 Spencer, *Wanderings*, p.611.
All buildings were constructed under supervision by the Compound labour force.\textsuperscript{43} There were over 300 Aborigines in Darwin at the time, but only seventy-six chose to move into the compound at first.\textsuperscript{44} As the years passed, regulations regarding the Aborigines were tightened and an increasing number of Aboriginal residents were compelled to move into the compound. When the new \textit{Aboriginals Ordinance} was promulgated in 1918, almost all Indigenous residents were subject to a curfew which required them to return to the compound each night.\textsuperscript{45} These measures were taken for the ‘protection’ of the Aborigines, but there is little evidence that the compound and the curfew, reduced the amount of prostitution, or the opium and alcohol abuse amongst the Aborigines to any significant degree. What is certain is that the new regime managed to deprive the Aborigines of their freedom, and increase their dependency on a welfare system.

\textbf{The Chinese Residents}

Chinese residents were also adversely affected by the Commonwealth takeover of the Territory. The government’s White Australia policy, backed up by legislation, gave all Europeans the licence to practice rampant racism against them regardless of whether they were naturalised Australians or not. As early as January 1911, the government banned the employment of Chinese workers on the wharves and elsewhere in Darwin.\textsuperscript{46} The leading Chinese citizens wrote a letter of protest to Acting Administrator Mitchell in March 1911. Their complaints included the fact that owing to the government’s policies, many Chinese now had no means of earning a living. Government employment opportunities had disappeared, they were no longer permitted to obtain fishing licences, and they were being evicted from the goldfields. The Chinese merchants were also disadvantaged because they were no longer able to employ Aboriginal servants. ‘Many of us have had the blackboys in our employ for years [and] have always treated them well,’\textsuperscript{47} the letter claimed. Their protests fell on deaf ears. The same issues were raised by a deputation of Chinese who waited on the Minister when he visited Darwin in May 1912. By this time they were also complaining about the fact that no Chinese could be naturalised, and that Chinese merchants

\textsuperscript{44} Wells, “Labour, Control and Protection,” p.67.
\textsuperscript{45} Martinez, “Plural Australia,” pp.126 and 179.
\textsuperscript{46} Jones, \textit{Chinese in the NT}, p.87; and Alcorta, \textit{Darwin Rebellion}, p.6.
\textsuperscript{47} NAA: A1, 1912/10547.
in Darwin and Pine Creek were losing trade because the Chinatown sections in both towns had been declared prohibited areas.48

Further problems arose when the Territory’s first union, the Amalgamated Workers’ Association was formed in March 1912. The Labor government specified that all government work should be performed by members of a union. The Association refused to admit Chinese workers, so the Chinese entrepreneurs were unable to tender for government contracts, and Chinese workers had even less chance of obtaining employment. The government continued to ignore most of the complaints proffered by the Chinese at this time and many Chinese residents left the Territory. The racial discrimination continued but the remaining Chinese were still a force to be reckoned with in Darwin. A considerable number were landowners and, as such, they had some influence on the Town Council. They also provided many essential services and supplies to residents of all colours with their laundries, barber shops, bakeries and stores, and Chinese market gardeners and fishermen still supplied the town with fresh fruit, vegetables and fish.

Resentment Grows

By the time the new Administrator arrived in April 1912, exasperation and resentment towards the Commonwealth administration had grown alarmingly. The Chinese and other Asian and Islander people were being harassed and discriminated against, the Aborigines’ access to Chinatown was curtailed and the paternalistic control of their activities was becoming more heavy-handed each day. Incoming white residents, most of whom were public servants, were resentful of the lack of amenities available to them in both their private and their working lives. The permanent white residents were seething at the condescension evident in the new public servants’ attitude towards them, and at the Department’s wilful rejection of their advice which was based on their long experience of living in the Territory. They deeply resented the fact that public service positions were only advertised in the south, so local Territorians had no chance of applying for jobs with the new Administration.49 They were angry that the government was spending over £400 per month on the Aborigines50 yet refused to start work on such projects as the transcontinental railway and schemes to assist the ailing mining industry. They also criticised the experimental farms established at

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48 Ibid.
49 “Squeezing Out Process,” *NT Times*, 5 April 1912.
Batchelor and at the Daly River early in 1912 and the release of farming land on the Daly River, the Adelaide River and at Stapleton.\textsuperscript{51} They considered it was a premature move to promote farming ventures while the population was too small to provide a local market and there were no plans to establish a railway to transport the produce to southern outlets.

**Parliamentary Representation**

A further aggravation which was to cause a great deal of friction in future years was the lack of parliamentary representation in the Territory. Under the South Australian administration, Territorians were granted separate representation in 1887.\textsuperscript{52} With the transfer to Commonwealth control, Territorians were disenfranchised. Most people seemed resigned about this situation, but a group of ex-Territorians, who met in Melbourne in January 1911, resolved to ‘protest against the present disfranchisement of the inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and [recommend] that this disability be quashed by the granting of four representatives, viz., two in the Senate and two in the House of Representatives’.\textsuperscript{53} The newspaper’s report, however, was less than sympathetic. It questioned the advisability of raising a protest at that time considering the small number of people in the Territory, and suggested that it would perhaps be better for Territorians to lobby for some form of local government. By the end of the year, however, it was expressing a different view. ‘Tenderfoot’ for example, clearly stated that ‘the Government has no intention of granting the franchise to Territorians at present, nor is there any promise of its being granted in the near future’, and claimed that ‘taxation without representation is nothing more nor less than political robbery’.\textsuperscript{54} Thus dissatisfaction about the matter was already evident in 1911, and the citizens’ protests about it grew increasingly strident as the years passed.

**Conclusion**

By the time the new Administrator arrived in Darwin, it was clear that his job promised to be a difficult one from the start. The people were already disenchanted with the new regime. The prolonged negotiations with South Australia over the transfer had wearied them. In the white residents’ view, money was being ‘wasted’ on the Indigenous population while very little was being done to encourage industrial development in the hinterland or to improve amenities in Darwin itself. In addition to that, the unfair treatment meted out to Mitchell and

\textsuperscript{51} Stapleton is 11.3km north-west of Adelaide River.

\textsuperscript{52} The first two Territory members of the SA Parliament did not take their seats until 1889.

\textsuperscript{53} “North Australian League,” *NT Times*, 27 January 1911.

\textsuperscript{54} “Left-Handed Justice [By ‘Tenderfoot’],” *NT Times*, 29 December 1911.
the disdain shown to ‘old-time’ Territorians were deeply resented. The new bureaucratic arrangements were also guaranteed to create serious problems. The promise that the Territory would be governed from Darwin was ignored, and many decisions, which ideally required local knowledge, were made in Melbourne. Also, the Administrator did not have complete control of the public service working in the Territory, and budget allocations, which were decided on by the authorities in Melbourne, were difficult to administer because of the wet-dry tropical climate which halted public works for four months of each year soon after public money was made available. In spite of the federal politicians’ belief that they could do a better job than the South Australians, their first efforts were not a success.
Chapter Four

The Gilruth Regime, 1912-1919

The First Administrator

John Anderson Gilruth was appointed the first Administrator of the Northern Territory on 25 March 1912.\(^1\) He seemed an ideal candidate for the position. A trained veterinarian, he was highly respected in academic circles, he was a man of decided opinions, and his tall imposing figure was guaranteed to command respect in any situation. Unfortunately, he was also authoritarian and very obstinate. It was almost impossible to persuade him to change his opinion or to make compromises, and he did not bother to hide his contempt or dislike of people who crossed him. A more conciliatory person would perhaps have weathered the storms to come: Gilruth was forced to leave the Territory in ignominious retreat.

In spite of all the dissatisfaction in Darwin about the first year of Commonwealth rule, the leading citizens managed to stage a warm welcome to Gilruth, his wife Jeannie and his two daughters when they arrived in Darwin on 16 April 1912. Heads of government departments, members of the District Council and the Chairman of the newly-formed Darwin branch of the

\(^1\) For further biographical details, see Alan Powell, “Gilruth, John Anderson (1871-1937)” in ADB; [database online], available at http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090017B.htm?hilite=gilruth [accessed 5 November 2007]
Australian Workers’ Association took part in the welcoming ceremony, which closed with the presentation of an elaborate framed address from the Chinese community.  

Gilruth lost no time establishing his authority with his staff and with the community as a whole. Word had already been passed that Gilruth was to be called ‘His Excellency’ and, five days after his arrival at a garden party held in the Residence’s grounds to welcome the visiting Parliamentary party, he announced that the building was henceforth to be called ‘Government House’. As Rosenzweig pointed out, Gilruth ‘saw himself more as a colonial Viceroy than a senior public servant and to complete this view, within two months of his arrival ... he had insisted upon his appointment as an officer in the AMF’.  

A mere six days after Gilruth and his family settled into Government House, a group of federal Members of Parliament headed by the Minister for External Affairs, Josiah Thomas, arrived in Darwin. Residents took advantage of the Minister’s presence and a number of deputations formally presented their requests to him. One group requested that a Workingmen’s Club be established in Darwin. The Chinese deputation repeated the complaints they raised with Acting Administrator Mitchell in March 1911, while a group of white parents requested better education facilities in the Territory, including a separate school for European children, and teachers for kindergarten, primary and secondary classes. When the Northern Territory Progress Association met the Minister, the members urged the need to build a government-owned meat works in the Territory. The Minister promised this would be done as soon as Gilruth had time to select a site, and it was announced on 30 August 1912 that the government would build a freezing works in Darwin. 

Further senior public servants arrived in the following months, including the High Court Judge, David Bevan, the Director of Lands, George Ryland, and the Director of Mines, Harald Jensen. Members of the Opposition became increasingly strident in their criticism of

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2 “Arrival of the Administrator,” *NT Times*, 19 April 1912. The newspaper noted that, for the first time at such ceremonies, the Chinese had abandoned their traditional dress and had donned European clothes and cut their queues off. 

3 Rosenzweig, *House of Seven Gables*, p.46. ‘AMF’ is the abbreviation for ‘Australian Military Forces’.

4 NAA: A1, 1912/10305.

5 NAA: A1, 1912/10547.

6 NAA: A1, 1912/10548.

7 NAA: A1, 1912/10703.

the number of public servants being appointed and repeatedly questioned the criteria on which these men were selected. On 8 October 1912, for example, MHR McWilliams referred to the ‘huge army of very highly-paid officials’ but complained that ‘up-to-date we have done actually nothing in the way of settling the Territory’. The conservative members of both Houses were also suspicious of the appointment of officers having strong affiliations with the Labor Party. George Ryland, for example had been a Labor Party member of the Queensland Parliament for a number of years before his appointment, and Harald Jensen was well-known for his socialist convictions. Gilruth and his senior officers were also criticised when they travelled inland to investigate the conditions relative to their fields of expertise. Gilruth himself set out on the first of his many inland expeditions in his new motor car on 2 September 1912. In spite of the fact that these prolonged absences of senior Administration officers were probably necessary, the situation was reported critically in *The Age* under the headline ‘Chaos in the Territory’ and more complaints were voiced in Parliament.

However, the influx of public servants was working wonders for Darwin’s economy and merchants and professional men in the town were reaping the benefits, while the prospects for employment reassured the working class white population. The increasing number of passengers bound for Darwin also improved the frequency and standard of shipping services to the region. A new vessel, the *Montoro*, was introduced to the Darwin passenger-cargo

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9 CPD, 8 October 1912, vol. LXVI, p.3953.
route between east coast ports and Asia by Burns Philp and the Dutch Royal Packet Company restored the regular passenger, cargo and mail service they had cancelled in 1910. Business activity in the town began to accelerate to the benefit of all residents. In June 1912, for example, businessman Ernest Felix Holmes installed an electricity plant and opened his cold storage and ice-making store on the corner of Knuckey and Smith Streets. A power plant was also installed at the railway yards in the same year, and this supplied power to Government House and other official buildings and operated refrigeration and freezing works for the government.

**Gilruth’s Disputes with his Staff**

Cordial relations between Gilruth and his staff did not last long. One of the first disputes to become public knowledge was over government working hours. Without bothering to consult with those involved, Gilruth raised the matter of changing government office hours with his Council of Advice at a meeting on 18 July 1912. Gilruth proposed that henceforth government offices would be open from 7.00 am to 4.00 pm. Some Council members disagreed with this and the debate must have angered Gilruth because he stopped convening the Council. In spite of this opposition, the new office hours were announced in the *NT Times* on 26 July, and took effect from 1 August 1912. The announcement caused a furore. The men pointed out that the boarding houses and hotels were not prepared to start serving breakfast at 6 am. Gilruth relented and changed the starting time to 7.30pm. This meant that the men were working four and a half hours between breakfast and lunch but Gilruth remained firm about the revised hours. The men refused to comply and continued to work from 8 am until 5 pm. Gilruth retaliated by docking them an hour’s pay. The impasse was eventually resolved in November 1912, with Gilruth the victor, but it is doubtful whether his success in this comparatively trivial matter was worth the bitter resentment the dispute caused.

The discord between Gilruth and his staff continued to escalate. Gilruth showed very little concern for the well-being of the men working under him. In 1914, for example, a group of

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14 NAA: F239, VOLUME 1. This body had been established by an Ordinance in 1911, and comprised the Administrator, as presiding officer, and senior members of his staff. The Council was convened only once more after July 1912. In Gilruth’s absence, Railway Superintendent H.V. Francis summoned the Council members on 28 April 1913 to ‘discuss departmental action in regard to the strike’.
single men petitioned Gilruth to allow them to form a mess in the building known as the ‘officer’s quarters’ which Gilruth had taken over for government offices. Gilruth refused the request and showed little sympathy for the men who were forced to live in the hotels in town.15 By far the most serious of the conflicts between the Administrator and his staff, however, was the feud which developed between Gilruth and the Director of Mines, Harald Jensen.16 In 1914 Gilruth demoted Jensen to the position of Chief Geologist, and installed T.G. Oliver as Director. Two years later, Jensen ‘was foolish enough to charge Gilruth with forty-three offences ranging from slander to misuse of government horses and undue interference in the Mines Department’.17 The Royal Commission headed by Mr Justice A.N. Barnett, which was appointed in May 1916 to investigate Jensen’s charges against the NT Administration judged that ‘Dr. Jensen has failed to substantiate any of his charges’.18 Jensen was suspended from the Public Service on 23 August 1916 and dismissed six weeks later.19

Gilruth quickly developed a talent for getting rid of potential troublemakers or subordinates who might challenge his authority. In January 1913, he dismissed the long-serving Government Secretary, Nicholas Holtze, one of the few public servants left from the South Australian years and the only senior staff member who had actually spent his childhood in Darwin. Holtze was replaced by Henry Carey, who came to the Territory in 1912 as Gilruth’s private secretary. The Sydney Morning Herald, criticised the appointment of officials who had little knowledge of the tropics, and pointed out that ‘The present administration has now a clear field, untrammelled by past traditions’20 which was no doubt at least part of the reason why Holtze was dismissed. In the following year the positions of Director of Schools, Director of Lands, Director of Agriculture and Superintendent of Railways were abolished.21 As a result of this move, Gilruth was accused of ‘trying to put all power in the hands of sycophants – most of the duties ended up in the hands of the

15 “Accentuating the Curse,” NT Times, 18 June 1914.
17 Powell, Far Country, p.145. See also NAA: A3832, RC19 ITEMS 1 & 2..
18 A.N. Barnett, “Report on the Royal Commission to Enquire into and Report on Certain Charges Against the Administrator and Other Officers of the Northern Territory Administration. (Sydney, 3 August 1916), p.32. (CDU Library, Special Collection, photocopy).
21 The Liberal government came into power in June 1913 and the new Minister Patrick McMahon Glynn no doubt encouraged Gilruth to get rid of the ‘radicals’.
Government Accountant, R.J. Evans and the Government Secretary H.E. Carey’ both of whom he had appointed. Henry Carey in particular became increasingly influential. He had assumed the role of Chief Protector of Aborigines on the retirement of Baldwin Spencer’s successor W. Stretton, and he had taken on positions such as that of Public Trustee and Sheriff previously held by Nicholas Holtze. He also took over responsibility for both Lands and Agriculture when the Directors were dismissed. Senator Ferricks later described Carey as “‘Pooh Bah’ to Dr. Gilruth’s “Mikado”” and his meteoric rise through the ranks of the public service was viewed with suspicion from the start.

**Gilruth and the White Citizens of Darwin**

One of the most critical problems confronting Gilruth on his arrival was the shortage of both office and residential accommodation for all the incoming public servants. Office space was acquired by squeezing new staff into existing offices and renting any available houses, no matter what their condition, to convert into business premises. Single men’s quarters were erected on some land opposite the convent and were completed in mid-January 1913, but there was also a need for married quarters, and the decision was made to build sixteen new cottages in Darwin. The only problem was that there were no allotments available in the surveyed part of the town, so Gilruth decided to utilise Crown land on what was then known as ‘Dead Horse Point’.

From the time the Palmerston District Council was established in June 1874 there had been intermittent battles between the Council and the local administration about the latter’s expropriation of so-called ‘Park lands’ for official purposes. This occasion was no exception, and both the Council and the Northern Territory Progress Association wrote strong letters of protest about the requisition of the newly-named ‘Myilly Point’ for government housing, wrongly claiming the area was ‘dedicated as park land’. Gilruth dismissed these protests, saying that the Council had never spent any money to develop the land outside the town boundaries, nor had it ever protested about the Chinese market gardeners who built their huts...

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22 *Powell, Far Country*, p.143.
25 “News & Notes,” *NT Times*, 27 March 1913. On 10 April 1913 the *NT Times* suggested that it was ‘about time ... that this locality was given some more sweet smelling name’ and it was probably Gilruth who gave it the name “Myilli” after the Larrakia word for “stones”. See “Place Names Register Extract: Myilly Point,” in *Place Names Register* (Darwin: Place Names Committee for the Northern Territory, 2011); [database online] available at [http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/placenames/](http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/placenames/). [accessed 21 April 2011].
in the area. ‘Apparently,’ he wrote, ‘objections to a few acres of so-called heritage being used for decent dwellings for white officials and workers do not apply to Chinese hovels’.27 Once it was firmly established that the area had never been proclaimed a reserve, a contract was awarded to Harold Snell who arrived in Darwin to construct the houses and who stayed to become one of the most reputable builders in the town.

This was just one of the issues which raised the ire of the white middle class residents in Darwin and soured their relationship with Gilruth. His dictatorial manner and his refusal to consult with the townspeople infuriated these citizens. With the release of his first annual report in 1913, they were incensed by his scornful criticism of the local entrepreneurs’ failure to show ‘ordinary business acumen, let alone enterprise’28 by not building more residences, boarding houses and hotels on learning about the transfer with its new, vigorous developmental policy and the inevitable concomitant influx of population. ‘Accommodation at the three hotels has not been increased by a single bedroom. No old boarding-house has been extended, and no new one built. But the tariffs have been raised’.29 Gilruth made no secret of his dislike of Darwin. In his 1912 report he also referred to Bitter Springs, known by the Aborigines as ‘Mataranka’, as ‘an excellent site for an inland capital, with an inexhaustible water supply, in probably the best climate of the northern part of the Territory, and fairly equidistant from all possible ports.’

27 NAA: A3, 1915/2838.  
28 Annual Report, 1912, p.3.  
29 Ibid.
The year 1913 also marked the confrontation between Gilruth and one of the most popular and influential men in Darwin. C.J. Kirkland came to Darwin in 1883 and, with his partner, Mayhew, established the Territory’s second newspaper, the *North Australian*. In 1889 the two men took over the *NT Times* and discontinued the *North Australian*. From the outset, Gilruth vigorously criticised the *NT Times* and openly regretted the fact that Acting Administrator Mitchell had renewed the government contract with Kirkland to print the *Government Gazette* for a further five years. It is clear that the Administration would have no sympathy for Kirkland if he ever overstepped the mark, and that is exactly what happened.

While reporting a case of indecent assault, Kirkland accused Judge Bevan of bias in his summing up of the trial and in his directions to the jury. He was immediately charged with contempt of court and fined £100 plus costs. Kirkland refused to pay the fine and was promptly escorted to Fannie Bay gaol. Public indignation was widespread and over two hundred people donated money towards paying the fine. The following day a cavalcade of vehicles travelled to Fannie Bay gaol to see Kirkland released and to accompany him back to Darwin where he was ‘made the chief figure in a popular demonstration the recollection of which still makes my brain whirl’. A local correspondent writing for ‘certain influential southern journals’ described the public meeting held that night: ‘Conservatives fraternised with labourites, white Australians with Chinese, rabid Socialists with business men, all assembled to honor (sic) their hitherto very retiring citizen, Charles James Kirkland’. In his address to this meeting, Kirkland frankly confessed that he should have spoken out more strongly about ‘matters of public moment ... particularly since the inauguration of the present administration,’ but he was constrained because of his dependence on the income derived from the government for printing the *Government Gazette*. If the descriptions of this affair are even halfway accurate, it was a remarkable event, unifying the people in an unprecedented way, even though it occurred during a bitter industrial dispute which was in danger of seriously inconveniencing business people and the general public by halting activities at the wharf.

30 NAA: A3, 1913/5390: J. A. Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, 9 May 1912.
31 “Peculiar Trials,” *NT Times*, 24 April 1913.
33 Ibid.
34 “Woolley-Manikov Affair,” *NT Times*, 1 May 1913.
Gilruth and the Asian and Coloured Citizens of Darwin

Gilruth’s handling of the public health issues in Darwin showed his typical high-handed response to any situation. It had long been acknowledged that the crowded, insanitary hovels in Chinatown were a health hazard. The Local Board of Health occasionally issued warning notices to landowners but these were never followed up with further action. Gilruth wasted no time in taking charge of the situation, and in June 1912 an Ordinance decreed that the Local Board of Health was henceforth directly responsible to the Administrator, who became, in effect, the Central Board of Health.

One of the official photographs of Chinatown’s condemned buildings, 1914

Dr Mervyn Holmes, who was originally recruited for the Aboriginal Department, was appointed as the Officer of Health in the following month. In his first report he praised many aspects of the European section of Darwin, although he was critical of the methods of waste disposal and the lack of a secure water supply for the town. When dealing with Chinatown he described the ‘uncontrolled and unorganized buildings’ and the ‘chaotic congestion’ which ‘increases the difficulties associated with drainage and sanitation in general’ and he warned that it would be necessary to ‘pull down many of the present hopelessly insanitary and unsafe buildings.’ Holmes dealt in detail with seventy-one tenements, some of which held three and four families per tenement. With Gilruth’s

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36 The Local Board of Health was made up of members of the District Council and was answerable to a largely indifferent Central Board of Health in Adelaide.
37 NAA: A3, 1913/9712.
38 *Government Gazette, NT Times*, 19 July 1912.
39 NAA: A3, 1913/9712.
40 NAA: A3, 1914/4383.
blessing, he proceeded to issue demolition notices to the owners of these tenements and this provoked a storm of protest from landowners. The Board refused to implement the demolition orders, not only because the members disagreed with the move and resented Holmes’ peremptory manner, but also because it was seriously short of funds.\footnote{Chua, “Racial Politics,” p.68.} Needless to say, the Chinese were outraged at the demolition orders and they appealed to the Chinese Consul in Melbourne. On 17 October 1913 the Acting Consul General for China protested to the Minister about the evictions.

Gilruth responded in two ways which would have been worthy of praise had he acted before influential pressure was applied. He gave free passages to forty-three aged and infirm Chinese to return to their birth places in Asia and awarded them a small grant to assist them to settle when they arrived home.\footnote{See “News & Notes,” \textit{NT Times}, 27 August 1914 for a copy of the letter of thanks received from the Consul-General for China for this action.}

All other evicted Chinese, Japanese, Malay and Filipino families were offered quarter-acre lots at a rent of two shillings and sixpence per annum in the area known as the ‘Police Paddock’ beyond the Daly Street railway crossing.\footnote{This area is now part of the modern suburb of Stuart Park.} He expected them to build sanitary huts and carry out market gardening on these lots. In order to help them settle, ‘the government supplied and carted all available second hand iron, arranged to cart all timber cut in the bush by the Chinese for the framework of the buildings and supplied them with food while they

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{group_of_aged_or_decrepit_chinese_repatriated_to_china_june_1914.jpg}
\caption{‘Group of aged or decrepit Chinese repatriated to China, June 1914’}
\end{figure}
were building and consequently unable to earn a living.'\textsuperscript{44} Ellen Kettle recorded that by the end of 1915, 190 tenements had been demolished in Chinatown and their occupants had been resettled at Police Paddock.\textsuperscript{45} No doubt many of these resettled families were grateful for Gilruth’s actions, but the Chinese and European entrepreneurs were aggrieved at the loss of lucrative rents from their properties.

**The Demise of the District Council**

This arbitrary appropriation of yet more of Darwin’s ‘Park lands’ further enraged Darwin’s leading citizens, and relations between Gilruth and the District Council deteriorated even further. The situation was exacerbated by the arrival of a new editor for the *NT Times*. Fred Thompson was recruited by Kirkland in 1914, and he lost no time in declaring war on the Gilruth administration and criticising the inert and ineffectual District Council for ‘deplorable apathy’ in allowing ‘the Administration to usurp its duties, ignore the privileges of local government, and flout the paramount right of the taxpayer’.\textsuperscript{46} The members of the Council must have taken his words to heart for a new and vigorous attitude was apparent in subsequent meetings. Councillor Bell, for instance, gave notice at the meeting of 28 July 1914 that he would move that the Council intended to assume ‘definite control over and responsibility for the entire area within the Council boundaries’ including ‘the Esplanades and the Park Lands’.\textsuperscript{47} This was throwing down the gauntlet indeed, and the subsequent reports of all dealings between the Council and the Administration are tinged with a spirit of confrontation.

\textbf{The Palmerston District Council, 1909. C.J. Kirkland is seated in the front row on the left}

\textsuperscript{44} Jones, \textit{Chinese in the NT}, p.90.
\textsuperscript{45} Kettle, \textit{Health Services in the NT}, vol. 1, p.65.
\textsuperscript{46} “Writing in Vain,” \textit{NT Times}, 2 July 1914.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. The Esplanade was occasionally referred to according to which way a particular section faced, that is, ‘the South Esplanade’ or ‘the West Esplanade’.
Matters finally came to a head on the 26 January 1915 when the Minister of External Affairs wrote to inform the Council that the Local Board of Health was to be abolished and that the government would take over its duties.\textsuperscript{48} Nine days later, the Minister announced that the Palmerston District Council would be replaced by the Darwin Town Council comprising two government nominees, two representatives of ratepayers and chaired by the Government Secretary, Henry Carey. This of course meant that the government had a majority in the new Council and an ‘Indignation Meeting’ was immediately organised for the following day. It was largely attended by ratepayers, unionists and entrepreneurs, and a series of resolutions were passed strongly protesting the move which was described as a ‘further disfranchisement, removing as it does the last vestige of the principles of democracy in this Territory’.\textsuperscript{49}

Following some fiery rhetoric in the \textit{NT Times} which kept the issue alive, a second protest meeting was held on the 25 February at which a resolution was passed stating that the residents had no confidence in the present Administration of the Territory and which called on the Minister to allow for a Council of Advice to be elected on adult suffrage to allow the residents some say in how the Territory was administered. In view of this public unrest, the Minister relented slightly by increasing the number of elected representatives in the new Town Council to four with three official Councillors to be chosen by the Administrator. He further promised that all people who had resided in the town for at least three months would be allowed to vote\textsuperscript{50} and that the Council could elect its own Chairman.\textsuperscript{51} The first election for the Town Council was held on 15 October and, somewhat surprisingly, the three unionists who stood were defeated by three local businessmen and one public servant who stood as the conservative ‘Town Party’ candidates. One source of conflict between the Administration and the townspeople was thus muffled, but the campaign against Gilruth continued to escalate in the newspaper and on the streets.

\textbf{Settlement Schemes}

In the midst of all this turmoil in Darwin, the Department of External Affairs, Gilruth and the NT Administration were busily trying to develop the Territory. Moves to attract permanent settlers, preferably with wives and children, began in 1912. Land at Daly River, the Adelaide

\textsuperscript{48} NAA: A3, 1916/1729.
\textsuperscript{49} “Indignation Meeting,” \textit{NT Times}, 11 February 1915.
\textsuperscript{50} Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.49.
\textsuperscript{51} Alcorta, \textit{Darwin Rebellion}, p.6.
River and at Stapleton was subdivided and opened for agricultural settlement, and experimental farms were established at Batchelor and on the Daly River. In the following year a sheep station was set up at Mataranka, and a small herd of cattle was imported from Queensland to stock a new dairy farm at Fannie Bay. The government also provided some assistance to ‘small parties of Russians and Americans to examine different parts of the country with a view to advising their fellow countrymen of the prospects of settlement in this part of Australia’. In another effort to attract settlers, the government sent the Director of Lands to Argentina to encourage Welsh colonists there to re-settle in the Territory. As a result of his efforts, a group of 220 settlers arrived from Patagonia in 1915 to work on the construction of the meat works and on the railway extension to the Katherine River.

The settlement schemes did not meet with success. The enterprising men who took up the government’s generous offer did not remain for long. The usual problems of high costs of commodities and farming equipment and supplies, the difficulties in transporting goods, and the great distances to suitable markets condemned the farmers to a perpetual struggle to make ends meet. Their isolation and the uncomfortable climate also added to the miseries suffered by them and their families.

**Vesteys Meat Works**

Construction of the meat works in Darwin and the consequent work on the railway and wharf were the most significant developments in the Territory since the 1880s, and Darwin was profoundly changed, both physically and socially, in the process. When Cook’s Liberal government took office in June 1913, the prospect of a government-operated freezing works being erected in Darwin disappeared. Instead, the new Minister, Patrick Glynn, advised Gilruth in September 1913 that he ‘had strong hopes of freezing works being constructed at

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53 Ibid, p.140.
54 Donovan, *Other End of Australia*, p.23.
57 It must be remembered that the Northern Territory was competing with the southern States which were also trying to attract more permanent settlers at this time. By promoting settlement in the Territory, many federal politicians were acting against the immediate best interests of their constituents. Their commitment to Territory development must have been grudging at best.
Darwin by the Union Cold Storage Co. the principals of which were Vestey Brothers’. Gilruth co-operated enthusiastically towards this end, and on 24 June 1914, Vesteys signed an agreement with the government to construct and operate a meat works in Darwin.

With this agreement, the government was committed to large capital projects, including the extension of the railway to Katherine and an upgrading of the port. It also promised to grant enough land near Darwin for the meat works and associated facilities such as the stock yards and workmen’s residences. Vesteys therefore ‘took up a 99-year lease on a large section of the best land in Fannie Bay’ which ‘comprised at least ninety allotments’ and which included all the land on Bullocky Point. The company immediately began building single men’s quarters large enough to house three hundred workers, and in 1915, construction of the actual freezing works themselves commenced.

It was an enormous complex and dominated Darwin’s northern skyline for many years. It ‘comprised ten acres of floor space ... the accommodation block for single men, two hundred huts for married couples and two 240 foot chimneys. It also had a water tank of such dimensions that, in the 1980s, it was roofed and converted to a gymnasium for the high school now on the site’.

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58 NAA: A3, 1916/1230 contains a useful summary of the complicated negotiations which led to the construction of the Vestey Brothers’ meat works in Darwin. Vestey Brothers was (and still is) commonly referred to as “Vesteys”, a convention which will be followed in this thesis.
60 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” pp.87-8.
61 Ibid, p. 89.
‘Two-and-a-Half Mile’ railway depot created a new suburb in Darwin which was originally called ‘Paraparap’ but which was shortened to ‘Parap’ in December 1918.62

Construction work started on the Vesteys meatworks in 1914 and almost immediately the company clashed with the unions. Vesteys had recruited its workers in Sydney and contracted to pay them at Sydney rates. This was unacceptable to the union so Vesteys promised to pay Darwin rates until the issue went to arbitration. In March 1915 Judge Powers of the Federal Arbitration Court ruled that the minimum rates for a labourer in the Northern Territory should be £3 17s for a forty-four-hour week.63 Work continued, but the construction period was plagued with industrial disputes on the railway, on the wharf and at Vesteys itself.

The meat works finally began operations in April 1917 when about 1,900 cattle were railed in from the hinterland and processed.64 Three months later, the company organised a ball and concert to celebrate the opening. Over a thousand people were reported to be present at this event which Alcorta described as ‘by far the most glittering night in Darwin’s history’.65 It was held at the meat works itself in ‘a huge room’ at ‘the very tip top of a huge building’. The concert was remarkable in that it included ‘items by French, Russian and Greek artistes’66 as well as Darwin’s traditional Anglo-Australian performers. It was also notable in that union organiser Harold Nelson was presented with a cheque for

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63 “Northern Territory Wages,” NT Times, 8 April 1915.
65 Alcorta, Darwin Rebellion, p.75.
66 “Paraparap Concert and Ball,” NT Times, 19 July 1917.
the enormous sum of £120 collected from union members in recognition of the work he had done to promote the union movement in the Northern Territory.

Industrial disputes continued into the beginning of 1918, with strikes by railway men and by wharf labourers in January and February. The negotiations between Vesteys and the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) in Brisbane had also broken down and in early March the *NT Times* contained an ominous paragraph announcing that Vesteys had cancelled the droving arrangements for the 1918 season.\[^{67}\] According to the report, there were already over five hundred men in Darwin waiting for the killing season to start. There were no other jobs available to these men, and it was going to be difficult to arrange for them to be shipped out as only a few steamers with limited accommodation visited the port each month. Eight days after this article appeared in the *NT Times*, the union voted to accept Vesteys revised offer which included a guarantee that no further strikes would occur during the season\[^{68}\] and Vesteys resumed operations. Vesteys’ readiness to abandon its expensive enterprise forced the unions to be more circumspect in future, although pay disputes continued to plague the company.

**The First World War**

In the midst of this local turmoil a far greater conflict began in Europe when war between Britain and Germany was declared in August 1914. For the people of the Territory, this cataclysmic event was the source of another grievance against the government. Filled with patriotic fervour, men from all over the region flocked to Darwin to enlist, only to find that the government was not accepting men from the Territory. Twenty-four men, most of whom had experienced active service in places such as India and South Africa, petitioned Gilruth to use his influence to allow a Northern Territory contingent to enlist as soon as possible.\[^{69}\] This was refused by the Minister for Defence who considered the men would be better used to defend the northern coast from any enemy incursions.\[^{70}\] Ignoring the Minister’s wishes, Territory men began to take passage to Townsville and other centres where they could enlist, and a subscription list was started to raise money to pay the passages for those men who could not afford the cost of a ticket.


\[^{68}\]Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p. 70.

\[^{69}\]“Volunteers for Active Service,” *NT Times*, 1 October 1914.

\[^{70}\]Many of the men from Darwin were members of the Cable Guard which had been formed in 1912 by recruiting about fifty members of the Palmerston Rifle Club. See “Cable Guard,” *NT Times*, 22 March 1912.
Another source of grievance related to the war was the alleged NT Administration’s use of the War Precautions Act to victimise people in Darwin. The question of censorship, for example, became a very sore point with unionists who claimed that the local censor, Henry Carey, was holding back messages relating to the industrial disputes in Darwin which they sent to their State branches, to Members of Parliament, and to other influential people.

In spite of resentment at these incidents, ‘at least 319 men from the Northern Territory enlisted for war service’, and those left behind participated in many activities designed to help the war effort. The NT Times devoted pages of each issue to war news and in August 1917 C.J. Kirkland started an appeal to raise funds for a ‘battleplane’. When the subscription list closed in 1918, ‘over £800 odd’ had been subscribed. Also, when news that a national Red Cross Society had been formed in Melbourne in August 1914, Mrs Gilruth called a meeting to form a local branch. This revitalised the social life of the white elite in Darwin, which had been lagging somewhat owing to the frequent absences of the Administrator and the tensions between him and his senior staff and his disagreements with the District Council. It became a patriotic duty to attend the concerts, balls, picnics, sporting fixtures and other events which were organised to raise funds for the war effort, and by November 1918, the Red Cross Society in the Northern Territory had raised just over £12,538.

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73 “Local Red Cross Efforts,” NT Times, 20 August 1914; and NTAS: NTRS 915, Joy Collins.
74 It should be noted, however, that the social and sporting life of the working class at this time was very active, owing principally to the activities of the Workers Club. See Stephen, “Contact Zones,” p.193 and elsewhere.
75 Government Gazette, NT Times, 16 November 1918. These were the highest per capita figures in Australia at this time.
World War I had other impacts on Darwin. Chua claims that it was only the outbreak of war which stopped the total destruction of Chinatown. The war also slowed the construction of the meatworks in Darwin and caused the Vestey company further expense and serious difficulties in matters such as obtaining suitable ships to transport the meat overseas. On a more positive note, the demand for frozen meat soared with the need to feed the Allied troops in Europe and elsewhere. Above all else, though, as federal money, materiel and men were poured into the war effort, federal interest in the Northern Territory declined rapidly, and, of course, funding for the local bureaucracy and for development schemes was severely curtailed.

**Industrial Relations**

The construction work undertaken by Vesteys and the government from 1914 on brought hundreds of workers of all nationalities into the Northern Territory and gave great impetus to the union movement. The Territory’s first union was established on 23 December 1911 when about forty workers formed a local branch of the Queensland-based Amalgamated Workers’ Association (AWA). The white waterside workers in Darwin were already on strike over a pay dispute at this time and the union immediately began negotiations on their behalf. The affair was rather clumsily handled but the sympathetic Labor government sent ‘a Queensland Public Service Inspector, to the Territory in June 1912, to determine a “fair and reasonable” wage for labourers in the government service’.

Industrial relations remained reasonably quiet for the remainder of 1912, but ‘the disastrous 1913 strike’ marked both the beginning of the bitter relationship between Gilruth and Territory workers, and the end of the AWA. The strike began when Gilruth announced in March 1913 that, from 1 April, survey field hands would no longer receive their weekly tropical allowance. This amounted to a wage cut of seventeen percent. When the AWA members voted to strike, there were some unlikely supporters of the union’s decision. The conservative editor Kirkland reported the strike positively in the *NT Times*, and the Director of Lands, George Ryland, took the extraordinary step of taking leave of absence without pay in order to participate in the action. Support outside the Territory however was not

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76 Chua, “Racial Politics,” p.69.
77 Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.29.
78 Ibid, p.35.
forthcoming, and when the strike committee sought to negotiate with Gilruth they hit a brick wall. The strike dragged on and at one stage Gilruth was forced to recruit his senior staff including Judge Bevan to work on the wharf unloading a cargo of vitally needed supplies. At first the Asian and Coloured workers supported the strikers, but, after the second week, ‘some of the Chinese carters returned to work and by the fourth week, Chinese labourers were being used on the wharf.’\(^8^0\) The strike, which started on 28 April, finished on 1 June, when the majority of workers agreed to go to arbitration. It was a death blow to the AWA and it went into hibernation.

In December 1913 a local branch of the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) was formed in Darwin,\(^8^1\) and in July of the following year, Gilruth’s \textit{bête noire}, Harold Nelson, became its organiser. Described as ‘an able administrator and a fiery orator’\(^8^2\) Nelson brought his wife and five children to Darwin in 1914. In his first year as organiser the union signed on 109 members, most of whom had arrived to work on Vesteys’ site or on the railway extension work. These members were predominantly Irish, Scottish, Russian and Greek. The union excluded Asian workers and the Aborigines, although ‘Coloured’ workers were accepted as long as they had one white parent.\(^8^3\)

After successfully securing a substantial pay rise for Vesteys workers the union grew rapidly, and by the end of 1915 it was ‘firmly implanted in Darwin society and was playing both an industrial role and a political one’.\(^8^4\) There were many confrontations and disputes in the following years, and at least one had serious consequences. On 1 November 1916 the waterside workers went on strike over a relatively trivial incident. This strike was a serious affair for two reasons. Firstly, it resulted in the Dutch steamer \textit{Houtman} leaving Darwin with over 900 tons of essential supplies meant for Darwin still on board. Secondly, the \textit{NT Times} accused the Greek waterside workers of causing the trouble, and this resulted in a ‘full scale riot ... in Cavenagh Street between the Greeks and the Anglo-Australians’.\(^8^5\) The arrival of large numbers of Greeks had at first been

\(^8^0\) Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.41. The government embargo on employing non-White workers had apparently lapsed.
\(^8^1\) By this time, the AWA and the AWU in Queensland had amalgamated. See Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.43.
\(^8^3\) Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.7.
\(^8^4\) Ibid, p.53.
tolerated by the union because they were considered ‘European’, but they maintained their unique cultural identity and became a fourth ethnic group in Darwin. Their failure to assimilate combined with disturbing news about the Greek king who tended to support Germany in the war, resulted in ‘an aggressive discriminatory barrier where both local prejudice and government policy were used to restrict Greeks’.  

By 1917 the AWU and other unions had served various claims on both Vesteys and the NT Administration. When seven cases were pending, Judge Powers of the Arbitration Court visited the Territory for the first time. Powers awarded pay rises to Vesteys’ workers, to non-Aboriginal pastoral workers and to waterside labourers. In his judgement, Powers listed the disadvantages attendant on living in the Northern Territory, paying particular attention to the lack of housing which often meant that a married man had to maintain a second household for his wife and children who had to remain ‘down south’ as there was no accommodation ‘up north’.

The Darwin town band followed by unionists carrying the AWU banner, 1914

The discord between the unions and both government and private enterprise was exacerbated by the conscription referenda in October 1916 and in December 1917. As the franchise was denied Northern Territory citizens, it at first appeared that residents would not be able to vote. To circumvent the problem the government attached them to South Australia and they were treated as absentee voters. Campaigning in the Territory was spirited, especially before the second referendum. The conservative Overseas Club which

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86 Ibid, p.43
87 Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.63. Powers arrived in Darwin with his wife and daughter on 13 July 1917, just in time to attend the Vesteys opening ball and concert.
88 Ibid, p.64.
was established in February 1917 to foster British interests in the Territory fought for a “Yes” vote. The Northern Territory Industrial Council, which was formed in June 1917, and which comprised three members from each of the four major unions in the region, campaigned against it. Although both referenda lost nationally, the vote in the Territory was very narrowly in favour in both cases.

The year 1917 was also significant for the AWU in that it was separated from Queensland and officially recognised as an autonomous branch. Nelson was elected Secretary of the new Branch and his influence continued to grow. By the end of 1917, ‘about 40 per cent of all white men in the Territory belonged to the A.W.U. and the four small craft unions of Darwin were heavily under Nelson’s influence’. The union was also a significant force in the social and sporting life of Darwin. Social events and sporting fixtures were frequently organised by the Workers Club and enthusiastically supported by the unionists. Also, AWU members became a majority on the Darwin Town Council in June 1917 when Harold Nelson and fellow unionist Robert Toupein joined another AWU member, Douglas Watts, as Councillors.

The State Hotels

The situation with the hotels in the Top End was the final straw which led to Gilruth’s downfall. Since the beginning of the Commonwealth administration of the Territory there had been suggestions that the government take over the liquor trade in the Top End, and on 27 September 1915 the Liquor Ordinance (No. 8 of 1915) was promulgated. According to Frank Alcorta,

> the legislation was ostensibly aimed at the Chinese “sly-groggers” who were often accused of selling low quality liquor to workers. In effect however it was meant to curb consumption of grog in the north and to provide some welcome revenue to the Federal coffers.

The government purchased all hotels in the Northern Territory north of the 15th parallel and installed a Supervisor of Hotels to organise the takeover. The bars of the Club and Terminus Hotels remained open to the public, but the historic Hotel Victoria became “a pub with no

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89 The AWU, the Amalgamated Carpenters Union, the Federated Clerks Union, and the Amalgamated Meat Industrial Union.
90 Powell, Far Country, p.152.
91 D.C. Watts won his seat in 1916.
93 Alcorta, Darwin Rebellion, p.43.
beer”\textsuperscript{94} for accommodation only. The boarders at ‘The Vic’ were mainly drawn from the upper echelons of the public service, and it became known as the ‘white elephant’ and scornfully referred to in the press as the ‘Palais de Victoria’\textsuperscript{95}. Complaints from customers arose almost immediately about the standard of the accommodation at these ‘State Hotels’ as they were called, and about the quality of the liquor from the government’s Liquor Store.

The acquisition of the hotels was the cause of one of the worst strikes ever staged in Darwin. The Labor government’s insistence that only union labour be recruited by the bureaucracy, and the union’s exclusion of Asian and Aboriginal workers forced the NT Administration to dismiss the non-white hotel workers. J.W. Callan, the Supervisor of Hotels, in consultation with the union, drew up a log of wages for the new white workers. Unexpectedly, ‘without consulting the union, Gilruth cancelled the agreement and introduced his own schedule’\textsuperscript{96} on 15 October 1915. This schedule was similar to Callan’s except for one feature: Gilruth cut the waitresses’ wages by about thirty to forty percent.\textsuperscript{97} Consequently, a strike was called on 23 October, and the workers were instructed to keep away from the hotel bars. This warning was repeated on 18 November, which indicates that a significant number of workers were not taking the ban seriously. The hotels’ boarders were seriously inconvenienced as the cooks were also on strike until the union relented and allowed them to return to work. The strike continued for 10 weeks and was eventually called off on 3 January 1916 after the Minister agreed to refer the matter to the Arbitration Court. Judge Powers was again called upon to arbitrate and, on 28 September

\textsuperscript{95} See, for example, Fred Thompson, “State Liquor Department,” \textit{NT Times}, 5 October 1918.
\textsuperscript{96} Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.56.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
he decreed that women should be granted equal wages for equal work and that Gilruth’s pay scale for waitresses was untenable.

A further round of complaints and indignation meetings about the State Hotels was initiated by an article in the *NT Times* on 5 January 1918 which complained of the dreary atmosphere and the lack of festive food at the Club and Terminus Hotels on Christmas Day.98 In the next issue of the paper, the editor commented on the ‘considerable interest and controversy’ arising from the article and rashly invited residents to ‘voice their views’.99 A spate of letters to the Editor ensued, complaining about the dilapidated state of the buildings, the inadequate sanitary arrangements, and the fact that if a customer wanted to buy bottled beer, wine or spirits he must first get permission from the Supervisor of Hotels. Furthermore, bottled alcohol was not sold at the bars: it could only be bought at the Liquor Store which was open from 8am to 4pm on week days. Another cause for complaint was the lack of choice: only one brand of beer was sold in the Territory and the whiskey was brought to the Territory in bulk and bottled locally. Residents complained that this whiskey – the only brand available – was of such an inferior quality that it was practically undrinkable. Further complaints were expressed about the seemingly constant increases in the price of alcoholic drinks. It was claimed that the regulations had done nothing to stop the sly-grog shops and the State Hotels were nothing but ‘booze dens’100

On 7 May 1918 another indignation meeting was held to protest about the administration of the Liquor Ordinance, but by this time the editor of the *NT Times* had lost patience with the repetitive letters and declared that ‘this correspondence is now closed except to correspondents who have something new and helpful to say’.101 By this time, too, the government had decided to take the matter seriously especially as the issue was being raised in Parliament.102 On 30 April Gilruth instructed Carey and Evans to inquire into the working of the hotels. Their report, which was issued on 21 June, exonerated Callan of any blame and offered reasoned explanations of all the issues raised by the residents.103

98 “Christmas Day at the State Hotels,” *NT Times*, 5 January 1918.
100 “Northern Territory Affairs: Home Truths from Senator Newland,” *NT Times*, 31 August 1918.
101 “The State Hotels, &c.,” *NT Times*, 4 May 1918.
103 NAA: A3, 1919/1448.
The report was made available to the *NT Times*, and was published in the September and October issues of the paper, accompanied by a series of articles by the firebrand editor, Fred Thompson, criticising the report in scathing terms.

The matter was still simmering when Gilruth committed an act of folly which exacerbated the situation and was the precursor to events which led to his downfall. In common with the rest of Australia, Darwin planned to celebrate the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918. Not unnaturally the waitresses at the State Hotels wished to take some time off to join in the festivities. According to the newspaper report\(^\text{104}\) the boarders agreed to get meals at cafes in the town, but Callan refused to give the waitresses the time off. They thereupon decided to take unauthorised leave, but when they returned to work the next morning they found Gilruth had ordered that they be locked out of the hotels and suspended. As a consequence of this action the barmen went on strike. The impasse only lasted four days and the women were reinstated without loss of pay and entitlements, but the antagonism towards Gilruth grew in intensity, and Thompson made much of ‘the Junker-like conduct of His Obstinacy the Administrator’\(^\text{105}\).

**The Campaign against Gilruth**

In the years since he had arrived in the Territory, Harold Nelson had repeatedly vowed that he would get rid of the tyrant Gilruth. He convened many public meetings to protest about the NT Administration in general and Gilruth in particular. By 1917, Gilruth was so unpopular that other people joined the unionists in voicing their complaints against him. Conservative businessman W. Bell, for example, complained about the seizure of public lands at Myilly Point and Stuart Park, and about the abolition of the District Council. Gilruth’s frequent absences from Darwin were also criticised. He continued to take long motor trips inland, and he visited Melbourne at least once every year.\(^\text{106}\)

When Gilruth’s contract expired in March 1917, the government ignored public antagonism towards him and he was reappointed Administrator ‘for the duration of the war and six months thereafter’.\(^\text{107}\) This seems to be an extremely foolhardy move but

\(^\text{104}\) “Lock-out of Hotel Employees,” *NT Times*, 16 November 1918.

\(^\text{105}\) “The Hotel Employees’ Lock-out,” *NT Times*, 16 November 1918.

\(^\text{106}\) Some of these trips lasted many weeks. In October 1916, for example, he stayed in Melbourne for eight months. See Alcorta, *Darwin Rebellion*, p.58.

\(^\text{107}\) NAA: A1, 1930/6111.
perhaps it can be excused when it is considered that the government’s attention was almost wholly taken up with the war and Gilruth’s reappointment was certainly the easiest option at this time. Needless to say, Nelson was furious, but when Gilruth returned in June 1917 from his extended stay in Melbourne, some two or three hundred people from “the Govt. Departments, the Paraparap Meat Works and the leading European and Chinese business firms” gave him an enthusiastic welcome at a formal reception followed by a social on 31 July.

The day before this welcome, Nelson organised yet another indignation meeting where ‘the gist of the whole of the speeches was a bitter condemnation of the system which had permitted of the reappointment of Dr. Gilruth as Administrator’. Nothing eventuated from this meeting save perhaps a deepening of the rift between the people who supported Nelson and those who supported the Administrator. Nelson was, however, subject to what amounted to official bullying a few weeks later. In October 1917 the authorities charged him under the War Precautions Act for the comparatively trivial offence of escorting a person named Mitchell onto the steamship Houtman when another person (Munro) had been issued with the pass. Mitchell was fined about £12 but Nelson was accused of being ‘the fountain head of all the trouble’ and was fined a massive £50 plus costs.

By the end of 1918, ill-feeling against the Administrator was at its height, and it seems that Nelson judged the time was right to move decisively against Gilruth. By this time union members dominated the Darwin Town Council. By a piece of political chicanery which, while not exactly illegal was definitely frowned upon by people such as Fred Thompson, the four elected seats were held by Councillors Nelson, Toupein, Watts and Pearse, all of whom were members of the AWU.

At a Council meeting on the 9 September 1918, Nelson presented five resolutions which attacked the judiciary in particular and the NT Administration in general. With the unions in control of the Council, the motion that the resolutions be laid before the Minister and the press was carried. Although the resolutions were criticised in the NT Times because

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108 “Welcome to Dr. Gilruth,” NT Times, 2 August 1917.
109 “Public Meeting,” NT Times, 2 August 1917.
110 “Breaches of War Precautions Act,” NT Times, 4 October 1917.
they ‘consisted of a series of bald statements unsupported by one atom of proof’,\textsuperscript{112} the editor used the incident to reiterate the desperate need for a change in both the Administration and in the government’s policy for the Territory.\textsuperscript{113} Industrial agitation and the indignation meetings called by Nelson had increased his prestige and power in the town, and the Administration’s injudicious announcement shortly after the lock-out incident that the price of beer was to rise again, gave Nelson the opportunity he needed.

On 3 December 1918 a public meeting was held in Parap in response to the announcement that the price of a bottle of beer would rise from one shilling and sixpence to one shilling and nine pence.\textsuperscript{114} According to Brian, this amounted to eighty-two percent of the basic hourly wage for a labourer at the time.\textsuperscript{115} A protest meeting at the meatworks voted in favour of imposing a boycott on the State Hotels and the Liquor Store until the price of liquor was lowered. A similar meeting in Darwin that evening also declared a boycott ‘until the price of bottled beer be reduced ... and ... the bar of the Hotel Victoria be opened to the general public.’\textsuperscript{116} A Boycott Committee was formed and the people were warned that if they broke the boycott and patronised the hotels or store they would be treated as ‘scabs’. Three days later a delegation which included Mayor Watts and Harold Nelson waited on the Administrator to discuss the price of alcohol. The report of the meeting published in the \textit{NT Times},\textsuperscript{117} demonstrates how implacable Gilruth could be when he was determined to stand his ground. His answers to the questions were as brief as possible and on a number of occasions he simply refused to respond at all. He admitted that the price of whiskey was too high but refused to consider lowering it. He also refused to involve the federal Price Fixing Board in the dispute. After more than an hour of fruitless discussion the meeting closed with nothing promised and nothing achieved.

On the following day a mass meeting was held at the Darwin Oval where the delegation reported on the meeting with the Administrator. Nelson made it very clear at this meeting that he considered the price of beer of secondary importance to the need to get rid of Gilruth. He put the question: ‘Why should we lie down any longer under the tyranny of a despot who can punish us if we raise our voices in protest against his maladministration?’

\textsuperscript{112} “Darwin Town Council,” \textit{NT Times}, 14 September 1918.
\textsuperscript{113} “Something Rotten in the State,” \textit{NT Times}, 14 September 1918.
\textsuperscript{114} NAA: A3, 1920/139.
\textsuperscript{115} Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.75.
\textsuperscript{116} “Boycott of Hotel Bars,” \textit{NT Times}, 7 December 1918.
\textsuperscript{117} “Hotel Bar Boycott: Deputation to Administrator,” \textit{NT Times}, 7 December 1918.
He then added that ‘in the near future you will be asked to take action, and I hope you will rise to your responsibility and end the reign of despotism!’ 118

Over the following two weeks, ‘a number of noisy meetings were held in which inflammatory statements were made principally by the Mayor and Mr. Nelson, Secretary of the A.W.U.’ 119 The situation became so tense forty special constables were sworn in on 16 December 120 to complement ‘a woefully inadequate police force of five’. 121 It may have been this action by the Administration that sparked the events on the following day, when about four hundred men marched from the meat works to Government House, accompanied by a car carrying an effigy of Gilruth. The procession was augmented by about two hundred more men as it wended its way through town to the fence surrounding Government House. 122

![Protest march with demonstrators led by a car carrying an effigy of Gilruth, 17 December 1918](image)

When they reached their destination, a deputation was appointed to ask Gilruth to justify his administration of the Territory over the previous five years. If the Administrator

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118 “Public Meeting on Oval,” *NT Times*, 14 December 1918.
119 NAA: A3, 1920/139.
122 NAA: A3, 1919/1031., J. A. Gilruth to the Minister for Home and Territories, 18 December 1918. This file contains shorthand notes of the conversation between the deputation and Gilruth which were made by Miss Little.
refused to comply, the deputation was authorised to ask if he were willing to leave the Territory and stay away until a commission investigated his conduct of Territory affairs. The protesters also authorised the deputation to demand that Gilruth’s friend and advisor, Judge Bevan, answer the same questions.

Police Inspector Waters accompanied the deputation into Government House where Gilruth, Government Secretary Evans,123 Gilruth’s son who was his private secretary, and the stenographer Miss Little awaited them. On being asked to address the crowd about his work in the Territory, Gilruth refused. He was, he declared, ‘answerable to the Minister and would not and did not recognize the citizens of Darwin’.124 He also refused to leave the Territory without his Minister’s permission. After about an hour and a half of ‘desultory discussion in which a number of petty grievances were aired’,125 Gilruth agreed to go out to the fence to address the crowd. As he turned towards the house after reiterating his determination not to give in to the crowd’s demands, the fence was broken down and the mob swarmed into the grounds, knocked Gilruth to the ground, and entered the house where they inflicted some minor damage. In his letter to the Minister, Gilruth claimed that Nelson was ‘astride the fence and in a state of great excitement’ inciting the crowd, but his accuracy about this is in doubt and he was probably motivated by his hatred of Nelson. The various reports are confused about some of the details, but even Gilruth admitted that it was Nelson, and his colleagues Watts and Gibson who rounded up the rioters and persuaded them to leave the property without doing any more damage. The mob then gathered on the open ground opposite Government House126 and burnt the effigy of Gilruth.

Gilruth described this event as a ‘serious riot’ and it has come to be known as the ‘Darwin Rebellion’. Dramatic accounts of the incident have appeared in popular literature and some histories have drawn parallels between this disturbance and the Eureka Rebellion127 and the Rum Rebellion,128 but the official files more accurately labelled it a ‘disturbance’. Nevertheless, it was perhaps the most dramatic occurrence ever witnessed by Darwin’s

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123 Evans took over as Government Secretary after Carey left the public service to work for Vesteys.
125 NAA: A3, 1919/1031, Gilruth to the Minister, 18/12/18.
126 On the motion of Councillor Toupein in June 1919, the Darwin Town Council renamed this block of land “Liberty Square” in honour of the event.
127 Lockwood, The Front Door, p.179.
128 Price, History and Problems of the NT, p.41.
residents and the town continued to seethe with gossip, speculation and resentful complaints.

The authorities moved quickly and HMAS *Una* was despatched forthwith. It arrived in Darwin on Christmas Day carrying eighteen soldiers from the Thursday Island garrison who were placed on guard around Government House and Gilruth’s office. It is interesting to note that both the authorities and the national press tended to blame the ‘aliens’ in the Darwin community for most of the trouble. The comparatively large proportion of Greeks and Russians in the community lent an air of verisimilitude to this point of view and it allowed people in the rest of Australia to ignore the participation of Anglo-Australians in these events. The subheadings in an article in the *Sunday Mirror* in January 1919, for example, included ‘The population is mainly of work shirkers and Bolshevists of all nations’, ‘Polyglot war shirkers’, and ‘Russian beer-drinkers’.

Meanwhile, the unions were making sure that the issue remained alive. The white carpenters refused to repair the damage done to Government House, and a meeting was held the night following the disturbance at which the unionists ‘resolved to carry on the agitation until such time as “redress for grievances” and “rights of citizenship” are granted.’ Another union procession was organised for Boxing Day. Led by the Darwin Brass Band, about one thousand unionists and other townspeople marched from ‘Toupein’s corner in Cavenagh street’ to the Darwin Oval where they resolved to ‘implore’ the Acting Prime Minister to recall Gilruth and to ask for ‘the institution of a provisional council consisting of five members to be elected annually on an adult franchise of the Northern Territory with your Government Secretary as representative of the Federal Government, thereby establishing in a measure the lost birthright of government by the people’.

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129 NAA: A3, 1919/1031: J. A. Gilruth to the Minister for Home and Territories, 6 January 1919.
130 “Why Things are All Wrong in the Northern Territory,” *Sunday Mirror*, 19 January 1919.
132 In his account of this event, the reporter unequivocally stated that ‘one thousand and eighty persons were counted’ marching through the gate to the oval. This seems a very large number considering Darwin’s total population in 1921 was only 1,381, but it must be remembered that Vesteyes employed hundreds of temporary workers who travelled to Darwin for the killing season each year. See “The Anti-Gilruth Crusade,” *NT Times*, 4 January 1919.
133 Ibid. The Acting Prime Minister at the time was William Alexander Watt.
Further meetings were held and the Boycott Committee worked assiduously to ensure that no unionists patronised the State Hotels or the Liquor Store. Alcorta claimed that under Nelson’s leadership the Committee ‘had become a group of ruthless vigilantes.’ The early weeks of 1919 witnessed further strikes and the anti-Gilruth campaign continued unabated. The arrival of Labor Senator Ferricks on the 20 January 1919 was another occasion for a procession and a meeting at the oval where the leading unionists spoke of their grievances against the Administration. The report of his arrival was given in detail in the *NT Times*, and at no time is Gilruth mentioned, which indicates that neither he nor his senior staff took part in the welcome. This was a notable break in the tradition dating back to the South Australian administration where all Members of Parliament were given a ceremonial welcome by both the townspeople and the public service, no matter what political banners they flew. It may indicate that Gilruth and his senior staff felt besieged by the militant unionists and were not willing to be seen in public. Certainly, military protection of Gilruth was still considered to be necessary, and when the gunboat *Una* left the port, she was replaced by HMAS *Encounter*. Tension remained high and matters were further exacerbated by the fact that Inspector Waters laid charges of assault against Nelson and fellow unionist Robert Balding. On the 19 February the two men were tried, found guilty and fined £3 plus costs. But by that date the townspeople must have known that Gilruth had been recalled to Melbourne. He and his family left Darwin on 20 February and Gilruth never returned to the Top End.

**Conclusion**

Gilruth’s departure marked the end of the first phase of Commonwealth administration of the Northern Territory and it augured ill for the future. Almost all the plans the Commonwealth put in place to encourage settlement in the region and to develop the industries came to nothing. By the time Gilruth left, it was acknowledged that the Experimental Farms were a failure and most of the people who took up agricultural blocks on the Daly River, the Adelaide River and Stapleton had left the Territory, disheartened by the harsh conditions, the lack of markets, the isolation, and the difficulties of farming in a tropical environment. Powell recorded that by June 1918 only ten farmers remained on

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134 Alcorta, *Darwin Rebellion*, p.104.  
136 Wilson, *A Force Apart?*, p.260. This sentence was revoked on appeal.  
137 In a most extraordinary oversight, the *NT Times* did not report on Gilruth’s departure. Was the editor, Fred Thompson, unaware that Gilruth was leaving forever, or was there some other reason for not recording the successful outcome for which he and the unions had been campaigning for so many years?
Apart from the opening of the Maranboy tin field which recorded its first production in 1913, mining was still in the doldrums. By the end of 1918, ‘there were only 194 Europeans and 282 Chinese engaged in mining pursuits’. The pastoral industry had been given a boost by the establishment of the meat works, but this operation had not yet worked to its full capacity and with the end of the First World War reducing the demand for frozen beef, and the willingness Vesteys had shown to close the plant for the 1918 season, future prospects looked decidedly shaky. About the only positive outcomes affecting development of the Territory during these first eight years of Commonwealth administration were improvements to the railway and to the port facilities. The wharf was improved by the addition of a cattle race and the installation of a larger turntable, operated by steam. The railway line which was extended from Pine Creek to the north bank of the Katherine River was formally opened on 4 December 1917.

Darwin’s physical, social, and political landscape changed profoundly during this period. The boundaries of the built environment had expanded to include the government houses and the Kahlin Compound on Myilly Point, the meatworks, workmen’s homes, and single quarters at Parap, and the embryo suburb of Stuart Park with its Asian and Coloured residents. Darwin’s infrastructure had improved over these years. Vesteys had piped water from Howard Springs for its operations, and although the town was still lacking reticulated water, a steady supply was now near at hand. Electric power was not yet provided to the whole town, but there were ‘literally hundreds of plants for lighting, cooking and laundry work’ in the town. The health regulations were more strictly enforced and as a consequence, building standards and the disposal of rubbish and night soil had improved. Thus, as far as the physical landscape was concerned, Darwin had benefited from the transfer to Commonwealth control.

It was a different matter entirely, however, when one considers the social and political environment. The bitterness of the divisions within the community lasted into the next

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140 Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p.172.
142 “Town Lighting and Power Plant,” *NT Times*, 20 April 1918.
decades, and, owing to wildly exaggerated news reports of the unrest in the Territory, Darwin’s residents gained a reputation in the southern states as ‘Bolshevists’ who spent most of their time inciting riots and revolutions. One interesting outcome of the clash between unionists and the government was that the balance of power within the community shifted. Before the transfer, the white elite more or less controlled the town, with the Chinese merchants also wielding a degree of influence in events. After the growth of unionism under Harold Nelson, the working class people had an equal if not a greater say in the social, physical and political life of the town. The Chinese and Aboriginal residents were still treated as outcasts, but the social scene was much more fluid than it was in 1910.

Politically, the situation was disastrous. In Darwin itself, local government had been compromised by the replacement of the Palmerston District Council with the Darwin Town Council where the townspeople had a slender majority of one against the government appointees. As far as the Commonwealth government was concerned, its failure to bring about successful development of the Territory, despite the expenditure of an enormous amount of taxpayers’ money, destroyed any hope held by the Commonwealth of showing South Australia how administration of the region should be carried out. This, coupled with the effort devoted to assisting Britain in the First World War, caused both the politicians and the bureaucracy to lose interest in the Territory. Then too, the insubordination shown by sections of the Darwin community no doubt added to the authorities’ disillusionment about the Territory. Their duty to administer the province remained, but the fire of enthusiasm had disappeared, and it was to take many years before any real commitment to the job returned to benefit the people of the region in general and of Darwin in particular.

*A reception at Government House, ca. 1912*
Figure 7: Sketch map of Darwin, ca. 1920s

Based on the map in Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.55.

143 Based on the map in Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.55.
Chapter Five

An Early Depression, 1920-1929

Over the first two decades of Commonwealth control, the federal government proved that it was even less adept than South Australia in its attempts to administer and develop the Northern Territory. With the Nationalist/Country Party coalition government in power for most of the 1920s,¹ it would have been possible to ease the difficulties experienced in the Territory by applying a consistent policy aimed at developing the region and streamlining the cumbersome bureaucratic structure set up in 1911, but this did not occur. The Gilruth debacle, the failure of the agricultural settlements and the closure of the meat works left the authorities floundering. The situation was not helped by the fact that there were no less than seven Ministers in charge of the Territory during this decade.² Once again, the authorities hid their confusion and lack of action by commissioning further expert investigations and wasting public money on additional complications to the local bureaucracy. In Darwin itself some advances were made in settling the unrest, but the bureaucracies in Darwin, Melbourne, and Canberra³ continued to treat the citizens as adversaries, making decisions without consulting them and neglecting their demands for necessities like a decent infrastructure which included sealed roads, a secure water supply and a reliable source of reticulated electric power.

The Development of Aviation

In spite of the gloomy economic outlook, the post-Gilruth era began on a high note in Darwin. The First World War had stimulated the development of aviation in Europe and America, and the Australian government was well aware of the implications of air travel for the vast and sparsely populated continent. While on a visit to Europe Prime Minister Hughes offered a prize of ten thousand Australian pounds to the first Australian aviators to fly from England to Australia in a British built aircraft. The flight was to last no more than thirty days and had to leave from a specified site in England and land in the region of Darwin. Six air

¹ William Morris Hughes was Prime Minister until 1923 when he was replaced by Stanley Melbourne Bruce, who remained PM until 1929 when the Labor Party under James Henry Scullin came into power.
² In 1916 control of the Territory had been transferred from External Affairs to the Department of Home and Territories. In the 1920s, four Ministers (T.W. Glasgow, C.W. Marr, N.R. Howse, and C.L.A. Abbott) served for less than a year. A. Poynton was Minister for twenty-two months; A. Blakely served for a little over two years and G.F. Pearce was Minister for four and a half years.
³ The government moved to Canberra in 1927.
crews entered the race. Four crashed en route and a number of contestants were killed. One aeroplane, piloted by Ray Parer took 206 days to reach Australia and was therefore disqualified. However, the Vickers Vimy aircraft flown by brothers Ross and Keith Smith with their crew members, Shiers and Bennett, managed to reach Darwin within the specified time. In anticipation of the arrival of one or more aircraft, an area in Fannie Bay was cleared for a landing strip, and on 10 December 1919, the citizens of Darwin were galvanized into using any means to reach the strip to witness the historic arrival of the first aeroplane to touch down on Darwin soil. Hudson Fysh who had prepared the landing strip for the race, declared that ‘it was one of the most moving sights I can remember – the termination of one of the greatest flights, if not the greatest, in the history of aviation’.\(^4\) Two days after this event, Captain Wrigley and Sergeant Murphy of the Australian Flying Corps also landed at Fannie Bay after successfully completing a flight across Australia.\(^5\) Further flights followed and Australia’s aviation industry developed steadily. The Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services (Qantas) was founded in November 1920 and by the end of the decade regular commercial flights were operating within Australia.

\[\text{Ross and Keith Smith’s Vickers Vimy, December 1919}\]

**The Government and the Unions**

The excitement of welcoming aviators to Darwin and the potential that these flights represented were about the only bright spots in the history of Darwin at the beginning of the 1920s. With Gilruth’s departure, government authorities were in a quandary: the situation remained extremely volatile. The popular power base, in Darwin at least, was now in the

hands of the unions led by Harold Nelson and the Boycott Committee. On 20 February 1919, the day after Gilruth’s departure, this committee was renamed the ‘Reform Committee’ and it was resolved to continue the boycott ‘until Northern Territory grievances are redressed’. The authorities were aware that the situation needed a strong hand, but it would obviously be foolish to send Gilruth back to Darwin as he was the focus of so much antagonism. Gilruth, however, was still the Administrator of the Northern Territory, so they decided to appoint a Director to manage affairs at the local level while Gilruth remained in the Department’s offices in Melbourne. Throughout all this upheaval the southern newspapers were making the government’s job more difficult by publishing wildly exaggerated reports of the ‘rebellion’, claiming that all Darwin residents were ‘Bolsheviks’ and repeating their criticisms about the vast amount of taxpayers’ money which had been expended on the Territory with so little to show for it.

The government could do nothing about the press reports, but, the authorities were quick to show that they would not give in to union demands. They informed Darwin unionists that the price of beer would not be reduced. Furthermore, the Minister picked up the gauntlet when

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6 “Public Reform Meeting,” *NT Times*, 22 February 1919.
7 It is not surprising that there is confusion about the end of Gilruth’s tenure as Administrator. Cabinet announced in June 1919 that his duties as Administrator had ceased. On 30 November 1919, by a verbal agreement between Gilruth and the Minister, Gilruth’s appointment was terminated but he continued to receive his salary until 10 July 1920. However, Gilruth’s second term as Administrator was supposed to last until six months after the end of the First World War. An armistice was declared in November 1918, but it was not until later that a proclamation was issued fixing the date of the end of the war as 31 August 1921. For some bureaucratic or legal reason, Gilruth therefore remained the Administrator until 28 February 1922. During this time he had been unable to accept any other permanent employment. The authorities decided to pay him a year’s salary of £1,750 as compensation. See NAA: A1, 1930/6111.
the hotel employees went on strike on 21 February 1919 by informing them that they were to be dismissed at the end of the month. The Reform Committee was thus obliged to pay not only the wages of these employees, but also the cost of their board and lodging until they found other employment. Local opposition to the hotel boycott and to the activities of the Reform Committee grew as every unionist in paid employment was levied a massive ten shillings to help pay for this expense. A series of rowdy meetings was held over the next few months. An attempt on 28 February 1919 to get the boycott lifted was only narrowly defeated and, at a meeting held three weeks later, another motion by James Maloney to disband the Reform Committee and form a Progress Association in its stead was passed, in spite of Nelson’s strenuous efforts to prevent it. Political machinations by Nelson resulted in this meeting being declared invalid and it was not until 28 April that the boycott was officially lifted by the Reform Committee.

The New Administration

The government maintained a reasonably firm stance with the unions, but, in an attempt to appease Darwin’s residents, it established a new Council of Advice composed of four non-official members and four government nominees, one of whom – the Director of the Northern Territory – was the Chairman. Two of the non-official members represented the unions and there was one representative each for the pastoral and mining interests. A number of leading Darwin citizens were incensed that the commercial sector was not given any voice on the Council. There was also strong criticism of the council in parliament. Senator Newland, who had consistently argued for some form of parliamentary representation for the people of the Northern Territory, called it ‘Autocracy camouflaged as Democracy’ and enumerated all the ways in which the Minister could legally override the wishes of the community representatives. Newland’s protests were ignored and the Council of Advice Ordinance, dated 16 June 1919, was gazetted on the following day.

By this time Gilruth’s former secretary, Henry Carey, who had retired from public service the previous year to work for Vesteys, had accepted the position of Director of the Northern

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8 This was roughly equivalent to a day’s wages for a labourer.
9 “Meeting of Citizens,” *NT Times*, 22 March 1919. The motion was carried by 170 votes for to 151 against.
10 “Reform Committee Meeting: Boycott Finally Lifted,” *NT Times*, 3 May 1919. The Annual Report, 1919-20, p.24, incorrectly recorded that the boycott ceased on 13 March 1919.
12 CPD, 6 August 1919, vol. LXXXVIII, p.11248.
Territory for a term of three years. With Rowland Evans remaining as Government Secretary and Judge Bevan in charge of the judiciary, the authorities must have been convinced that all was under control. But they underestimated the strength of the hatred felt for Gilruth and his colleagues amongst the unionists in the Territory. With Nelson continuing to foster this rancour, the new arrangement had little chance of success.

Nelson’s Campaign Continued

The dissension among union members over the Reform Committee and its aims showed that Nelson’s power over the workers was weakening slightly. Unionists were also uneasily considering the possibility that they had gone too far in their tyranny over Vesteys. The company’s readiness to cancel the droving season in 1918 must have given a warning that lucrative employment at the meat works was at risk, especially since the end of the First World War had drastically reduced the demand for meat products. Doubts were now openly expressed about Nelson’s agenda and his strategy.

Nelson was, however, a gifted politician and he managed to pursue his ends in other ways. He was one of the two ‘industrial’ representatives on the new Council of Advice and this provided him with a fruitful opportunity to manipulate affairs in Darwin. The Council held its first meeting on 21 August 1919 and Nelson immediately began using this forum as a platform to press for various reforms. In spite of Director Carey’s claim that the meetings ran

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14 NAA: A1, 1930/6111.
'quite smoothly',15 some ominous signs appeared at this first meeting. Nelson monopolised most of the morning criticising the Council, which he called ‘a mockery to democracy’16 before going on to itemize all the issues he expected the Council to discuss in subsequent meetings. These included the ‘reform of the present judiciary, the removal of the present judge, and the creation of a number of Labor justices of the peace’.17 Less controversial issues were also discussed at this and subsequent meetings, including suggested amendments to the Workmen’s Homes Ordinance, the provision of medical facilities in country districts, the erection of a maternity ward at the Darwin hospital, and revision of the Lands Ordinance and regulations governing pastoral leases.18

The unresolved and contentious issue of taxation without representation was raised by Nelson at the meeting of 29 August. The question of some form of political voice for Territorians was often discussed at meetings and raised by deputations to the Minister or Administrator during the years following the Commonwealth takeover of the Territory, and a significant number of Territory residents refused to pay their income tax as a gesture of protest. Nelson probably brought the matter up at this Council meeting because fellow unionist and Mayor, Robert Toupein, was due to be charged with non-payment of income tax on 17 September.19 Whatever Nelson’s motive, it was an intelligent move on his part, because it was an issue which was supported by middle class white professional and business people in Darwin, who otherwise had little in common with the union movement. The Northern Territory Industrial Council organised a public meeting on 15 September to discuss the same issue. The meeting passed a motion ‘condemning the injustice of taxation without representation’ and demanding that the Minister ‘withdraw all summonses on this head’.20

The stage was set for a full-scale campaign to get some form of representation in federal parliament for white people of the Territory, but another crisis, instigated by Nelson, arose and once again the issue lapsed. The Council meeting of 6 October was notable for two reasons. Firstly, the damning report on the demonstration farms at Batchelor and the Daly

15 NAA: A3, 1920/3769, H.E. Carey to Minister P.M. Glynn, 8 September 1919.
16 “Northern Territory Advisory Council,” NT Times, 23 August 1919.
17 Ibid.
18 See NAA: A3, 1920/3769 for a complete list.
19 This issue was also being fought in Papua at this time and the NT Times reprinted an article from The Papuan Courier on the subject. See “Taxation Without Representation: (‘The Papuan Courrier’ [sic] 2/3/1919),” NT Times, 21 June 1919.
River was raised and Council members were incensed when they were informed that the Minister had already closed the farms without consulting them. Secondly, the Minister’s replies to issues raised by the Council were read at the meeting. On almost every issue the Minister either rejected the Council’s suggestions or prevaricated and gave no satisfactory answers. This was clearly not acceptable to Nelson, and at the following meeting he went on the attack. He started by raising the issue of the recent retrenchments the government had made to its staff in the Territory without asking the advice of either the Council or the unions. The ‘Advisory Council is nothing but a huge joke’, he said, and he claimed that ‘the same autocratic powers’ that had been used by Gilruth were now being used by Director Carey.21

He then took the opportunity to read a copy of a private letter written by Carey to Gilruth which implied that the two men had been conspiring in various ways to make illegal profit out of their negotiations over Vesteys and other enterprises in the Territory. Nelson moved a long and involved motion that ended with the words ‘the board (i.e. the Council) has proved abortive’. The motion was lost, but the damage had been done. Nelson and fellow unionist W. Ryan resigned, and, as the newspaper noted, ‘after a brief career of somewhat questionable usefulness’ the Advisory Council met no more.

After the Council meeting, yet another public meeting was held at which Nelson presented ‘a powerful and convincing oration’ during which he declared that the people of Darwin ‘would have to make a clean sweep of the whole mob, lock, stock and barrel’.22 He cleverly roused the indignation of the audience and two important motions were passed. The first was to demand that a new, elected Council with executive powers be formed.23 The second was that ‘this meeting demands that Carey, Evans and Bevan leave the Territory by the next boat’.24 Following the passage of these motions a deputation was appointed to carry them into effect. Nelson, Toupein, three other unionists and the NT Times reporter went to Government House and confronted Director Carey, Judge Bevan and Secretary Evans. The three men refused to resign and leave the Territory without obtaining permission from the Minister, and the deputation intimated that force would be used if necessary. The officials continued to resist and Nelson finally said plainly that ‘your refusal to resign will precipitate one of the biggest revolutions Australia has seen, and only a firm hand by those who control the present

21 See “N.T. Advisory Council,” NT Times, 11 October 1919. This report on the meeting has been used because the copy of the relevant minutes held by National Archives (NAA: A3, 1920/3769) is largely illegible.
22 “Territory Administration Condemned: Important Public Meeting,” NT Times, 18 October 1919.
23 Nelson occasionally gave the impression that a local, elected Council with executive powers was as important to him as representation in the federal parliament.
24 “Territory Administration Condemned: Important Public Meeting,” NT Times, 18 October 1919.
industrial mind are (sic) holding it back’. Minister Glynn, however, sent instructions that the officers were to remain at their posts, and further stormy public meetings and confrontations between the deputation and the three officials were held. The men finally acceded to the unionists’ demands and left the Northern Territory by the steamship Bambra on Sunday, 19 October 1919.

**The Government’s Response**

It is surprising that the authorities neglected to take legal proceedings against the main ringleaders of either the ‘Darwin Rebellion’ of December 1918 or the expulsion of Carey, Bevan and Evans ten months later. Their reaction to the latest contretemps was to place long-time Territorian Police Inspector Waters in charge of the public service, and to despatch a gunboat, HMAS Brisbane, to Darwin to help ‘assist the Civil Authorities if required’. The Minister then appointed a Tasmanian Supreme Court judge, Norman Kirkwood Ewing, to conduct a Royal Commission of Inquiry. Not only was Justice Ewing to investigate the events leading to the recall of Gilruth and the deportation of Carey and others. He was also to inquire into the alleged irregularities in the departments dealing with the Aborigines, with Lands and Surveys, and with Mines.

After fifty-three sittings, held in Darwin, Thursday Island and Melbourne, the hearings closed on 29 March 1920. In an inexplicable move, Justice Ewing then dispensed with the services of his secretary and, apparently without referring back to the minutes of evidence, sat down to write his report. The new Minister, Alexander Poynton, laid the report on the table in the House of Representatives on 20 May 1920, saying that ‘it would be undesirable’ to continue employing Gilruth and his colleagues or any other people criticised in the report.

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25 NAA: A3, NT1919/3824, H.E. Carey to Secretary, Home and Territories Department, 21 November 1919; and “Carrying out the Wishes of the Public,” *NT Times*, 18 October 1919.
26 They were later accused in both the press and in Parliament with cowardly ‘deserting their posts’ and their reputations suffered in consequence. See, for example, CPD, 21 October 1919, vol. XC, p.13573.
27 NAA: A3, NT1920/916.
28 For a summary of the issues which were to be investigated by the Royal Commission, see NAA: A460, A5/3 which includes a cablegram dated 14 November 1919 from the Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department to Gilruth, who was in New York at the time, informing him of the Inquiry.
The final report was, no doubt, a serious shock to a number of people, not least to the main proponents. It was highly critical of Gilruth and his colleagues. Ewing made personal judgements of the men, claiming, for example, that Gilruth was both indiscreet and autocratic. There was almost certainly some justice in these personal opinions, but many of the other criticisms were based on a misrepresentation of the facts as they emerged during the hearings, and where no facts could be manipulated to show Gilruth and the others in a bad light, Ewing managed to damn them by innuendo, implying that they had been guilty of serious misdemeanours, if not outright corruption.

The lawyers retained by Gilruth, Bevan and Carey lodged an official protest with Prime Minister Hughes, claiming that the report was ‘not based on or justified by the evidence given before the Commissioner’. At their request, Robert Garran of the Attorney General’s Department investigated the lawyers’ claims and found that there were indeed many inaccuracies in Ewing’s report and that a number of assertions he made were not borne out by the evidence. While their lawyers dealt with the Minister, Judge Bevan wrote to the Governor-General about the report and Gilruth wrote to the Prime Minister giving precise details of his objections to Ewing’s judgement. Further puzzling details of Ewing’s behaviour came to light when he submitted a claim for reimbursement of his expenses. Why, for example, did he pay a handsome retainer to Harold Nelson, the main instigator of the disturbances in 1918 and 1919? Why too did Ewing fail to call Nelson as a witness? Questions such as these and the furore aroused by the report persuaded the authorities to let it fade into obscurity. They terminated the employment of Bevan, Carey and Evans, and no doubt hoped the difficult period in Darwin’s history was over.

**Acting Administrator Smith**

The ship which brought Justice Ewing to Darwin to carry out his investigation also carried another important passenger: the new Acting Administrator. Miles Staniforth Cater Smith had a varied career. He was the mayor of Kalgoorlie when the Commonwealth was formed and he was elected as one of Australia’s first Senators in 1901. His most recently-held position before being posted to Darwin was as the Director of Agriculture and Mines in the Papuan public service. During his time in Papua he undertook some exploring expeditions

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which earned him some accolades from the Royal Geographical Society. Following a mildly
distinguished career in the AIF during World War I, he was appointed Acting Administrator
of the Territory ‘to smooth over the political turmoil arising over the administration of Dr
Gilruth’.  

Smith took his mandate to quieten things down in Darwin seriously. His first address to the
citizens of Darwin was delayed owing to an influenza epidemic, but on the evening of 5
December an open air meeting was held outside Government House at which Smith outlined
his attitude towards his job and the people of the Northern Territory. In a remarkable contrast
to the aloof, disdainful manner which Gilruth showed towards the local people, Smith
stressed that he favoured a collegiate approach to solving the Territory’s problems. He
wanted any policy he proposed for the development of the Territory to be ‘our policy and not
my policy’. He also took a conciliatory approach to the unions and during his short term of
office there were no protest meetings or strikes.

Smith’s initial address to Darwin’s residents was also significant in that he read a message
from Prime Minister Hughes announcing that as soon as practicable the newly-elected
government would introduce legislation ‘to give the residents in the Territory a representative
in the Senate of the Commonwealth Parliament who will be entitled to speak and vote on all
Territorial questions’. At last it seemed that the nagging resentment caused by the loss of
parliamentary representation in 1911 was to be eased. But Territorian hopes were dashed
when the Senate rejected the Bill. As a result of this disappointment, the townspeople began
a co-ordinated campaign of civil disobedience towards the Administration which resulted in a
steep increase in the number of tax defaulters in the Territory. Staniforth Smith was deeply
offended at the defeat of the Bill and he gave the government’s refusal to grant the
franchise to Territorians as his reason for withdrawing his application for the permanent position of
Administrator. He returned to Papua where he was given ‘an enthusiastic reception’ and
served out the rest of his public service career in that country.

35 “Stanniforth (sic) Smith Takes People Into His Confidence: Right Man in Right Place,” NT Times, 6
December 1919.
36 Ibid.
Frederic Charles Urquhart was appointed as the Territory’s next Administrator in January 1921. Considering the problems caused by Gilruth’s inflexible character and disdainful manner, it seems astounding that the government chose an authoritarian, right-wing martinet as the next officer in charge of the NT Administration. Smith had shown that a conciliatory approach could achieve results, but there were many politicians complaining loudly in parliament and elsewhere that he was too ‘soft’ in his dealings with the Darwin ‘Bolsheviks’. In December 1921, for example, Senator Foll complained that the troublemakers in Darwin ‘have now such an exaggerated idea of their own importance that they think no one will stand up to them … Staniforth Smith pampered them,’ he said. Perhaps criticism like this influenced the authorities to take a harder line with the Territory, and Urquhart, who spent thirty-nine years in the Queensland Police Force and resigned with the rank of Commissioner, certainly filled the bill. In his thesis, Mettam claimed that ‘Urquhart defined his task narrowly as a quasi-military operation to crush an incipient “insurgency”’. Urquhart did not mince his words when giving his opinion of matters in Darwin. In his first annual report, which he wrote after less than five months in the job, he blamed all the ills afflicting Darwin on the unions and claimed that ‘the only genuine grievance is taxation without representation’. Harold Nelson made no attempt to appease Urquhart and on a few occasions managed to seriously embarrass him. During an altercation between the two men, an angry Urquhart tapped (or hit) Nelson a few times on the shoulder. Nelson charged Urquhart with assault and was eventually awarded £1 and costs in damages. Nelson and a large number of his mates also embarrassed Urquhart and enraged many of the townspeople during the visit of Minister Poynton. They sang the ‘Red Flag’ from the jetty as he sailed away, drowning out the singing of the national anthem by the townspeople.

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39 CPD, 6 December 1921, vol. XCVIII, p.13773.  
42 Annual Report, 1921-22, p.5.  
Minister Poynton vs. the Unions

Poynton was no doubt offended by his reception in Darwin and he was determined to regain control of the town, especially as Urquhart was so vociferously arguing that the community was ‘tyrannized and terrorized by a camarilla of unscrupulous and disaffected persons, to whom no concession should be made’. Following Mayor Toupein’s successful escape from punishment for tax evasion, the Taxation Office resumed its prosecution of Darwin’s tax defaulters. About forty of the town’s leading citizens, including Nelson, spent time in the Fannie Bay Gaol as a result, but so many of the town’s residents gave such wholehearted support to the defaulters it made the whole situation a hollow victory for the government.

Poynton and his Department then attacked from a different direction by attempting to break the union’s dominance of the Darwin Town Council. In June 1921 the Darwin Town Council Ordinance was amended to allow for a Town Council consisting of five members, all of whom were to be elected by qualified electors. The electors qualified by being ratepayers, British subjects, and on the electoral roll. All the unionist electors who did not own property in Darwin were thereby struck off the roll and union power in the town was seriously compromised. In spite of this change, unionists Finniss, Pearse and Hickey were returned at the Council election of October 1921. This was probably due to the apathy of a significant number of the conservative ratepayers who did not bother to enrol, much to the despair of the

45 CPD, 29 June 1921, vol. XCVI, p.9606. This was a telegram (hence the telegraphese), from Urquhart which was read in the House of Representatives by Poynton.
46 Mettam, “Central Administration,” p.1; and Donovan, Other End of Australia, p.53.
47 NAA: A3, 1921/3964.
editor of the *NT Times*. It was not until the election in June of the following year that the conservative candidates were successful and control of the Council was taken out of the hands of the union.

Perhaps the most serious move made by the government in this battle was the abolition of the jury system in the Northern Territory. The authorities had long been concerned about the reluctance of Territory juries to convict any European of offences against the Aborigines. During the Gilruth era, the unionists developed a virulent dislike of Judge Bevan, not only because of his association with Gilruth, but also because they suspected him of bias, especially in court cases involving unionists. With such a small population base, it was inevitable that unionists would be called for jury duty and it became a point of honour for these men to bring in a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’ whenever a fellow unionist was on trial. The administration of justice in the Territory became a travesty, and it is not surprising that the government retaliated by abolishing juries, but it was undoubtedly a further erosion of the civil rights of Northern Territory residents.

The Law Observance Ordinance of 1921 not only abolished trial by jury except for capital offences: it also provided for the deportation of tax avoiders, the maintenance of order at public meetings, and the punishment of those who interfered with others who were pursuing their lawful trades. Public reaction to the Ordinance seemed to be limited to comments in the press. The *NT Times* claimed that the move was justified considering that ‘for about eight years, juries have resolutely declined to convict any white man, no matter what proof has been offered’. The union-backed *Northern Standard*, on the other hand, railed against the injustice of the Ordinance and attacked Poynton, calling him (among other things) a ‘pompous little Labor renegade’. The Ordinance did however improve matters in Darwin. The authorities had more control over the administration of law and order in the town and,

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48 “Town Council Election,” *NT Times*, 25 October 1921; and “Another Farce,” *NT Times*, 1 November 1921.
51 “The Rebound,” *NT Times*, 20 September 1921.
52 “When the Tide Turns,” *Standard*, 2 December 1921. See also “Poynton’s Declaration of War,” and “Poynton’s Vendetta,” *Standard*, 22 December 1921.
'one very conspicuous result ... was that robberies of goods in transit from the ships to the consignees had ceased.'

**Parliamentary Representation**

The recurring string of complaints, demonstrations, protest meetings, and acts of civil disobedience designed to acquire some form of representation for the Northern Territory finally came to an end in 1922 with the passing of the *Northern Territory Representation Act*. The legislation allowed for one Northern Territory representative in the Lower House, but he was not given any voting rights and he was not to be counted as a member of the House for quorums or majorities. The *Standard* scornfully described the representative as ‘a man with a gun, but with no cartridges’ and a later historian described him as ‘the first parliamentary eunuch in Australia’ but the passing of this legislation was a significant victory for the people of the Territory, and if the newspapers are anything to go by, the election campaign was a lively affair. The election was set for 16 December 1922 and Harold Nelson was a candidate. At his first public meeting for the campaign, Nelson surprised his audience by his attitude towards the election and his candidature. The *NT Times* editor, J.A. Porter observed that ‘his opening statement that in the contesting this election he “was not representing any industrial section of the community” must have come as a shock to his loyal followers present who had come prepared to listen to the customary wild and stormy invectives’.

There was a delay in announcing the results of the election, but on 21 March 1923, Nelson learned that he had won the election by the narrow margin of nine votes. Once ensconced in the House of Representatives, Nelson did indeed show a new face to the world. While remaining a forceful and decisive speaker, he abandoned the emotional rhetoric of the past and argued logically and cogently on issues relating to the Northern Territory. It is easy to dismiss his position as an ineffectual sinecure, but his presence in the House did make a difference. A telling example of this occurred in the first Parliamentary sittings after his election. On 29 June 1923 Nelson asked that the new Land Ordinance no. 7 of 1923 be

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55 “Farcical Representation,” *Standard*, 20 October 1922.
57 “Mr. Nelson’s Election Meeting,” *NT Times*, 14 November 1922.
disallowed. The normal procedure regarding Northern Territory ordinances was that they were drawn up by the Department and tabled in the House of Representatives for a specified period and, if no one objected to them, they automatically became law. Nelson explained this to the House and then described how the new Ordinance would tie up all the land in the Territory for about the next forty-two years. Nelson’s arguments were so persuasive that Prime Minister Bruce announced that the Ordinance would not be put into operation on 1 July as gazetted, but would remain in abeyance until the House had considered it.  

**Vestey's and the Economic Downturn**

Just a few short weeks after the arrival of Staniforth Smith, and during a comparatively peaceful period when residents were recovering from the drama associated with the expulsion of Carey and his associates, Darwin was rocked by the most devastating news. On 17 March 1920 Vestey's announced that the meatworks would not open for that year’s killing season. The timing could not have been worse: the town was already filling up with the itinerant workers expecting to obtain well-paid employment at the meatworks. Many of these men did not have the wherewithal to travel back to their homes in Queensland and the southern states. In his annual report of 1919-20, Smith described the effect of the closure as ‘extraordinary’. He explained that for some months people who worked in the Territory as prospectors, miners, and pastoral workers had been drifting into Darwin ‘in anticipation of the high wages to be paid during the meat season’. They had been joined by men from other states many of whom were now penniless and in debt to the storekeepers. There were also a significant number of Darwin residents who ‘carried on with odd jobs during the slack period between the meat seasons’.

*Employees who worked at the preserving plant at Vestey's*

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60 *Annual Report*, 1919-20, p.4.
'The Government,' Smith wrote, 'was confronted with a town of over 2,000 people, mostly manual workers and their families, with not a wealth-producing industry in the place.' He estimated that there were between five and six hundred unemployed in the town. He decided to grant 216 free passages out of Darwin to the unemployed, giving preference to the Greek, Patagonian, and Spanish emigrants and to twenty-two old, indigent Chinese who wished to return to Hong Kong. In this way, he explained 'whatever work was available was conserved for the British and Australians and our little white industrial garrison of British descent ... was depleted as little as possible.'

Staniforth Smith blamed the shortage of shipping for Vesteys’ decision, but many people claimed that the excessive union demands and the frequent industrial strikes by the Darwin ‘Bolsheviks’ were at least partly at fault. Vestey’s management remained tight-lipped about the reasons for the closure and they never blamed the unions for their decision. It seems clear from government records that Smith’s assessment was correct. Shipping services were still in the hands of a ‘Shipping Controller’ who took charge of Australia’s sea transport during World War I. C. Conacher, the managing director of the North Australian Meat Company, told Smith that he needed space for six thousand tons of coal, passages for 150 butchers from Brisbane to Darwin, and two refrigerating steamers but the Shipping Controller had been unable to help him. Vestey’s must also have considered the fact that, as the demand for meat had diminished drastically at the end of the war, their pastoral properties in South America could easily satisfy the market and at a much lower cost than the Australian operations.

At the beginning of each subsequent killing season, the Australian government and the residents of the Territory expected that Vestey’s would re-open the meatworks. The company

61 Southern newspapers used phrases such as ‘killing the goose that laid the golden egg’ (“Meatworks Close,” SMH, 11 February 1920), and ‘hoist by their own petard’ (“Their Own Petard,” The Register [Adelaide SA], 9 February 1920). Even many years after the event, some historians claimed that industrial troubles were at least partly to blame for Vestey’s closure. See, for example, W.T. Hare, The Early History of Animal Industry in the Northern Territory (Darwin: Conservation Commission of the NT, 1985), p.116. A. Grenfell Price, who lived in the Territory for a number of years, and worked under Gilruth, Smith and Urquhart, claimed the unions were entirely to blame. See A. Grenfell Price, Island Continent: Aspects of the Historical Geography of Australia and its Territories (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972), p.170.
63 This was the official name of Vestey’s operations in the Northern Territory.
64 NAA: A3, 1921/3421.
65 According to a departmental memorandum dated 10 August 1921, in the four years ending 21 December 1920, the meatworks recorded a total loss of £263,247. See NAA: A2124, 2A.
fostered this expectation by continuing to lobby the government in the hope of obtaining further help and concessions from the authorities, and the government went so far as to plan for a modernised wharf, for refrigerated railway trucks, and for an improvement in the supply of fuel oil for the benefit of Vesteys. But, apart from opening the meatworks in 1925 for a brief season restricted to boiling down operations, Vestey's henceforth confined their activities in northern Australia during the 1920s to exporting live cattle from their Territory properties to the Philippines.

Almost a decade before the Great Depression which hit the developed world in 1929, the closure of Vestey's meatworks was the start of the depression in the Northern Territory. The lack of a processing plant in the region meant that pastoralists were forced to find markets for live cattle overseas and in the southern states and the industry languished. Mining news was limited to two or three reports of gold finds at The Granites in the Tanami Desert which occasionally led to a few mini-gold rushes. Agriculture was almost non-existent following the failure of the government demonstration farms and the exodus of most of the farmers from the Daly River and elsewhere. Those that remained had turned their attention to growing peanuts with some success, but it was clear that a thriving agricultural industry could not be developed, especially while the problem of getting the produce to markets had not been solved. The pearling industry also folded in 1921 when Jolly & Co withdrew their fleet of seven pearling boats as prices were too low to cover costs. The industry revived in 1925 when new payable pearl shell banks were discovered near Darwin, and in 1928 matters were going so well that V R Kepert transferred his fleet of eight pearling luggers from Broome to Darwin and three other master pearlers followed him. The successful pearling industry however did not impact on the level of unemployment among Darwin's workers to any great extent as the Coloured pearling crews were trained specialists in their jobs.

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66 The number of beasts processed during that year was 9,682. See George Redmond, “A History of Public Works in the Northern Territory from 1824: Draft manuscript,” August 2001 (NTL, optical disk, 4¾ in.), p.4.
67 See, for example, “Rich Gold Find at the Granites,” Standard, 26 October 1926.
68 Shirley Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling in the Northern Territory 1869-1969” (Research paper, 1997), (CDU Library, Special Collection, photocopy), p.20.
69 “Notes, News & Comments,” Standard, 17 March 1925. Mary Albertus Bain, Full Fathom Five (Perth: Artlook Books, 1982), p.145 says the industry revived in 1924, but the Standard’s article mentions that the banks had not been worked for the last five or six years.
70 Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling,” p.21. Apparently the shell found around Darwin was of a better quality than that found near Broome. See “Notes, News & Comments,” Standard, 25 August 1925.
whole, the economic situation of the Northern Territory was in dire straits and people once again raised the possibility of leasing the region to a chartered company.  

Government Inertia

Government authorities seemed to make very few attempts to invest money and promote schemes to encourage industry in the Territory at this time. They fell back on the time-honoured ploy of funding ‘expert’ inquiries into various aspects of Territory life and rarely carried out any of the recommendations provided by these experts. In 1923, for example, Vice Admiral Sir William Clarkson investigated the possibility of establishing a port on Vanderlin Island near the mouth of the McArthur River. In the same year, railway experts, Hobler and Lindsay, arrived to check out the possibility of extending the railway line to Daly Waters, and this was one recommendation that the government actually acted upon, at least in part.

In 1920 Prime Minister Hughes announced that the government could not afford to build a north-south transcontinental railway, yet that is what most of the experts recommended.

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72 Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.7.
74 CPD, 14 April 1920, vol.XCI, p.1116.
The government finally did extend the northern line to Birdum\textsuperscript{75} which had the dual benefits of giving work to the unemployed and extending the range of viable transport and communications inland, but on the whole a fatal inertia seemed to afflict the authorities, at least in the first half of the 1920s. Perhaps the conviction that Vesteys meatworks would re-open allowed them to shelve the Territory’s problems in this period with a clear conscience.

**The Two Territories**

In 1926-7 some extreme changes were made to the NT Administration. In June 1926 the current Minister for the Northern Territory, Senator George Pearce, brought down a Bill which divided the Northern Territory at the 20\textsuperscript{th} parallel of latitude\textsuperscript{76} into two regions called ‘North Australia’ and ‘Central Australia’. Each region was to have an administrative structure headed by a Government Resident supported by an elected Council of Advice.\textsuperscript{77} The Act was proclaimed in March 1927 and Lieutenant-Colonel R.H. Weddell was appointed Government Resident for North Australia.\textsuperscript{78}

In addition to this radical change, a three-man development commission was appointed to promote the pastoral industry in North Australia where, as Powell pointed out, ‘most of the cattle country lay’.\textsuperscript{79} The North Australia Commission members, J.H. Horsburgh (Chairman), W.R. Easton and railway expert, G.A. Hobler, were appointed in August 1926 and immediately set to work drafting necessary legislation and preparing plans for comprehensive improvements to transport facilities in the Territory, including the provision of adequate water bores along the stock routes. The three men conscientiously investigated the situation in great detail and issued annual reports, but the government’s refusal to provide them with financial backing to carry out their schemes meant that the Commission dwindled into an extremely expensive advisory body.\textsuperscript{80}

It seems impossible to determine the motives for this asinine scheme. The government was crying poor and refusing to spend money on practical help to kick-start industry in the

\textsuperscript{75} Work commenced on the railway extension in 1926 after the bridge across the Katherine River was completed. The line reached Birdum in 1929 and the government decided it could not finance the extra distance to Daly Waters as originally planned. The railway line being constructed north from Oodnadatta to Stuart (the former name of Alice Springs), was also completed in 1929. See Powell, *Far Country*, p.164.

\textsuperscript{76} This was near Tennant Creek.

\textsuperscript{77} See NAA: CP859/6, Item 1; and Donovan, *Other End of Australia*, p.66.

\textsuperscript{78} NAA: A1, 1934/6796 provides detailed information on the new administrative structure.

\textsuperscript{79} Powell, *Far Country*, p.163.

\textsuperscript{80} See NAA: F20, Items 1-125 for correspondence regarding the North Australia Commission.
Territory, yet it decided to spend enormous sums of money on two administrative structures and pay generous salaries to three commissioners and finance the wages of the clerical staff needed to support them. Powell suggested that the move ‘came from the revival of the old Australian fear of Asian eyes upon [the Territory’s] emptiness ... The “yellow peril”, he wrote, ‘helped to push the bill through a lukewarm parliament’. While many southern bureaucrats and so-called experts in the states approved of this move, it seemed that the people in the Territory were doubtful of its wisdom from the start. C.L.A. Abbott, who served as Minister in charge of the Territory in 1928-29, claimed that the North Australia Commission was ‘not very well received in Darwin and the local press scoffed at its activities, accusing it of wasting money, and giving it the name of the “rhinobusters”, rhino meaning money’. Nelson also criticised the Commission claiming that ‘instead of being a benefit to the area, the commission has actually been an incubus’. He also pointed out that the Commission’s reports only recommended what Nelson himself had been advocating for the past five years: the construction of roads and railways and the development of water conservation schemes.

The people of Darwin received no benefits from the Commission. In January 1927 a deputation from the Town Council approached the Commission to enumerate their grievances over the railway, the coastal shipping service, the aerial mail service and Darwin’s lack of adequate water and electric power reticulation. When referring to the last named grievance, the Chairman told the deputation that the Commission had no authority to provide Darwin with infrastructure. After four ineffectual years, the Northern Australia Act was repealed, and the Government Resident for North Australia, R.H. Weddell, assumed the title of ‘Administrator’ for the reinstated Northern Territory.

81 Powell, Far Country, p.163. Many politicians were no doubt reluctant to authorise such an expensive scheme, but the recurring fear that the numerically superior ‘Asian hordes’ would invade Australia and overwhelm our Western culture was still strong in the 1920s. Federal politicians may have been afraid of the ‘yellow peril’ but when seven members of the Japanese House of Representatives visited Darwin in 1926 they were warmly welcomed by the populace. See Annual Report, 1926-27, p.7; and Martinez, “Plural Australia,” p.232.


83 Abbott, Frontier Province, p.56. See also the “They Say” column in the Standard, 7 January 1927 and subsequent issues, and “The Three Rhinobusters,” Standard, 29 March 1927.


86 NAA: A1, 1927/3612.
Depression in Darwin

The closure of Vesteys affected more people than those who had hoped to obtain employment at the meatworks. Government workers, especially those working on the railway and the wharf were also victims. Harvey recorded that within two years of the closure, the number of railway employees dropped from one hundred and seventy down to a mere sixty-seven.\(^{87}\) In his annual report for 1923-24,\(^{88}\) Urquhart stated that the waterside workers now averaged no more than ‘36 hours’ work per month, if so much’ and there was no other work for them. He explained that they were settled men with families who bought houses when working for Vesteys and the ‘value of their properties has depreciated to vanishing point’. He pointed out that ‘high rates of passage money’ to the south, the uncertainty of finding employment elsewhere, and the persistent rumours each year that the meatworks would reopen made them prefer to stay in Darwin.

Needless to say, the lack of any large profitable industries and the high rate of unemployment in the town also impacted on the merchants and professional people in Darwin. The ‘grand old firm’ of storekeepers, Philip R. Allen and Co., for example, was a victim of the downturn. It was established in Darwin in 1873 and at one time had branches in all the main population centres in the Top End, but it was forced to close its doors in 1920.\(^{89}\)

Vesteys closure did not interfere with some significant developments in other Darwin businesses however. In January 1920 the bar at the Victoria Hotel was opened to the public for the first time since the government acquired the hotels in 1915.\(^{90}\) When the dispute over the government hotels was finally resolved in 1920 a series of public meetings and negotiations between the Administration and the unions resulted in agreements on matters such as the price of bottled beer, the wages of barmen and the hotel’s hours of opening. Finally, on 1 November 1921 the government abandoned its control of the hotels which were then leased to private enterprise.\(^{91}\) With the Reform Committee’s job accomplished, the hotels flourished, as did the other source of entertainment, the Don Picture Theatre, which

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\(^{87}\) Harvey, *Never Never Line*, p.110.


\(^{90}\) James, *Hotel Victoria*, p.12.

\(^{91}\) Two distinguished Territory women leased the Hotel Victoria. May Brown, the ‘Wolfram Queen’, obtained the lease from the government in 1921, and Christina ‘Tanami’ Gordon took over the lease in 1926 and eventually bought it in 1929. See James, *Hotel Victoria*, pp.14-5; and Carment, *Looking at Darwin’s Past*, pp.54-5.
had been showing moving pictures three times a week in the Town Hall since 1913, and which moved to its own premises later that same year.

There was another small industry in Darwin which suffered from the closure of the meatworks. In 1919 a group of four enterprising Greeks established a salt works at Ludmilla Creek, expecting to obtain most of their income from the sale of salt to Vesteys.92 One of the partners, Stratos Haritos, moved to Ludmilla with his family to operate the works, and they managed to survive by running a farm on their property and ‘selling salt to the local butcher shops and to buffalo hunters and station owners’.93

Another interesting development in the life of the town occurred in this period. C J Kirkland, owner/editor of the *NT Times* had sold the paper to the firebrand pro-unionist journalist Fred Thompson and his two partners in 1917. Thompson left the partnership in 1921 and John Porter took over as editor of the paper.94 In stark contrast to Thompson, Porter was anti-unionist and unashamedly supportive of the NT Administration, and unionists suddenly lost the valuable support provided by the local newspaper. The unions therefore sponsored the establishment of a new newspaper, the *Northern Standard*. Fred Thompson quickly became firstly a contributor and later the editor of the paper. Darwin residents had rarely had an objective, balanced account of local affairs, but at least they now had a chance to read two sides of the same story, even if both versions were often clearly prejudiced.

**The Unions in the 1920s**

Meanwhile there were some significant developments in the history of the unions in the Northern Territory during the 1920s. It is easy to convey the impression that the Darwin unionists were a cohesive body of working class men and women all striving for the same goals. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nelson, with his gifted oratory and his wily political talents, was often able to dominate the disparate groups, especially during Gilruth’s administration of the Territory, but there was always a degree of dissenion between the different unions and within each union. With the failure of the meatworks and the

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94 Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” pp.79 and 83.
government’s attacks on their power bases, the conflict among the unionists intensified and Nelson and his colleagues made several efforts to unify the movement to no avail. In August 1922, the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner summed up the situation by reporting that the head office of the Australian Workers Union had advised that it ‘had definitely withdrawn from the Territory and no longer represented the workers at Darwin ... [Since then] the men have grouped themselves in two sections; the one known as the North Australian Industrial Union, represented by Mr. H. Nelson ... the other as the Northern Territory Workers Union’. Urquhart greeted the formation of the new, more conservative union with great satisfaction and observed that the ‘extremist leaders are losing prestige’. It was noted somewhat disapprovingly in parliament and elsewhere that the Northern Territory Workers Union (NTWU) admitted Half-caste and Coloured workers as members, and another critic ‘suggested calling them the “Rainbow Union”, referring both to their headquarters in [a house known as] rainbow cottage and their “multi-coloured” membership’. The existence of two general unions was, of course, a disaster for unionists. If the North Australian Industrial Union (NAIU) went on strike, members of the NTWU would step in and take on the work, thus negating any bargaining power the unionists might have had. The two unions finally amalgamated to form the North Australia Workers Union (NAWU) which was registered as a trade union on 29 April 1927.

The problems of divided rule within the public service intruded into union matters in 1926. Public servants in the Territory who worked for Departments which were not controlled by the NT Administration were eligible to join the Commonwealth Public Service Clerical Association (CPSCA). NT Administration staff members were not only excluded from this body, but they were also ineligible to participate in other benefits enjoyed by most Commonwealth public servants. Both Staniforth Smith and Urquhart, among others recommended that the Territory public service should be incorporated into the Commonwealth public service and some moves were made in that direction in 1921-22 but they came to nought. NT public servants finally retaliated at the injustice of the situation by

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99 See for example, Annual Report, 1919-20, p.26; Annual Report, 1921-22, p.11; and NAA: A3, 1921/3764.
setting up their own Public Service Association of North and Central Australia (PSANCA) in December 1926.  

**The Buchanan Reports**

This move by the Northern Territory public servants may have been to some extent in response to the visit of Sir George Buchanan in 1925. An eminent British engineer, Sir George was commissioned by the federal government with the dual tasks of investigating the administration of the Northern Territory in all its aspects and reporting on the ports and harbours in northern Australia. He arrived in Darwin on 13 April 1925 and, after spending a few weeks touring the Top End and north-western Western Australia, he presented his report on the development and administration of the Territory in August of the same year, while his report on the ports and harbours was issued in 1926. There was little in the reports that was entirely new and revolutionary, but they were written in such a clear and forceful manner that they demanded attention.

As far as the economic development of the Territory was concerned, Buchanan came to the conclusion that the most viable industries in the Territory were pastoral activities and mining and these should be encouraged at the expense of agricultural pursuits. Cheaper transport was absolutely essential, and he recommended, as others had done before him, that the railway be extended to Daly Waters then taken east to Camooweal where it could be linked up to Queensland’s railway network. He further recommended that a branch line be built to Borroloola at the mouth of the McArthur River and that a railway be taken west from Katherine to Wyndham via Victoria River Downs and Wave Hill stations. In Buchanan’s opinion, the port facilities at Darwin needed an urgent upgrade and Territory roads needed to be developed.

Buchanan was highly critical of the administrative set-up in the Territory. He echoed the criticisms made by all three Administrators who complained that they did not have control

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100 Bruce Juddery, *White Collar Power: A History of the ACOA* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p.104. By this time the Northern Territory had been divided into two separate administrative regions.

101 Buchanan, *NT Development*.

over six important departments operating in the Territory\textsuperscript{103} and that this divided rule caused many problems. Buchanan observed:

It is generally admitted that no administration nor any business can be carried on efficiently with ... divided control, and I do not think the administration of the Northern Territory is any exception to the rule. Indeed, I had not been very long in Darwin before I became aware of the bitterness and friction existing between the various Government Departments due to the lack of co-ordination and central control.\textsuperscript{104}

Buchanan recommended a ‘Crown Colony System of Government’ in which the federal government would be equivalent to the British government, while the Minister for Home and Territories would have the same responsibilities as the Secretary of State, and the Administrator would be the supreme head in the Territory, similar to a Governor, with perhaps a small executive council to assist him. A self-contained budget of revenue and expenditure would be prepared and submitted for the approval of the Minister and sanctioned by parliament.

This seems an ideal scheme. It would have placed the Administrator at the head of every branch and sub-branch of the public service in the Territory, and all public servants in the Territory would have been employed under the same conditions. The self-contained budget was an important recommendation. It would allow for long-term planning, and would eliminate one serious difficulty experienced by every Administrator: money allocated to the Northern Territory each year was only accessible from about October, just as the Wet season was starting. It frequently happened that public works had to be held in abeyance until the end of the Wet and the money could not be fully expended by the end of the financial year in June and was therefore returned to consolidated revenue. Not unnaturally many politicians and public servants ‘down south’ assumed that the money was not needed, and budgets for the following year were frequently cut as a consequence.

Buchanan described Darwin in great detail.\textsuperscript{105} The Darwin Town Council, he explained, was responsible for ‘repairs and maintenance of streets, public parks, baths, and town hall’, while the sanitary service ‘is controlled by the Health Department and the electric lighting is supplied by a private contractor under agreement with the Minister for Home and Territories.’

\textsuperscript{103} These were the Railway, Post & Telegraph, Customs, Taxation, Public Works and Quarantine Departments. See also, for example, \textit{Annual Report}, 1921-22, p.5.
\textsuperscript{104} Buchanan, \textit{NT Development}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, pp.12-4.
In his opinion, Darwin ‘is well laid out and ... has the possibility of being a fine city.’ He noted that the gaol at Fannie Bay was ‘delightfully situated ... in good repair and scrupulously clean’, but he criticised the other government buildings, many of which, he said, were in a bad state of repair. Government House was singled out for special mention because it had not been repaired or painted since 1918, the gutters were corroded and the garden was full of weeds. He seemed scandalised by ‘houses occupied by white people constructed entirely of galvanized iron, even to the interior room partitions’, and he deplored the fact that the electricity supply was only turned on at dusk so Darwin’s residents could not use it during the day for ‘thermantidotes’ such as fans. ‘As a general rule,’ he wrote, ‘kitchens, bathrooms, and wash houses in all houses were small and unventilated, with galvanized iron unceiled roofs’. He expressed sympathy for the women of Darwin who had to work in such unsuitable surroundings, although he did note that, if she could afford it, the Darwin housewife could employ a ‘half-caste or aboriginal to do some of the rough work’. Nevertheless, Buchanan admitted that Darwin was ‘a very healthy spot’ and he devoted a considerable proportion of his report in considering whether white people could live healthy and productive lives in a tropical climate despite the fact that this subject had already been dealt with in depth by the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine. Based on the Institute’s investigations, the Australian Medical Congress which met in 1920, ‘generally concluded that, with certain adjustments to tropical conditions of their mode of living, Europeans could live, work and thrive in the tropics as elsewhere’. Buchanan summed up the problems faced by Darwin residents as the unpleasant climate, inappropriate houses, the ‘indifferent and unsuitable food’, and isolation, but concluded that with better communications and the ‘ordinary amenities of life ... Darwin could be a very charming town and the centre of life for north Australia.’

The Population of Darwin in the 1920s

When discussing Darwin’s population, Buchanan displayed an obsessive interest in the racial background of the residents which was typical of bureaucrats at this time. He produced the following chart of the population in Darwin in 1921:  

He also provided some interesting figures on the racial mix of the people working in administrative roles: ‘Of the above population, 22 British and 9 Chinese are employed at the cable station, 6 British at the radio station, and approximately 150 British, male and female are Government employees’. In the commercial sector: ‘the British population conduct 1 store, 3 cafes, 1 newsagency, 2 dressmakers’, 3 auctioneers’ and 1 butcher’s shops, and 3 hotels; and Chinese conduct 4 tailors’, 8 grocers’, 6 fruit shops, 2 cafes, 1 bakery, and 1 saw-mill’.109

The authorities were seriously concerned about the ethnic mix of Darwin’s population on two counts. Firstly, the presence of so many non-Caucasian people was a direct contravention of the much vaunted White Australia policy, and secondly, there was a real fear that, as the numbers of mixed-race children increased, the Whites would be seriously outnumbered and eventually lose their ascendancy in the region. Public servants became obsessed with the degree of Aboriginality of the Half-castes, and introduced new categories of ‘Quadroon’ and ‘Octoroon’ to more closely classify the Coloured population. The obsession was intensified after 1927 when Dr Cecil Cook was appointed Chief Protector of the Aborigines. Cook constantly warned the government that the birth rate of part-Aboriginal children was increasing, and he advocated ‘breeding the colour out’ by promoting marriages between part-Aboriginal women and white men.

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109 Ibid.
The Government and Aboriginal Residents

Meanwhile the selling of opium, sly grog, and so-called ‘hop beer’\(^\text{110}\) to Aborigines, the prostitution of Aboriginal women, and the increasing incidence of venereal disease continued, and the government took further measures in an attempt to control the Indigenous inhabitants of Darwin. As early as 1914 the area known as the Police Paddock was declared a prohibited area for Aborigines,\(^\text{111}\) and in 1916 the entire area of Darwin out to the Four Mile railway crossing was declared prohibited.\(^\text{112}\) Thus the Kahlin Compound which was established in 1913 was the only exempted area in Darwin.\(^\text{113}\) Permits were issued to enable Aborigines to go to work in Darwin, but any Aboriginal worker not provided with approved accommodation at his or her employer’s premises was required to be back at the compound by sundown. In 1918, the new Aborigines Ordinance was promulgated which was described as ‘a somewhat drastic measure, conferring considerable powers [on the Protector] and providing for heavy penalties’.\(^\text{114}\) The regulations were indeed drastic. The Chief Protector was made the guardian of every Aboriginal or Half-caste child; anyone wishing to employ an Aborigine must obtain a licence and must furnish half-yearly returns of the Aborigines employed by him.\(^\text{115}\) The Aborigines themselves were forbidden to sell or otherwise dispose of the government-issued blankets or other items and offenders were liable to a fine of £20 plus the value of the article or imprisonment for three months, and the Protector had the power to confine an Aborigine to any compound in the Territory. The degree of control escalated over the following years reaching the extreme point where the Chief Protector had the right to forbid Darwin Aborigines to attend the cinema if the film being shown were likely to present a negative view of white people and their society.

\(^{110}\) Unlike the hop beer frequently sold in the southern states, this beverage had a very high alcohol content.

\(^{111}\) *Government Gazette*, G.N. 179-14, 17 September 1914.

\(^{112}\) *Government Gazette* (unnumbered notice), 2 March 1916. The notice was repeated on 19 April 1919, this time with the number G.N. 88.19. See also *Annual Report*, 1915-17, (sic), pp.45-6; and Sue Jackson, “Geographies of Coexistence: Native Title, Cultural Difference and the Decolonisation of Planning in North Australia” (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, School of Earth Science, 1998), p.125. Aborigines from Kahlin were usually allowed to attend the cinema once a week. Exceptions occurred when the authorities decided the film portrayed White people in an unflattering light.

\(^{113}\) The general public were prohibited from entering Kahlin Compound.

\(^{114}\) “New Aboriginals Ordinance,” *NT Times*, 17 August 1918. For the full text of the new Ordinance, see *Government Gazette*, G.N. 258.18, Ordinance No. 9 of 1918, 26 October 1918, 2 November 1918 and 9 November 1918.

\(^{115}\) One easing of the 1911 restrictions was that, while Asian men were still forbidden to employ Aborigines, it was made possible for Asian women to employ Aboriginal women as servants.
The Kahlin Compound itself had developed over the years. A school for Aboriginal and Half-caste children was established in 1914, but no attempt was made to teach the children to the standard pertaining in the Darwin public school and the convent school. The emphasis in the Kahlin School was on training, not education: basic schooling to fit them for domestic or stock work.\footnote{116} An Aboriginal clinic was set up in the following year and the authorities noted that the Aborigines were far more comfortable about attending this institution rather than the Darwin Hospital.\footnote{117} As Wells pointed out, the authorities continually emphasized that ‘Kahlin was specifically for employed Aborigines and their families who were expected to pay the Aborigines Department a percentage of their wages to cover their costs at the compound’.\footnote{118} Various small enterprises were organised within the compound to help reduce the costs. These included providing the compound and other government institutions with fruit, vegetables, fish and firewood, and constructing water canteens and iron tanks for sale, while the women ‘conducted a laundry service and made clothes for sale to the Health and Aboriginal departments’.\footnote{119}


\footnote{118} Wells, “Labour, Control and Protection,” p.68.

\footnote{119} Ibid, p.69. See also NAA: A1, 1933/4332 for Dr Cook’s description of the laundry scheme, etc.
In 1923, following a spate of criticism about Kahlin in the press and elsewhere, the Half-caste Home was moved from the compound to one of the nearby government houses on Myilly Point. About twenty-five boys and girls moved into the house at first. In later years the accommodation, which was designed for an average-sized family, was at times occupied by as many as seventy or more children. Half-caste children continued to be taken from their mothers and there was never enough room in the home for the number of inmates. In her biography, Hilda Muir graphically described the tragedy common to all the stolen children: “From someone who’d had so much, I was now someone who had nothing with no past and an unknown future”. Hilda claimed the authorities constantly starved the children and ‘gave us half an education and treated us as if we were half human’.

The authorities were constantly torn between the desire to move all Aborigines away from Darwin and the need to satisfy the residents’ demand for cheap domestic and manual labour. Almost invariably their reports of the compound were positive, yet the public criticism at the standard of the buildings, noisy riotous and immoral behaviour, and the brutality shown by the superintendent and his wife towards the ‘inmates’ were frequently made public in the press and elsewhere. Urquhart appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the compound in 1923, but when he forwarded the minutes of evidence and the report to the head office in Melbourne, he asserted that ‘agitation against the existing Compound is 95% fictitious and has scarcely any foundation in actual facts’. He denied that the compound was ‘no better than a brothel’, full of diseased dogs and depraved people, and he disagreed with the Committee’s recommendation that the compound be moved further away from the centre of town. His comments on the probable cost of such a move were enough to persuade the government to follow the usual pattern of filing the report and taking no action.

In 1928 the government recruited Queensland’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, J.W. Bleakley, to carry out yet another investigation into the Territory’s Indigenous people. In his report he spelt out the dilemma facing the authorities very clearly:

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120 NAA: A659, 1939/1/15580. There is some confusion about the date of this move. Some historians say it occurred in 1924 (e.g. Wigley, *Black Iron*, p.54) and some say 1925 (e.g. Docker, “Native Administration,” p.493), but the NAA file includes a letter of complaint from Myilly Point residents dated 11 October 1923 and the subsequent report from the Administrator’s office make it clear that the children moved to the house in 1923.


123 NAA: A452, 1952/284, Urquhart to the Secretary, Department of Home and Territories, 4 July 1923.
Life in Darwin for many of the white families would be almost impossible without some cheap domestic labour, and the Aboriginal is the only suitable labour of the kind procurable – but for this demand, the last place to be selected for an Aboriginal institution would be a town where the presence of a large number of aliens and, until recently, a big meatworks employing hundreds of men, presented so many of the dangers from which it is desired to protect these simple people.  

At the time of Bleakley’s investigation there were people from thirteen different tribes in Kahlin, and he wanted the compound reorganised on ‘attractive village lines’. ‘It seems only fair,’ he wrote, ‘if these people are to be confined to their Compound, that life there should be made at least comfortable and attractive for them’.

He recommended that separate quarters be provided for single women so that ‘any loose system of “pairing” could be discouraged’, and he wanted the compound to have a resident superintendent and matron who did not have the added responsibility of the Half-caste Home.

As far as the Home was concerned, Bleakley showed the same obsession with race as other bureaucrats. He reported that there were seventy-six children in the home, and classed them according to their degree of Aboriginality as ‘Half-caste’, ‘Quarter-caste’ and Octoroon.

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\begin{align*}
\text{Children from the Half-caste home, 1928.} \\
\text{From Bleakley’s ‘Album of anthropological photographs’}
\end{align*}
\]


126 Bleakley specified what ‘strain’ made up the racial mix of these children, and it is interesting to note that, according to his report, there were sixty-two Aboriginal-European children in the Home compared to five Aboriginal-Chinese. This almost certainly refutes the often-repeated official view that the Chinese were to be
Bleakley wanted those children with more than fifty percent Aboriginal blood to be sent to the mission stations on Goulburn and Bathurst Islands, while those with a lighter skin colouring could be handed over to local institutions such as the Darwin Convent School. The Territory’s influential Chief Protector of Aborigines, Dr Cecil Cook, was a ‘rather violent critic’ of Bleakley and his recommendations, especially those pertaining to the Kahlín Compound and once again a report was accepted and filed with very little done to implement the recommendations.

**Asian and Coloured Residents**

While the Half-caste children from the cattle stations and bush communities were being brought into Darwin and housed in the Half-caste home, and the full-blood Aboriginal residents of Darwin were forced to live in the Kahlín Compound, there were still a large number of mixed-blood Aborigines living freely in Darwin. Most of them had homes in the Police Paddock area where they apparently lived full and vibrant lives in spite of the unemployment which was rife at the time. The area also housed many migrants from Southeast Asian countries and some of the poorer Chinese families.

Both government authorities and private citizens continued to exhibit racist attitudes and practice discrimination against the Asians, the Coloured citizens and the Aborigines during the 1920s. In the federal election in 1922, for example, when Northern Territory residents were voting for their first Member of Parliament, the Chief Electoral Officer decreed that no Asians would be allowed to vote, even though there were quite a number of Australian-born and naturalised Chinese who should have been eligible to do so. Then again, in 1925 Darwin parents raised a petition calling for racial segregation within Darwin Primary school. The petition mentioned only Asian students, but Administrator Urquhart assumed it referred also to the Half-caste and Quadroon children. He opposed the idea and southern bureaucrats, who ‘were impressed most by the costs involved’, refused the request.

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127 Presumably his motive was similar to Cecil Cook’s: to breed out the colour by making only the lighter skinned girls available for White males to mate with.


129 Mettam, “Central Administration,” p.64. No Asians were added to the electoral roll until 1928.


131 Ibid, p.163.
In spite of this, the non-white residents were finding their voices and learning to assert themselves in ways which were non-aggressive but nevertheless gave them a modicum of control over their lives and the way they were treated by the Whites. There were various factors which contributed to this change, but perhaps the most significant were the NTWU’s acceptance of them as full members of the union, and the growing respect of Darwin’s Whites for their undoubted talents, principally as sportsmen and women, but in other fields as well.

During the South Australian years, the social and sporting events in Darwin were dominated by the white elite. In 1912, however, the Darwin Workers Club was formed and it became one of the leading social and sporting organisations in Darwin. When football was introduced into Darwin’s sporting calendar in 1916, it gradually became clear that the non-Caucasian people, particularly the part-Aboriginal residents had a natural talent for the sport. The Coloured community also came to the fore in social situations because of their musical talents. While the white elite might have been content with musical renditions of classical and traditional songs and ballads, the working class families wanted something more modern. A number of bands were formed by members of the Coloured community, most notably the Filipino ‘Rondalla’ band formed shortly after the First World War, and the Cubillo String Band formed in 1926.

The Chinese community in Cavenagh Street was also changing. In 1920 the Australasian Chinese Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang) was established in Sydney and the local Chinese community soon formed a branch in Darwin which eventually supplanted the traditional tongs. The younger Chinese began to participate more actively in events and functions held by other ethnic groups in Darwin. The first non-white sporting club, the Darwin Chinese Recreation Club, was formed in 1923. When a group of influential white football players managed to ban the participation of Asian and Coloured players in the game in 1926,
the Chinese turned to soccer and the Darwin Soccer Club was formed with two Chinese, one white and one Half-caste team.  

![Darwin Chinese soccer team](image)

The unions assisted in the growing influence of non-white residents in Darwin. The NAIU and its successor, the NAWU, allowed Half-castes to join the organisation as long as one parent was European. In 1928, the NAWU executive removed racial restrictions by allowing any Coloured person who had passed the third grade school examination to become a member. Martinez explained that wharf work ‘became an important multi-ethnic meeting place’.  

She claimed that the social history of Darwin cannot properly be understood unless we consider the way in which Chinese-Aboriginal co-operation played a central role in promoting a sense of “multiculturalism” both on the sporting field and in the town itself.  

Darwin’s Physical Landscape

In spite of the poor economic outlook, there were a number of changes to the physical environment of Darwin in the 1920s. The first half of the decade saw more buildings condemned by the Chief Medical Officer than the number he approved, although a few buildings, including a Chinese hospital and a Chinese vegetable shop were erected, and the Soldiers’ Memorial Hall was officially opened in October 1922.  

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137 Martinez, “Plural Australia,” pp.197 and 271. After a spirited fight with the Town Council, the club was given permission to use the oval.


139 Ibid.


A new cemetery was opened near the Botanic Gardens in 1920\textsuperscript{142} and the Town Council’s Lameroo Baths was completed in 1922.\textsuperscript{143} On the other hand, the annual report of 1918-20 recorded that the large Greek camp at Doctor’s Gully was by then nearly demolished as a number of Greeks had moved interstate after Vesteys closed. The medical authorities were allowing some camps to remain because many of the men had left their families in Darwin.\textsuperscript{144} A later report announced that the Chief Medical Officer had condemned seven buildings five of which were demolished and a massive fifty-four Aboriginal camps were also destroyed.\textsuperscript{145} From about 1925 the erection of new buildings and extensions to existing buildings began to predominate. Lyons Cottage was built in 1925,\textsuperscript{146} for example, and additions were made to the Post Office buildings, while Chinese merchant, Man Fong Lau, built two shops in Cavenagh Street.\textsuperscript{147} Two significant additions to the Darwin landscape were erected in the last two years of the decade. The building of the female prison at Fannie Bay was completed in 1928,\textsuperscript{148} and a new cinema, the Star Theatre, built by Harold Snell and capable of seating over eight hundred people, was opened in September 1929.\textsuperscript{149}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{142} Peter Dermoudy, “Restoration of Palmerston Cemetery, Goyder Road, Darwin” (Darwin: National Trust of Australia (NT), 1991), [p.1].
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Bartlett, “Port of Darwin, vol.1, p.49.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Annual Report, 1919-20, p.63.
  \item \textsuperscript{145} Annual Report, 1921-22, p.20.
  \item \textsuperscript{146} This building, which still stands today, is also known as the British Australian Telegraph House, and was built by Harold G. Snell. See Toni Bauman, Aboriginal Darwin: A Guide to Exploring Important Sites of Past and Present (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), p.40; and Carment, Looking at Darwin’s Past, p.33.
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Annual Report, 1924-5, p.22.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} Annual Report, 1927-28, p.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} Carment, Looking at Darwin’s Past, p.70.
\end{itemize}
Conclusion

The 1920s, was essentially a period of marking time as most of Darwin’s residents waited for something to eventuate. For those who had set their hopes on government activity to kick-start the Northern Territory economy, they waited in vain. The government continued to stifle criticism by commissioning expert – and expensive – investigations into Territory affairs and did little of a substantial nature to develop the region. Its ineffectual attempts to assist the Territory only achieved further unnecessary expenditure of public money and an escalation of the contempt and dislike for both bureaucrats and politicians expressed by many of Darwin’s residents.
Chapter Six

The Military Build-up, 1930-1940

The Great Depression and the growing international tensions in Europe dominated world news during the 1930s. In Australia the decade opened with the Scullin Labor government in charge, but in 1932 the non-Labor coalition under Joseph Lyons\(^1\) won the election and continued to govern through the remainder of the decade. The Department of Home Affairs was replaced in 1932 by the Department of the Interior which was formed by merging three existing departments: Home Affairs, Transport, and Works and Railways.\(^2\) Seven Ministers were in charge of the Northern Territory during the 1930s,\(^3\) which precisely followed the trend evident in the 1910s and 1920s. This chapter covers the history of Darwin as it emerged from economic stagnation to a population boom and a sudden burst of prosperity caused mainly by an increase in government expenditure in the north as it prepared for the possibility of war.

The Economic Situation in the Northern Territory in the 1930s

Within the Territory the pastoral industry received a blow in 1930 when the Philippines government banned cattle imports.\(^4\) The pastoralists struggled through the depression years, with many of the smaller operators turning their backs on the beef industry and leaving the field to the larger land holders. By 1933 Lyons and his Ministers were ready to wash their hands of the Territory and it was announced that large sections of northern Australia were to be offered to one or more chartered companies.\(^5\) The announcement raised a storm of protest\(^6\) but the pastoral lessees on the Barkly Tableland showed a great deal of interest.\(^7\)

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1 Prime Minister Lyons died in office in April 1939. The Country Party leader Earle Page ‘held the fort’ for 19 days, and was then replaced by Robert Gordon Menzies of the United Australia Party who served as Prime Minister from 1939-1941.
3 They were: A. Blakeley, R.A. Parkhill, J.A. Perkins, E.J. Harrison, T. Paterson, J. McEwen, and H.S. Foll. 
6 See, for example, “The Chartered Company in History: An Illuminating Review by Randolph Bedford, M.L.A.,” *Worker* (Brisbane), 20 September 1933; and “Sinister Plan to Give Northern Territory to Private Co.,” *Standard*, 23 August 1932.
7 “Big Task for Federal Cabinet: Meetings Next Week,” *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 14 April 1934.
Yet, once again, a scheme for developing the north failed to get off the ground and the matter was allowed to lapse.\(^8\) In 1937 the government appointed William Payne and John Fletcher to conduct a Board of Inquiry into the pastoral industry.\(^9\) Their report\(^10\) was praised by most sections of the community, but the onset of World War II prevented the government from instituting most of the major changes recommended in the report.

Generally speaking, the pearling industry prospered during most of the 1930s.\(^11\) The pearl divers usually camped on the shores of Frances Bay during the lay-up season, and unionists became anxious about the competition these indentured Asian workers could present on the labour market. The Pearl Ordinance was therefore amended in 1937 to prevent them taking on any work other than that related to the pearling boats.\(^12\) There was also concern about the Japanese pearling fleet working the waters off the north coast of Australia.\(^13\) Suspicions were discreetly voiced that this enterprise was acting as a cover for an intelligence-gathering network for Japan.\(^14\) This mistrust, added to the fear of competition from the Japanese industry and concern over the Japanese pearlers’ relationships with local Aboriginal women, led the government to commission an armed patrol vessel, the \textit{Larrakia}, captained by C. Haultain, to police the waters off the northern coast.\(^15\) Captain Haultain had to tread carefully: both the local and Japanese pearling crews brought much-needed finance into Darwin. Bach estimated that between 1931 and 1936, the industry produced £245,820 worth of shell ‘of which something between £20,000 and £30,000 found its way annually into the trading channels of the Territory’.\(^16\)

\(^12\) Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling,” p.24.
\(^13\) By 1937-38 there were about 100 Japanese vessels in northern waters. See Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling,” p.25; and Powell \textit{Shadow’s Edge}, p.12.
\(^15\) CPD, 22 June 1937, Vol.153, p.201; and Bain, \textit{Full Fathom Five}, p.211. In an echo of South Australia’s habit of choosing unsuitable government vessels for northern waters, the \textit{Larrakia} could not cope with the heavy seas and was continually breaking down.
Luggers in Darwin harbour with Fort Hill and The Camp in the background

The pastoral industry remained the most valuable of the Territory’s enterprises but promising developments occurred in the mining sector during the decade. In 1930 there were only sixty-eight Europeans and thirteen Chinese working in the mining industry, but in 1932 gold was discovered at the Granites field in the Tanami desert area in central Australia and it was followed by a short-lived gold rush. Miners drifted away from the Granites field because of its harsh conditions, but following the discovery of gold in Tennant Creek in 1932, the ‘great Peko Mine’ was established and a thriving township developed to service the industry. According to Powell ‘by 1935 there were six hundred people on the field and two years later Tennant Creek’s gold production was valued at £85,000, two-thirds of the Territory’s total gold value. Gold mining activities also revived around Grove Hill and Pine Creek and the production of other minerals, such as wolfram, tin, mica, copper, and tantalite continued to bring revenue to the Territory’s coffers.

Developments in Aviation

In Darwin, however, the most noticeable developments in the early years of the decade were those related to aviation, which not only continued to add to Darwin’s importance in the eyes

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17 It was valued at £560,763 in the 1937-38 financial year, compared with £230,429 for the production of all minerals. The pearl shell industry was valued at £67,000, while agriculture (mainly confined to peanut production) realised £9,935, and buffalo hides £19,031. ‘Other production’ was estimated at £22,855, making a grand total of £910,015. See Annual Report, 1937-38. p5.
18 Jones, Pegging the NT, p.218.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid, pp.167-8. The township was originally called ‘Tennant’s Creek’.
22 Annual Report, 1933-34, p.5.
23 See, for example, the Annual Report, 1938-39, pp.5-6 for details on the production of each of these minerals.
of fellow Australians, but also changed the physical landscape of the town. The little landing strip at Fannie Bay (which was also used as the golf course for Darwin’s residents), remained the first touchdown on Australian soil for most of the international flights during the 1930s. Famous aviators, such as Ross and Keith Smith, Amy Johnson, and Charles Scott had thrilled Darwin’s residents by their remarkable flights, but it was not long before the arrival of aeroplanes was regarded as almost commonplace. The early 1930s saw the beginning of regular air mail services between England and Australia, and these were soon followed by passenger services.

Charles Kingsford Smith in flying helmet and goggles handing the first air mail from England to the Darwin postmaster, Hurtle Bald, 25 April 1931

24 NTAS: NTRS 2686/P1. Department of Lands, Lands Administration Branch. Correspondence files, 1925-44. Box 1 of 2: “Golf Club Course”. Permission for Darwin golfers to use the landing ground was granted on 7 May 1930, and they were still using it five years later.
27 Flight Lieutenant Charles Scott completed a record-breaking flight from England by landing at Darwin on 28 April 1932, and, with C. Campbell Black as his co-pilot, he won first place in the MacRobertson Air Race in 1934. See *Annual Report, 1931-32*, p.3; McGorey, *North of Capricorn*, p.10; and “Aviation: Record Broken, Scott Arrives,” *Standard*, 29 April 1932.
In 1933 Qantas and a British company called Imperial Airways joined to form the Qantas Empire Airways (QEA) which won the contract for Australia’s overseas air service. Regular flying boat services to and from Europe commenced in 1934 and a small side jetty was built on the north side of the Darwin wharf to accommodate the seaplanes and allow passengers to embark and disembark. By 1938 ‘the frequency of the mail was increased to three times weekly’ and Administrator Abbott also noted that the arrival and departure of aeroplanes at Darwin had increased from eight to twenty per week. QEA passengers often ‘stayed overnight at the Qantas cottage on the cliff top near the old Vestey’s meatworks at Parap’ and added to the growing prosperity of Darwin’s merchants. The presence of these cosmopolitan visitors, however, made the authorities and the general public even more aware of Darwin’s shabby appearance and its inadequate infrastructure, particularly in regards to its accommodation facilities and its inadequate supplies of both water and electricity. Nevertheless, the development of air travel changed the public’s perception of the little outpost and it was now seen by many as the country’s ‘front door’.

**Two Administrators in the 1930s**

With the repeal of the *Northern Australia Act*, departments under the control of the North Australia Commission were returned to the NT Administration, and Lieutenant-Colonel R.H. Weddell assumed the title of Administrator and continued to act as the senior public servant in Darwin until 1937. Weddell emerges as a rather unfortunate figure at this time. He is rarely mentioned in the local news and his only claim to fame seems to be his role as victim in the unemployed workers’ acts of protest over relief work and rations, and the number of unfortunate social, administrative and political gaffes he committed during his term of office. After ten years of service in the Territory, he was succeeded by C.L.A. Abbott in 1937.

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31 Ibid.
34 NAA: A2124, 2B.
Described by one biographer as ‘vigorous and frequently authoritarian’ and by another as ‘self-confident and a little flamboyant’, Aubrey Abbott began his administration by antagonising the unionists soon after his arrival when he used public servants to unload essential items from a ship while the stevedores were on strike. Carment claimed that ‘town dwellers regarded him as insensitive and arrogant’, and that he ‘reciprocated by treating them with contempt’, but there is no doubt that his energy and his commitment to improving the Territory’s reputation and promoting its development breathed new life into a stale and disenchanted public service. Abbott’s wife, Hilda, was an energetic and intelligent woman who did much to assist her husband in his work. Under her guidance Government House was redecorated and she participated enthusiastically in the social and service organisations in the town. While many people in Darwin disliked her for her high-handed ways and her ‘air of self-assumed grandeur’, she was also widely respected for her style and panache and her contribution to the social life of the town.

37 Donovan, Other End of Australia, p.116; and “Mr. Abbott’s Removal Sought,” The Argus (Melbourne), 13 August 1937.
38 Carment, “Abbott”.
39 NLA: MS4744: “Papers of Charles Lydiard Aubrey (1886-1975) and Hilda Abbott”. The correspondence between husband and wife held amongst these papers shows that Aubrey confided in Hilda and frequently sought her opinion on official matters.
40 James, Residence and its Residents, p.27.
42 Rosenzweig, “‘And the Sphinx Smiled’,” p.34.
Problems with the Unemployed

Before the arrival of the Abbotts however, the 1930s opened in exactly the same way as the 1920s in that there was once again serious trouble between the working class residents and the authorities. A significant number of unemployed people remained in Darwin during the 1920s and 1930s. Sager noted that ‘by 1931 unemployment had become institutionalized in Darwin. The long-term unemployed were a permanent sub-section of the town’s working class’.43 Partly in response to repeated requests that the government initiate some major public works in order to provide full-time employment for these men, the construction of the railway bridge across the Katherine River commenced in 1924. This was followed by the extension of the railway from Katherine to Birdum. After this project was completed in 1929 however, Darwin workers were once again left without access to permanent employment opportunities. The onset of world-wide depression in 1929 made the situation far worse, and by June 1932, there were ‘232 destitutes’ who ‘were being maintained by the Government’.44 Many of the unemployed remained because they had bought land and built their homes in the town during the boom created by Vesteys meatworks. Others remained because they liked the place, and still others refused to move because there was also high unemployment in the southern states so there was little likelihood they would find work there, and at least the weather was warm in Darwin.

In 1930 a group of the unemployed, led by Communists Waldie and Mahoney, ‘seized a group of buildings located on the railway line about two kilometres out of Darwin’45 which were known as the ‘Immigrants’ Home’.46 They formed themselves into a commune, sharing what little money they had and devising strategies to obtain food and maintain cleanliness and order at the Home.47 Charles Priest joined this group when he arrived in Darwin after eighteen months moving around the Territory in search of work, and he described his life there as ‘positively halcyonic’ with sufficient food to eat and clean quarters to live in.48 But the men wanted work and deeply resented ‘the indignity of relief work’, doing jobs such as

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43 Sager, Discovering Darwin, p.61.
44 Annual Report, 1931-32, p.3.
46 The Home had been built during the Gilruth era to provide temporary housing for the immigrants who were expected to flock into Darwin before moving onto their farms in the hinterland.
47 Priest, ‘Further NT Recollections,” p.26. This memoir provides a detailed explanation of how the men obtained food, and how the commune was organised.
48 Ibid, p.27.
‘pulling weeds from the stone footpaths of Smith Street’. They began making public speeches about their plight and staging small-scale demonstrations. On two occasions, however, the demonstrations were on a much greater scale and were regarded more seriously. On 29 April 1930, members of the Darwin Unemployed Workers’ Movement marched to Government House to demand either full-time work or full maintenance rather than rations. The leaders confronted Weddell and locked him in his office while the other protesters took possession of the verandah of the administration offices, where they remained until 3 May. After this incident, ill-feeling between the police and the unemployed escalated and various unpleasant incidents were reported. Finally, on 28 January 1931, another major demonstration was staged, involving about thirty men who again occupied the verandah at the administration offices. By the afternoon the number of protestors had doubled and a serious fight occurred between the police and the demonstrators in which four police and two unemployed were injured.

![Demonstrators, flying the red flag, on the verandah of the government offices, June 1931](image)

The unemployed achieved very little with these demonstrations and this was the last serious disturbance although the authorities were still afraid of further trouble. The government managed to get rid of many of the troublesome members of the group by giving them free

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50 Sager, *Discovering Darwin*, p.61.
51 See, for example, NAA: A1, 1932/83, “Communist Meetings at Darwin”.
52 Donovan, *Other End of Australia*, p.75.
53 See, for example, NAA: A1, 1931/4202. It contains a letter dated 16 March 1931 from the Deputy Government Resident, L.H.A. Giles to the Department’s Secretary reporting the rumour that another demonstration was planned with the protesters carrying firearms and ‘jam tin bombs’. He further reported that the police were being issued with firearms.
passage to southern ports in 1932. The authorities also managed to persuade thirty-one men to settle on farms at the Katherine River and Mataranka to grow peanuts. The unemployed who remained in Darwin subsequently confined their attention to sending letters to Canberra, holding peaceful protest meetings, and participating in social and sporting activities in the town.

Problems with the Town Council

The unemployed were not the only citizens in Darwin to come into conflict with government authorities at this time. One serious difference of opinion occurred in 1930 after the Department of Home Affairs drafted a new Darwin Town Council Ordinance. The Councillors were informed that it was ‘merely intended to consolidate the existing law’. They received a severe shock when they saw the draft which made sweeping changes and seemed designed to deprive the Council of what little power it had to influence affairs in Darwin. The Town Clerk, Reg Leydin, was instructed to write a letter setting out the Council’s objections to specific clauses of the proposed new Ordinance. As far as the Councillors were concerned, the most alarming provision was the section which decreed that the Council must be elected by full adult suffrage. In his letter, Leydin pointed out that the ‘number of ratepayers at present in the town represent, roughly, only a quarter of the total number of Darwin residents on the Federal Roll’, and he explained that this provision would give the vote in municipal affairs to ‘a large number of half-castes and illiterate Chinese (such as populate the Police Paddock).’

The final revision of the new Ordinance was still underway in Canberra when an election for two new Councillors was due to be held in Darwin. Three candidates, including activist and editor of the *NT Times*, Jessie Litchfield, nominated for the positions. Only an hour after nominations closed, the Minister contacted Weddell and instructed that the election be

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54 Powell’s wry comment sums up the government’s short-sighted ineptitude on this matter: ‘thus did governments help to depopulate the Territory they wished to develop’. See Powell, *Far Country*, p.166.
56 See, for examples, NAA: A1, 1932/183.
58 This letter was reprinted in full in the above article and the following quotations are taken from that letter.
59 The letter does not mention that when adult suffrage pertained a decade previously, the Town Council was controlled by the unions, and the conservative element, which dominated the bona fide ratepayers, was powerless. Perhaps the conservative Councillors in 1930 were unwilling to disturb the comparative peace which prevailed in 1930 by reopening that can of worms although some guarded references were made to the ‘past difficulties’. See “Adult Suffrage: Govt. Nominee Opposes,” *Standard*, 11 April 1930.
postponed until the new Ordinance became operative. The entire Council resigned in protest at this high-handed move, but a special Ordinance was passed giving the Minister power to appoint a temporary council until the end of October or until an election by adult suffrage was held. On 19 June 1930, Weddell submitted the names of five persons\textsuperscript{60} to the Minister who promptly appointed them as the interim Council, thus depriving the residents of Darwin of any semblance of local autonomy at all. The proposed new Ordinance was apparently left to moulder in a file in Canberra and the ‘temporary’ Council remained in place for the next seven years.

The new Council immediately set out to reduce expenditure in municipal affairs and to improve the roads which were in a parlous state. By 1934, much had been accomplished and the Councillors had time to turn their attention to the town’s power supply. At this time, electricity was produced by the business enterprise established by Felix Holmes from a generating plant in Smith Street.\textsuperscript{61} The service was expensive and the hours of supply were limited.\textsuperscript{62} The Council claimed that it could supply a twenty-four-hour service at a cheaper rate, and announced it would take out a loan of £3,500 to cover the cost of establishing the scheme.

\textit{Power poles became a dominant feature of Darwin’s streets. Mitchell Street with the Club Hotel on the right}

\textsuperscript{60}The five men were: John Brogan, shopkeeper, Robert Bowman, dentist, Patrick Brennan, agent, Ainsly Callanan, railway official, and Patrick Connors, pearler. Brogan was appointed Mayor. See CPD, 8 August 1930, vol.126, p.5689. See also CPD, 6 August 1930, vol.126, p.5412; and CPD 18 June 1930, vol.125, p.2828.

\textsuperscript{61}The Holmes ‘Estate’ as it was called was on the corner of Knuckey Street, on the same side of Smith Street as the Hotel Victoria. See Sager, Discovering Darwin, p.15. Holmes died in August 1929 but his business continued to operate under a board of trustees. For details of Holmes’ life and work in the NT, see Bev Phelts, Felix Ernest Holmes, Darwin 1890-1930: Racehorse Owner, Pearler, Agriculturalist, Pastoralist, Butcher, Baker, Icemaker, and the First to Switch on Darwin (Darwin: NT Research Services, 2011).

\textsuperscript{62}See NAA NTAC1980/55, Item 3, R. Leydin, “Local Government in the Northern Territory”. The file title for this Item is “Leyden (sic) Report (History of Darwin Town Council)”. 
Unfortunately the project was too expensive, the machinery was inadequate for the job, and the power supply was frequently interrupted.\textsuperscript{63} By 1935 the Council’s credit balance had turned into a deficit and the loan was still unpaid.\textsuperscript{64}

Many of Darwin’s residents became thoroughly disillusioned with the Council. When the current Minister visited Darwin in 1935, a deputation representing the ratepayers requested that he replace the so-called temporary Council with an elective Council.\textsuperscript{65} The Minister was non-committal at the time, but a few months later the residents of Darwin were outraged to learn that the government was proposing to disband the Council and hand the work of municipal government over to the NT Administration. A protest meeting was held in Darwin on 6 December 1935 which sent a clear message to Canberra that the people of Darwin would not tolerate this proposal and that they demanded an elected Council.\textsuperscript{66} The government backed away from the issue, but the military build-up in the latter half of the 1930s put too great a strain on the Council’s resources. The damage caused by the cyclone in 1937 was the last straw. The Council was dissolved at its own request and it surrendered its duties to the Works and Services Branch of the NT Administration on 1 April 1937.\textsuperscript{67}

### Parliamentary Representation

Jessie Litchfield bitterly observed in later years that ‘residents, who had rejoiced at the taking over of the Territory by the Commonwealth on Jan. 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1911, now realised that they were losing every vestige of self-government, and were becoming still more subservient to Canberra’.\textsuperscript{68} The Territory’s only remaining political influence was MHR Harold Nelson, who was still denied a parliamentary vote. Nelson had continued to act as a ‘conscientious ambassador’\textsuperscript{69} in parliament, but he had achieved very little in fact during his years as the

\textsuperscript{63} Phelts, “Switching On,” p.26; and Leydin, “Local Government”. Leydin claimed that the scheme made a profit and that the Council’s financial difficulties were caused by the great increase in the non-rate-paying population needing services such as rubbish removal, and the increase in heavy vehicle traffic on Darwin’s roads.

\textsuperscript{64} See NAA: F1, 1936/17 for details of the problems faced by the Council at this time. The file contains a memo to the Administrator, dated 2 August 1935, from the Chief Clerk and Accountant, L. Giles, who wrote that ‘the town is at a hobble-de-hay stage – too small to help itself and too large to be run economically’.


\textsuperscript{67} NAA: A1, 1937/2067. This file provides details of the practical considerations investigated by the NT Administration prior to the abolition of the Council. Complaints about this move must have taken a long time to die down because in his report for 1938-39, Abbott took care to emphasize that the dissolution of the Council occurred \textit{at the Council’s request}, and he repeated that assurance in his report for the following year. See \textit{Annual Report}, 1938-39, p.26; and \textit{Annual Report}, 1939-40, p.21.

\textsuperscript{68} NLA, MS 629, Jessie Litchfield, “Historical Records of the N.T.” Section 6, p.8.

\textsuperscript{69} Carment and Maynard, “Nelson,” p.220.
Territory’s representative. His biographers noted that in 1934, he ‘was still hammering issues that he had raised in his maiden speech’\(^{70}\) eleven years earlier. Territory voters grew disillusioned by his lack of progress, and when Adair Macalister Blain stood as an independent candidate in the 1934 election, he defeated Nelson by a majority of sixty-seven votes.\(^{71}\)

Like his predecessor, Blain found life as a non-voting member of parliament frustrating in the extreme. Soon after his election, he complained in the House that he was never consulted by either the Minister or his departmental staff about matters relating to the Territory. To make matters worse, the contents of new ordinances being drafted by the Department were kept a close secret until they were tabled in parliament. For all the good the Northern Territory member could do, Blain claimed, ‘he might as well not be here’.\(^{72}\) He won a small victory in November 1936 when he was granted the right to vote on motions disallowing Territory ordinances,\(^{73}\) but his influence was severely limited. However, he continued to represent Territory constituents to their apparent satisfaction until he volunteered for the army in 1940. In spite of his absence overseas, he remained the Territory representative during the war, and was even re-elected to parliament in absentia in 1943.\(^{74}\)

**The Aborigines and Half-castes**

The 1930s saw a tightening of the bureaucratic stranglehold on Aboriginal people in the Territory. Yet at the same time public thinking was being informed and modified by the growing influence of anthropologists such as Dr Donald Thomson and Professor A.P. Elkin who became ‘one of the most influential non-indigenous activists for Aboriginal rights’.\(^{75}\) Elkin’s influence amongst the policy makers and bureaucrats in Canberra and elsewhere was remarkable, but it was the ‘man on the ground’ in Darwin who made sure that it was his ideas which took precedence when anything practical had to be done. In 1927 Dr Cecil Cook was appointed Director of Health and Chief Protector of Aborigines. Dr Clyde Fenton described his superior as

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\(^{70}\) Ibid.


\(^{72}\) CPD, 8 April 1935, vol.146, p.954.


over six feet tall, lean, hard bitten, with a face burned fiery red by the tropic sun, (he seldom wore a hat), a snow-white thatch of untidy hair, and a single vivid blue eye, with which he could see far more than the average mortal could with two.  

Cook, who was commonly known as ‘Mick’, was also a very intelligent man with an arrogant manner strikingly similar to Gilruth’s, and a tendency to view his Aboriginal charges as ciphers in a logistical problem rather than as individual human beings. He was determined to keep the Territory ‘white’. He constantly used scare tactics to warn that, if the authorities were not careful, northern Australia would be overrun by Half-castes, most of whom, he claimed, had Communist leanings. In 1933, for example, he supplied figures which demonstrated that the natural increase of white people in the Territory was 0.3 per thousand, whereas in the Half-caste population it was 16.2 per thousand. At a conference in 1938, Cook warned that in fifty years or so ‘the white population of the Northern Territory will be absorbed into the black’ unless something were done to reverse the process.

Cook gradually came to accept the fact that, in spite of all the regulations designed to keep Aboriginal women away from white and Asian men, miscegenation would inevitably occur. Social engineering schemes based on eugenics had been popular at the beginning of the twentieth century in Australia and elsewhere. Although the movement had lost much of its appeal by the 1930s, Cook adopted this strategy and worked strenuously to ‘breed out the colour’ in the Half-caste population by promoting marriages between Half-caste women and white men. He became obsessed with the degree of Aboriginality amongst the people of mixed blood and he managed to make other public servants equally obsessed. As Hasluck noted, the NT Administration showed a marked ‘tendency to use vulgar fractions as an indication of racial origin’. Cook continually stressed the need to educate the Half-caste

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76 Quoted in Andrew Markus, Governing Savages (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p.89. Cook lost one eye in an accident when he was a child. Dr Fenton, the ‘Flying Doctor’ of the Top End, was appointed the third medical officer in the North Australia Medical Service (NAMS) in 1928. See Powell, Far Country, p.178.


78 Docker, Simply Human Beings, p.498.


80 Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p.69. From 1931-32 until Abbott changed the format of the Annual Reports in 1940, the reports from the Education Branch contained a table designating the racial descent of all the children.
girls to a standard which would ‘uplift’ them, thus making them more attractive to prospective white husbands. Darker-skinned girls were often sent away from Darwin (and white men) to mission stations on Melville or Croker islands, while many of the lighter-skinned ones were entrusted to the care of the nuns at the convent school in Darwin itself where they would get a better education than what was available at the Kahlin school. Hilda Muir claimed that when a white man was seeking a wife, Cook would ‘choose special half-caste girls to line up’ so the man could pick one he liked. ‘It wasn’t romantic’, she admitted, ‘but it was a good way of escaping the Compound’.

Aboriginal women and children in the 1930s. The buildings suggest this was taken at the Kahlin Compound.

In spite of the woefully inadequate funds supplied by the Commonwealth and vociferous complaints from the white community, Cook worked assiduously to make a success of his schemes. One of his most ambitious ideas was to initiate a ‘Half-caste Housing Scheme’ whereby selected part-Aboriginal families would ‘voluntarily subscribe to a fund which would then advance them money to build homes’. The scheme was approved by the Minister in 1932 and building began the following year using unskilled Aboriginal labour from Kahlin supervised by white tradesmen. By 1934 eight houses had been completed at a


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total cost of £1,200, and a year later Cook was able to report that three families had paid off their homes and that he was planning to build a further three homes in the coming year.

Cook believed that the provision of these homes was an effective incentive for Half-castes in Darwin to ‘lift their game’ and behave in a ‘civilised’ manner. A further incentive was supplied in 1936 when it was decided to provide selected Half-castes with exemption certificates. Under the Aboriginal Ordinance it was illegal to supply liquor to any Half-caste Aborigine in the Territory. As these people began mixing more freely with Whites in the work place and on the sporting field, their inability to join in social occasions at the local bars became increasingly irksome. Vigorous lobbying by Coloured and Whites finally persuaded the government to lift the ban for ‘approved’ individuals. The Ordinance was amended and these Half-castes were issued with certificates which permitted them to enter licensed premises. The certificates were immediately labelled ‘dog’s licences’ and Riddett claimed that they caused dissension within the Coloured community. The discord may have arisen over the realisation that, by accepting a certificate, the holder had, in effect, renounced his or her Aboriginal heritage. Val McGinness refused to apply for the exemption. He considered that ‘he was already a citizen and a British subject. “What was I supposed to be exempted from?” he asked authorities, who nevertheless gazetted Val’s exemption without Val’s permission’. Despite the criticism, the certificates remained in force. By 1940 over 240 Half-castes had been exempted, and within the next three years those holding the certificate were granted further ‘privileges’, including access to social security benefits.

Cook also drew up new regulations and modified existing ones to improve the living conditions of Full-blood and Half-caste Aborigines and to facilitate official control over the smallest aspects of these people’s lives. He used various ways to increase the restrictions on the movement of Aborigines within Darwin in an attempt to further control miscegenation.

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86 See, for example, NAA: F1, 1936/112 which contains a letter from the Acting Secretary of NAWU to the Minister asking that Donald Bonson be exempted.
87 McGinness, Son of Alyandabu, p.25.
and the spread of venereal disease. In 1932, for example, he issued identity discs without which no Aborigine could attend the cinema or access his or her money in the Aboriginal Trust Account.\(^{92}\) He also refined the regulations governing the Trust Account, which had been set up by Gilruth in 1913. This scheme was probably designed to teach Indigenous people how to manage money, but it became yet another humiliation heaped on Aboriginal workers, and much of the money was lost. Val McGinness recalled bitterly how he was denied his money:

“they [white bureaucrats] said that money we put in [the Trust Fund] was used to build houses for part-Aboriginals who were exempted. But I paid out something to the extent of one hundred and fifty pounds for my house … But the balance of the Trust money that we were putting in since 1922, I don’t know what happened to that.”\(^{93}\)

It would be easy to regard the Aboriginal and Half-caste residents of Darwin as passive victims in this tale of discrimination and oppression. Victims they certainly were, but they were not passive. They made numerous attempts to take some measure of control over their lives. On one occasion, for example, Larrakia elders at the Kahlin Compound organised a meeting to discuss sending a deputation to visit Weddell to air their grievances, although it pained them to go over the head of the Acting Superintendent, Xavier Herbert, whom they liked ‘very much’.\(^{94}\) The elders wished to make Weddell aware of their concern about the rumours of the removal of the Compound from Myilly Point. They also wanted to express their dissatisfaction that the promises given to them by Gilruth and others when they moved into the Compound had never been kept, and they were unhappy that such a large number of people from other tribes were living in the Compound. Numerous other complaints were aired at the meeting but there seems to be no report that the deputation actually met with the Administrator at a later date.

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\(^{92}\) NAA: A1, 1934/4166. The *Standard* claimed that the Aborigines asserted these disks were “‘all the same as dog.’” See “Round About,” *Standard*, 13 September 1932. According to Markus, ‘by early 1934 the disks had become a rarity’ as the Aborigines refused to wear them. See Markus *Governing Savages*, p.100.


The Half-caste people in Darwin were also proactive in their dealings with authority. With the help of Xavier Herbert, they formed the ‘Eurausian League’ which was later known as the Northern Territory Half-caste Association and began the campaign which successfully led to exemptions from the Aboriginal Ordinance. Another more minor incident which nevertheless demonstrates the insensitivity of the bureaucracy and the determination of some Half-castes to resist the oppression forced on them, occurred in 1938. Staff accommodation at the Darwin Hospital was in short supply and six Half-caste girls who worked as domestics at the hospital were forced to move to the Half-caste Home. The Matron at the Home tried to enforce the same conditions on these girls as applied to the inmates, insisting that they go to bed at dusk and only attend the cinema on one night a week like the other girls. The domestics promptly went on strike. Four girls backed down and returned to work when faced with the formidable Dr Cook, but two refused to do this and were replaced by less recalcitrant workers.

**Birth of the Assimilation Policy**

Criticism of the government’s handling of Aboriginal affairs in the Territory escalated in the 1930s. The ‘Infamous Justice Wells of the Northern Territory Supreme Court’, for example, was accused of a racist attitude and many claimed his trials were tainted by improper court

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procedures which prejudiced the cases against Aborigines. The Judge’s outspoken criticisms and comments against Aborigines on trial and his harsh sentences caused a scandal which reached as far as the London newspapers and became an issue with the Colonial Office. The damaging publicity, the evident failure of the ‘protection’ policy, the increasing interest in Aboriginal affairs by the general public, and the deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture as interpreted by the anthropologists, all combined to force the authorities to reconsider their approach to the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. A Board of Enquiry investigated the NT Administration’s dealings with Aboriginal welfare in 1935 and its report clearly stated that the emphasis should be on ‘the ultimate possibility of adapting the Aboriginal to the conditions of western civilisation’.99

This enquiry was followed in 1937 by a conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal authorities, which was ‘the first time that relevant administrators met formally to develop a national approach to Aboriginal affairs’.100 The first resolution listed in the report on the conference dealt with Half-castes and clearly stated what was to become known as the assimilation policy:

this Conference believes that the destiny of the native of aboriginal origin but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.101

Cook’s scheme to ‘breed them white’ was strongly criticised by Bleakley and others and the conference rejected it. Delegates were careful to stipulate that this ‘ultimate absorption’ did not apply to full-blood Aborigines who were still living their traditional life. As Bleakley argued, ‘we have no right to attempt to destroy their national life. Like ourselves they are entitled to retain their racial entity and racial pride’.102 As far as the detribalised full-blood Aborigines were concerned, the conference resolved to keep the adults under ‘benevolent

99 Quoted in Frank Stevens, The Politics of Prejudice (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1980), p.59. This quote indicates that the official White attitude was about doing things to Aborigines rather than helping them do things for themselves – an attitude still held by many people in authority today.
102 Ibid. p.18.
supervision’ and train the children ‘to white standard and subsequently to place them in employment in lucrative occupations which will not bring them into economic or social conflict with the white community’.  

A few months after the conference was held, John McEwen, a future Prime Minister, was appointed Minister for the Interior. He showed more interest in Aboriginal affairs than most of his predecessors and, with the help of the Department’s Secretary, J.A. Carrodus and Professor Elkin, he formulated a White Paper entitled “A New Deal for Aborigines” which was issued in February 1939 and which became the basis of the new government policy wherein ‘protection’ was officially replaced by ‘assimilation’.

The New Deal included the provision that Aboriginal affairs be separated from the Health Branch of the NT Administration and administered by a separate branch. Shortly after the New Deal was made public the government created the new Native Affairs Branch and E.W.P. Chinnery, formerly Director of Native Affairs and District Services in New Guinea, was appointed its Director. According to Elkin, Chinnery ‘revised Ordinances, and in spite of the difficulties of the War period, laid a sound foundation for implementing the new policy as soon as full civil control was re-established in the Territory’. In spite of the fact that some of Cook’s ideas were similar to the New Deal policy, it was clear that theorists, politicians and bureaucrats were relegating him to a minor role in the new regime. He resigned from his position in 1939 and began teaching at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine at Sydney University.

The ‘Singapore Strategy’

Domestic matters, such as the government’s handling of Indigenous affairs, were not the only issues of concern in the 1930s. The international outlook in both Europe and Asia continued

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103 Ibid, p.3.
104 Elkin, “Aboriginal Policy,” pp.30-1; and NAA: F1, 1938/46.
105 Docker, Simply Human Beings, p.223. Historians often refer to this as a ‘Department’ but it was part of the NT Administration and was therefore more correctly a ‘Branch’. See Annual Report 1938-39, pp.22-3.
107 Rowse, “Cook, Cecil”. A memo dated 12 December 1938 from Carrodus to the Administrator about the reorganisation of the NT Medical Service makes it clear that Cook was not expected to remain in the Territory, and Cook later wrote a very bitter memo in which he referred to his ‘ignominious dismissal’. See NAA: F1, 1939/363.
to look increasingly ominous, and there were numerous news reports during the 1920s and 1930s that Darwin was to become an important part of the government’s ‘Singapore strategy’ designed to defend its interests in the region. Darwin was to be ‘the end of the Singapore-Australia defence axis, a place for strategic reserves of naval fuel oil’. It was therefore necessary that tanks for these oil reserves be installed and protected, but economic problems caused by the world depression meant that the tanks and other military installations in Darwin were only introduced in a desultory way until the end of the decade.

The decision to construct the oil tanks at Darwin was announced in 1924 but it was not until 1926 that the Works Director in Darwin began to remove sand from Mindil Breach to prepare the site for the construction of the tanks. Thirty months later, the oil tanker War Krishna sailed into Darwin Harbour and pumped almost eight thousand tons of oil into No. 1 tank, an event which, according to Jessie Litchfield, should have been marked by ‘some little ceremony’. By 1928 four tanks had been installed but shortage of funds delayed construction of the other two tanks until 1933.

It was obvious that, should war eventuate, these tanks would have to be protected, and in 1930 the Military Board decided to move the garrison stationed at Thursday Island to Darwin. In July 1932, gaol inmates and day labourers recruited from the unemployed in Darwin fenced off East Point which had been taken over as a military reserve. The first troops of the Darwin Detachment, comprising five officers and forty-two men took advantage of a planned visit to Darwin by the Australian fleet and took passage on the warships which arrived in Darwin in September 1932. They were assigned quarters in temporary

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108 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.5.
109 “Naval Defence Scheme,” Standard, 28 March 1924.
112 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.5; and “Darwin Oil Tanks,” Standard, 24 January 1930.
113 “Good News for Darwin: Two Remaining Oil Tanks to be Built,” Standard, 24 June 1932.
114 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.7.
115 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.122. Apparently the barbed wire fence across the road to one of their favourite picnic spots seriously annoyed Darwin’s residents. See “Darwin to be Defended: Anti-aircraft Guns There Soon,” Standard, 4 November 1932.
116 Rosenzweig, “‘And the Sphinx Smiled’,” p.33. See also Rayner, Darwin Detachment for a detailed account of the work done by the Detachment and for extensive extracts from the diary written by Captain F.N. Nurse in 1932-33 which describe the technical, social and personal experiences of the officers while they were in Darwin. Col. Williams, Officer-in-Charge of the Detachment, was careful to explain to Darwin residents that he and his men were not the garrison: ‘They had been sent up on a special mission. They were the developmental or construction section to establish the defences of Darwin’. The permanent garrison would arrive later. See “R.S.A. Reunion,” Standard, 4 November 1932.
accommodation at Vesteys meatworks and immediately set to work installing two six-inch naval guns at East Point, and constructing the barracks and married quarters for the garrison. They also constructed a searchlight station at Point Dudley, halfway between Fannie Bay gaol and East Point. On 20 September 1933, the first three officers and twenty-nine other ranks of the permanent garrison arrived in Darwin and added a welcome stimulus to the social and sporting life of the town. In the following year two six-inch naval guns were installed at Point Elliott and Darwin’s two forts were officially opened.

The six-inch naval guns at East Point

The Cyclone of 1937

The military transformation of the Darwin landscape was interrupted when a tropical cyclone passed over the town on the night of 10-11 March 1937. The Standard gave a graphic description of the ‘night of terror’: ‘the crashing of falling iron and trees, amidst the screeching of the wind, and inky blackness, created a night of horror which most will remember while memory lasts’. One fatality was caused by the cyclone: an Aboriginal

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119 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.8; and Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.122.
120 Their presence was not without controversy however. In 1933 the Wanderers Football Club dropped all its Coloured players. The President, W. Fitzgerald explained that there were a number of men from the garrison who wished to play for the club but the military authorities decreed that they could only join if the Wanderers became an all-White team. According to the news report, Fitzgerald, while reluctantly accepting the Army’s ruling, presented a passionate defence of Coloured players and concluded that ‘a combined colored (sic) team of Buffaloes and Wanderers players would provide a tough proposition on the football field for any white team in Darwin and produce better football than we have had for years’. See “Wanderers F.C. Dispute,” Standard, 1 December 1933; and Stephen, “Contact Zones,” p.245.
121 Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.19.
man was killed when a house was lifted off its piers and fell on him as he sheltered underneath. In her oral history interview, Sheila Hansen described how the cyclone ‘took all our roof, and pushed one side wall right through the lounge room, and right through and out the front. And all the gramophone records just went sailing out in the wind as though they were bits of paper’. The *Standard* noted that ‘many families are homeless and others face almost certain ruin’ but reported later that most of the pearling fleet had escaped the storm. The reporter also commented wryly that ‘for the present Darwin can boast that there are no unemployed in the town’. Reconstruction began immediately but there was no discernable improvement to the cityscape and at the end of the year the *Standard* admitted that Darwin was still a tin-can sort of town with a wharf which bends in the middle and streets full of Chinese. Its garrison members (*sic*) about 150. Its aerodrome would fetch a high price in the antique market.

**The Militarisation of Darwin**

Things began to move at last in the following year and by the time Britain declared war on Germany the Larrakeyah barracks had been built on Emery Point, and the Garrison had been joined by the Darwin Mobile Force. By 1940 there were over 2,200 troops stationed in Darwin. Temporary huddled camps to accommodate unmarried military personnel were built at various locations, including the area near the Parap Civil Aerodrome. The government also leased large sections of Vesteys meatworks to house the Mobile Force until new barracks were completed. As the need for accommodation grew, the ubiquitous ‘Sydney Williams huts’ began to appear on Darwin’s skyline.

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124 NTAS: NTRS 226, HANSEN, Sheila, TS 640, p.5.
125 “Destructive Cyclonic Storm”. See also NAA: F1, 1937/296, which provides a descriptive list of the people who applied to the government for financial assistance after the cyclone.
126 “After the Storm: Cleaning Up and Repairing Damage,” *Standard*, 16 March 1937.
128 The original barracks was situated on the Esplanade between Brooks and Aldridge streets. It was at first referred to as ‘Nebraska Beach Barracks’ after the beach below the buildings, but the name was soon changed to ‘Larrakeyah Barracks’. The barracks was moved to its present site in 1939. See Rayner, *Darwin Detachment*, p.103. The endpapers of this book give further details of the original barracks: the front shows its location, and the back gives its proposed layout.
130 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.124.
131 Ibid, pp.121 and 124.
132 “To House New Mobile Force: Part of Meatworks Leased,” *Standard*, 24 January 1939. Soon after their arrival on 29 March 1939, the men were complaining of the intolerable conditions at Vesteys. See “Mobile
In the latter half of the 1930s, the Navy and Air Force also began to make their presence felt in Darwin. The Naval Reserve Depot which had been closed down in 1922 was reopened under Lieutenant-Commander H.P. Jarrett in 1935, and the last of the oil tanks was completed in 1939 giving a storage capacity in Darwin of 96,000 tons of fuel in a total of eleven tanks. The Navy’s wireless telegraphy station, HMAS Coonawarra, which had a range of 13,000 km was constructed in 1937, and a massive anti-submarine boom was installed across the outer harbour in 1939-40.

After deciding that the civilian airport near the race course was too small for military purposes, a new site, six kilometres from town was chosen for the RAAF base in 1937 and work commenced the following year. In 1939 the RAAF no. 12 (General Purpose)
Squadron was formed at Laverton in Victoria. There were fourteen officers and one hundred and twenty airmen commanded by Squadron Leader Charles ‘Moth’ Eaton. By July 1939 a construction party comprising two officers and thirty members of the squadron had arrived in Darwin to prepare accommodation and facilities for the squadron, and the remaining men arrived later that same year.\(^{139}\) Construction of the base proceeded far more slowly than expected by southern authorities who did not allow for the shortage of skilled labour, the slow delivery of materials, and the union disputes which bedevilled the project.\(^{140}\)

\[Image: The men's quarters at the RAAF base, 1939\]

**The Resumption of Land**

The military activities in Darwin in the latter half of the 1930s were both a blessing and a curse for Darwin’s permanent residents. The influx of large numbers of both military personnel and civilian workmen employed on construction projects revitalised the Darwin economy, but by 1936 the amount of land being resumed for defence purposes was causing both alarm and resentment in the NT Administration and among Darwin’s residents in general. In February 1936, for example, Weddell sent a memo to the Department which contained what was for him a very strong protest about the use of defence lands on Myilly Point and the proposed resumption of Mindil Beach, which was a popular recreation spot for the community. When referring to Myilly Point, he wrote: ‘It appears to me a flagrant misuse

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\(^{139}\) Ray Shepherd, “The Qantas Empire Airways Ltd Hangar at Darwin” (Research paper, 1999), (CDU Library, Special Collection, photocopy). p.11.

\(^{140}\) Bender, “RAAF Station,” pp.60-3.
of a Defence Reserve, when only a residence for the Commanding Officer of the Garrison has been built thereon.\textsuperscript{141}

Other public servants in the NT Administration sent complaints to Weddell which he passed on to the Department. Dr Cook complained that Defence was taking all the recreation reserves around Darwin,\textsuperscript{142} and T. Haultain, captain of the \textit{Larrakia}, complained that the Navy proposed taking over an area used by the vessel ‘as the only safe and convenient place to prepare ships for sea.’ The Navy, he claimed, proposed to use the site for houses for naval personnel, and he added bluntly that ‘its value to the navy in my opinion is confined to a harbour view.’\textsuperscript{143}

Business people in particular were in a quandary. Their businesses were booming but they were too afraid of military resumptions to invest in larger premises.\textsuperscript{144} By 1938 the complaints were being voiced in parliament. On 19 October Senator Brown informed the Senate that ‘disquieting rumours of naval “brass hats” saying: “we want this land” have almost paralysed business developments there’,\textsuperscript{145} and a year later Macalister Blain complained that the naval authorities had ‘ruthlessly acquired some of the best sites along the esplanade’ for which they paid ‘only nominal compensation to the owners’.\textsuperscript{146}

The Navy originally planned to resume all the land from Bennett Street to the sea.\textsuperscript{147} This area included almost all the Administration offices, Government House, the Town Hall, many stores and other businesses, and the Anglican Church, but vigorous campaigning by Abbott, supported by the Department’s Secretary, who wrote letters of protest to the Department of Defence,\textsuperscript{148} finally forced the defence authorities to confine any future resumptions, in the main, to unoccupied land.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{141} NAA: A659, 1939/1/7985, r. Weddell to Secretary, Dept. of the Interior, 27 February 1936.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, Cook to Administrator, 29 April 1937.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, Haultain to Administrator, 29 April 1937.
\textsuperscript{144} See, for example, “A Planned Darwin: Big Resumptions Likely. One Firm has Received Notice,” \textit{Standard}, 1 October 1937.
\textsuperscript{145} CPD, 19 October 1938, vol.157, p.887.
\textsuperscript{146} CPD, 21 & 22 September 1939, vol.161, p.994.
\textsuperscript{147} NAA: E1131, Item 1, “Report from the Committee Appointed by the Minister for the Interior to Investigate Matters Association with the Development of Darwin,” November 1937, paragraphs 8-11.
\textsuperscript{148} NAA: A659, 1939/1/7685.
\textsuperscript{149} There were, nevertheless, 26 sections resumed between January 1936 and March 1939 for which compensation had not been paid to the owners by July 1939. See NTAS: NTRS 2686/P1, “RAN Resumption, Town of Darwin”.
The Darwin Development Committee’s Town Plan

With the resumption of land and the erection of new buildings, the need to more closely control the development became apparent. In 1935 Macalister Blain sent a letter to the Minister for the Interior in which he raised the need for ‘a correct and complete planning of Darwin and its environs for a distance of say 50 miles inland’.\(^\text{150}\) Three years later the *Standard* quoted Abbott as saying, ‘‘I hope to give Darwin a new dress and a fresh lease of life by making it the garden city of North Australia’’ and describing the ‘‘picturesque avenues of poinciana trees and coconut palms’’.\(^\text{151}\)

Panorama of Darwin, 1938 showing the corner of Smith and Bennett streets. In centre from left is Cashman’s store, the Bank of NSW and the Commonwealth Bank under construction. The Don Hotel is behind the Bank of NSW

In 1937, with much of Darwin in disarray after the cyclone, the government created the Darwin Development Committee (DDC) which was composed of one representative each from the Department of the Interior, from the NT Administration, and from the Department of Defence. The report, which was issued in November 1937,\(^\text{152}\) assumed that, for the foreseeable future, the Navy would hold all land from Bennett Street to the shore line and therefore recommended that Darwin’s administrative buildings and the main shopping centre should be sited in the area bordered by Cavenagh Square, McLachlan Street and Peel Street to the Esplanade, with an ‘Asiatic’ shopping-come-residential centre on ‘the Knuckey Street


\(^{151}\) “Darwin to Become Garden City: To be Given New Dress,” *Standard*, 30 December 1938.

\(^{152}\) NAA: E1131, Item 1, “Report”. The report was kept secret because it contained sensitive information about military plans for Darwin, and this aroused the ire of MHR Blain and many Darwin residents. See CPD 21 & 22 September 1939, vol.161, p.994; and “Planning of Darwin: Secrecy Hampering Development,” *Standard*, 18 July 1939.
side of Bennett Street extending northeast across Woods Street’. It also recommended that the indentured crews of pearling vessels, many of whom camped around Frances Bay in the lay-up season, could be accommodated in dosshouses near the new Chinatown.\textsuperscript{153} Following the submission of the report, W.T. Haslam, senior architect in the Department of the Interior and a member of the DDC, drew up a town plan incorporating the committee’s recommendations.\textsuperscript{154} The new plan may have been an excellent scheme, but, as usual, it was shelved as more funds were diverted to military projects.

In the short term, the completion of the DDC’s report had an unfortunate effect on the NT Administration. The inadequacies of the government’s office accommodation in Darwin had been the source of many complaints over the years. Military development in Darwin in the 1930s led to a marked increase in the population as troops arrived and tradesmen were recruited from southern states to build the military installations. Unskilled workers in the south heard of the building activity in Darwin and also started to arrive in large numbers despite public warnings that there was no work for them as there were enough unemployed workers in Darwin to satisfy the demand.\textsuperscript{155}

As Darwin’s population grew, the demand for government services also increased. More public servants were appointed and the NT Administration offices were full to capacity. These offices were spread over six different places\textsuperscript{156} and unhealthy working conditions were the norm. In the offices opposite Government House even the rear verandah had been converted to offices despite its low roof,\textsuperscript{157} and officers’ desks were crammed together in each room in a manner which was both unhealthy and uncomfortable.

The government finally agreed to spend money on extending these offices by adding a second storey to the structure, and the Estimates for 1936-37 included an amount of £68,000 to be spent on ‘the construction of Commonwealth offices at Darwin; the provision of a new wall for the gaol, ... the reconstruction of the Administrator’s office; and the erection of a new school for half-castes at Darwin’.\textsuperscript{158} However, work on the alterations had not started by the

\textsuperscript{154} Gibson, \textit{Bag-huts, Bombs and Bureaucrats}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{155} In the 1938-39 financial year for example, Abbott recorded that ‘little short of a thousand tradesmen and other workmen’ arrived in Darwin during that year. See \textit{Annual Report}, 1938-39, p.27.
\textsuperscript{156} NAA: F1, 1940/492, Government Secretary to Administrator, 13 June 1939.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, Acting Government Secretary to Works Director, 18 November 1937.
\textsuperscript{158} CPD, 16 September 1936, vol.151, p.165.
time Abbott took over as Administrator in March 1937, and within a few weeks of his arrival he was sending memos to Canberra about the urgent need for more office accommodation. But the new town plan required an entirely new building in a different location, and all plans for extending the existing building were discarded. Abbott immediately began to urge that the required land in the new area be resumed as soon as possible but his pleas went unheeded and his memos were often left unanswered.\(^{159}\)

Ronald McInnis’ Town Plan

Meanwhile, the *ad hoc* nature of the military resumptions continued to cause a great deal of concern. In a memo to the Administrator in July 1939, the Chief Clerk of the Land Administration Branch observed that ‘the authorities are evidently proceeding piecemeal with these resumptions’ and pointed out that this process was ‘the subject of a good deal of criticism by local business men and property owners who complain that they are hampered by the uncertainty thereby created’.\(^{160}\) In spite of further protests from Abbott and others, nothing was done to systematise the process, until, in September 1939, Blain recommended that Ronald McInnis, Brisbane’s town planning officer, be recruited to advise the government on controlling Darwin’s development. McInnis was, Blain claimed, ‘one of three persons in Australia who, to my knowledge, hold the diploma of the Town Planning Institute of

\(^{159}\) See, for example, NAA: F1, 1940/492, Administrator to Secretary, Dept. of the Interior, 16 December 1938.

\(^{160}\) NTAS: NTRS 2686/P1, Gerald Piggott to Administrator, 19 July 1939. See also NAA: F1, 1940/230 which contains an extract from the notes of a deputation to the Minister of the Interior (Senator Foll) from the Chamber of Commerce, Darwin, which deals with the same subject.
At Blain’s suggestion, Abbott contacted the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, who agreed to release McInnis ‘when required’. 162

McInnis landed in Darwin on Friday 6 September 1940 and lost no time in exploring the town and obtaining the necessary information on land ownership, population statistics, and relevant ordinances and regulations. Within a day of arriving he was commenting in his diary on the ‘lack of civic control and policy’ 163 and he observed the following day that ‘Darwin seems in sore need of a town committee to control its development’. 164 As Petrow observed, McInnis was ‘originally a surveyor’ who favoured down-to-earth schemes 165 and his report, which was issued early in 1941, 166 recommended that as much as possible of Goyder’s original layout be retained and adapted to cater for the needs of modern transport and a larger population. The report caused a great deal of interest and some indignation, 167 but most people approved of his ideas. By this time however, the Second World War was well under way and it was recognised that any proposed changes would have to wait until peace returned.

Housing Shortages

The steep increase in Darwin’s population was creating a serious housing shortage. Incoming married public servants were in urgent need of houses and these were being erected as fast as funds – and the weather – would allow. For the NT Administration there was also a pressing need for quarters for unmarried staff. When Abbott arrived in 1937 he found ‘that single officers of both sexes could find accommodation only in hotels and boarding-houses, which,
as well as being expensive, were most undesirable for girls.\textsuperscript{168} Abbott managed to get enough funds to build two large messes for the single men and women working for the NT Administration\textsuperscript{169} and he made sure that they were not only functional but were attractive both inside and out. No doubt influenced by his wife, Abbott was determined to improve the appearance of the town. He deplored the fact that government houses ‘were painted the hideous drab brown that one associated with small railway stations in Australia’.\textsuperscript{170} Hilda reported in her memoirs that her husband ‘decreed’ that, when repainted, the buildings must be ‘clear white with green or blue woodwork which brightened the streets and looked well from the ships coming up the harbour’.\textsuperscript{171}

The annual reports give some indication of Darwin’s transformation in the 1930s. In his 1938-39 report, for example, Abbott recorded (without mentioning the military projects) that thirty-four private houses and twenty-five government buildings were erected that year. He also noted that both the Bank of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Bank were erecting permanent and elegantly designed premises in the town, and that the Hotel Darwin, described as being ‘a much improved venue for civilised drinking and social discourse’,\textsuperscript{172} was due to be competed ‘about April 1940’.

\begin{center}
\textbf{The newly-built Hotel Darwin as viewed from the Esplanade}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{168} Abbott, \textit{Frontier Province}, p.50. The girls were even staying at the Don Hotel, which was so disreputable it was out of bounds for sailors, and was known locally as ‘the bloodhouse’ because of the frequent brawls. See Ron Brown and Pat Studdy-Clift, \textit{Darwin Dilemmas} (Carlisle WA: Hesperian Press, 1992), p.9.  
\textsuperscript{169} Annual Report, 1937-38, p.16; and Annual Report, 1938-39, p.27. The buildings cost a total of £13,600 and accommodated 56 people.  
\textsuperscript{170} Abbott, \textit{Frontier Province}, p.47.  
\textsuperscript{172} NTAS: NTRS 275, HARPER, Mrs W.E., p.4.
The style of many of the new buildings was also different. Bridgman noted that the Hotel Darwin, the Commonwealth Bank, and the Sergeants’ Mess at the Larrakeyah Barracks were among the most important ‘art deco influenced buildings constructed in Darwin during the late 1930s’. Referring to the Hotel Darwin, an American visitor, Edgar Laytha, claimed that ‘this single building revolutionized Darwin life. It made the pioneers forget the frontier’, and a leading Australian architect has since described the hotel as ‘an excellent blend of traditional south seas openness of nineteenth-century English Colonial Asian hotel, and of 1930s modern’.

Bridgman also wrote about the new style of housing for Commonwealth officers called the Anglo-Asian bungalow designed by the NT Administration’s architect, Beni-Carr Glynn Burnett. Over one hundred of these bungalows were constructed in Darwin for senior public servants between 1937 and 1941. The working class families however, were struggling to put roofs over their heads, in spite of recommendations by Abbott and others that a workers’ subsidised housing scheme such as that proposed by Harold Nelson in his 1922 election campaign be introduced. Frog Hollow and other vacant areas in the town became crowded with untidy camps containing tents and ‘makeshift substandard forms of shelter’ for tradesmen and labourers who could not find other accommodation.

Improvements to the Infrastructure

The growing population forced the authorities to take some long overdue action about the water supply in the town. Since Darwin was first founded in 1869, residents had relied on

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173 Bridgman, Acclimatisation, p.54. See also Abbott, Frontier Province, pp.61-2 for an account of the building of the Hotel Darwin.


175 Donald Leslie Johnson, Australian Architecture 1901-51: Sources of Modernism (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1980), pp.139-40. To the horror of most Darwin residents, the hotel was demolished in 1999.

176 Burnett (1889-1955) moved to Darwin as Architect Grade 1 with the Works & Services Branch of the NT Administration in July 1937. See Bridgman, Acclimatisation, p.54. Examples of these bungalows can still be found in the National Trust precinct on Myilly Point.

177 Bridgman, “The Anglo-Asian Bungalow”.


At the end of many Dry seasons, this water ran dangerously low, but both the former municipal council and the government ignored residents’ repeated requests for a reticulated and reliable water supply. The situation reached a critical stage at the end of the 1937 Dry season. It was therefore announced by the Minister in March 1938 that a concrete arch dam would be built across the upper Manton River and water from this dam should then be pumped a distance of forty-three miles to Darwin. Contracts for constructing the dam and laying the pipeline were awarded later in the year. The authorities expected the dam to be finished by the second half of 1939, but various factors, including a strike which lasted for seven weeks, delayed the project and, as an interim measure, a pipeline was laid from Howard Springs to provide the necessary water to Darwin until the dam was completed. Water from Manton Dam finally reached Darwin on 11 March 1941.

The hospital was another facility which urgently needed an upgrade at this time. In spite of various additions and alterations, the little hospital above Doctor’s Gully, construction of which was financed by public subscription and a government subsidy in 1875, had struggled for years to cope with the demands on its services. In 1939 control of medical services in the Northern Territory was transferred from the NT Administration to the Commonwealth Department of Health, and a proposal to build a new hospital at Darwin was submitted to parliament on 4 June 1940. Matters moved quickly after approval was granted. The ‘exemplary design’ with its ‘cruciform plan and central landscaped courtyard’ was drafted, the contract was awarded in July 1940, and the hospital was completed in January 1942.

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181 NAA: FA, 1937/456. This file contains a report from the ‘Principal Civil Engineer’ dated 10 December 1928 which describes the existing system and explores the possible sources of water within a 50-mile radius of Darwin which could be pumped to the town for public use.


184 Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.25. See also “Darwin Water Supply: Service from Howard Springs,” Standard, 20 October 1939. Neither of these sources mention the old pipeline from Howard Springs to the meatworks constructed by Vesteys. It seems likely that this would have been utilised in 1939 and Powell suggested that it was rebuilt and expanded. See Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.44.

185 Bridgman, Acclimatisation, p.12.

186 Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.26. Darwin also had a leper hospital which was established at the old Quarantine Station on Channel Island in 1931. It housed both local lepers and those transferred from the Cossack (WA) Lazaret after the Commonwealth health authorities decided that only three leper stations were to be maintained in Australia. In 1938 there were 118 lepers on the island. See Annual Report, 1937-38, p.45.
The Kahlin Compound was badly damaged by the 1937 cyclone, but the site for its replacement, the Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, had already been selected.\footnote{Wigley, \textit{Black Iron}, p.56.} Situated about four miles from Darwin and comprising 743 acres, the Bagot Reserve was proclaimed on 19 March 1938.\footnote{Wells, “Town Camp or Homeland,” p.27. 743 acres = 300.7 hectares, and 4 miles = 6.43 km. See also NAA: F1, 1938/354; and Martinez, “Plural Australia,” p.182.} There was some criticism of the site. Some said it was too close to the new airfield and would pose a threat to the morals of ‘our boys’.\footnote{Quoted in Sharman N. Stone, ed., \textit{Aborigines in White Australia: A Documentary History of the Attitudes Affecting Official Policy and the Australian Aborigine, 1697-1973} (South Yarra Vic: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p.182.} NT Administration staff, especially the Chief Surveyor and the Director of Lands, thought the site was too far from town and too large,\footnote{Jackson, “Geographies of Coexistence,” p.127.} and Elkin, who wanted the people moved to Cox Peninsula across the harbour, thought it too close to town and claimed that the wild jungle environment would cause problems in controlling the Aborigines.\footnote{Ibid, p.132.}

In spite of these criticisms, the residents of the Kahlin Compound were transferred to Bagot in May 1938. The facilities, designed by Cook, included an administration office, a canteen store, a house for the superintendent, separate residential facilities for single males, for single females, and for families, a communal kitchen and dining area, a hospital and clinic, and a
school designed to accommodate sixty pupils. According to a report written by the Welfare Branch in 1965, the buildings were ‘of an up-to-date tropical design built of concrete and fibro-cement’, but the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal residents did not have long to enjoy the new facilities because the Army took over the Reserve late in 1940 and the Aborigines were ‘dispersed in various ways’.

Growing Tension in the Town

By the time Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, the non-Aboriginal population of Darwin had grown to almost four thousand, comprising the permanent citizens, the public servants, military personnel, and the large contingent of workers and skilled artisans. The population continued to grow as the military build-up escalated, and tensions within the town also increased. Darwin had always been a contentious community, and the pressures on the population during this period were at times even more acute than during the Gilruth years.

As the militarisation of Darwin intensified, the local business sector and the town’s working class, including the hitherto unemployed, rejoiced in the growth in economic activity, but they ‘increasingly came to resent military indiscipline and, even more, military encroachment on the old way of life they loved’. The situation did not improve when NAWU began to flex its muscles once again. The union’s influence had waned during the depression years, but, as the construction industry grew, so too did the union’s bargaining power. A number of the most influential unionists belonged to the Communist party, or at least had leanings in that direction, and their concern over the ‘capitalists’ war’ was tepid at best. It was not until Germany invaded Russia in June 1941 that these men began to wholeheartedly support the military work being carried out in the Top End and elsewhere.

Before that happened however, the union staged a number of strikes which disrupted the military and civil developments in Darwin and the hinterland. In addition to the strike at Manton Dam for example, construction work at the RAAF base was delayed when fifty-four

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192 Annual Report, 1936-37, p.27.
194 Ibid.
195 The official figure was 3,653 of which 2,687 were Europeans. See Annual Report, 1938-39, p.20.
196 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.43.
197 In a private communication, dated 11 October 2012, David Carment pointed out that ‘in other parts of Australia, such as the NSW coal mines, Communist leaders worked hard to damage the national war effort.'
men walked off the job in September 1939.\textsuperscript{198} The most vexatious industrial disputes however, were those which involved work on the wharf, which interrupted the delivery of vital supplies. The military became so exasperated with the ‘wharfies’,\textsuperscript{199} and so desperate to clear the cargoes from the ships, that on a number of occasions they simply moved in and unloaded the holds themselves. This occurred in November 1939, and again in March 1940, when the troops moved five hundred tonnes of coal in two days, and again in October 1940.\textsuperscript{200} As Grose observed, ‘the wharfies [in Darwin] were militant to a point where the troops and townspeople saw them as something akin to saboteurs’.\textsuperscript{201} In fairness to these men, he also pointed out that working conditions on the wharf in Darwin were particularly hard: ‘the heat was intolerable and safety levels were lamentable,’ and ‘the abysmal workings of the Darwin wharf made for poor morale in the workforce’.\textsuperscript{202} Powell made the same observations and also noted that ‘control of the cargo was divided inefficiently between Burns Philp, the Port Superintendent, the railways authorities and the N.T. Administration’ and that many stevedores were aware that they would be ‘caught in a death-trap should air raids take place’.\textsuperscript{203}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{oil_tanks_railway_darwin.jpg}
\caption{An aerial view of the oil tanks, the railway station and the Darwin jetty showing the right-angled bend which caused so many delays in unloading cargo.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{198} Bender, “RAAF Station,” p.60.
\textsuperscript{199} A term commonly used in Australia when referring to stevedores.
\textsuperscript{200} Powell, \textit{Shadow’s Edge}, p.46. See also CPD, 26 May 1939, vol.159, p.799; and NAA: A1196, 58/501/13.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid. In a memorandum to the Minister dated 19 November 1937, Carrodus referred to the wharf as ‘the “Achilles heel” of North Australia’ and he quoted the Arbitration Commissioner’s judgement of 23 January 1935 which described the situation at the wharf in detail. See NAA: A659, 1939/1/4727.
\textsuperscript{203} Powell, \textit{Shadow’s Edge}, p.49.
Even without industrial disputes, the work on the wharf was far too slow to cope with the enormous increase in cargo coming into the port. When the Curtin Labor government came into power in 1941, Eddie Ward, the Minister for Labour and National Service, came to Darwin and struck an agreement with NAWU to allow the importation of temporary wharf labour from the south. Within a few days over 160 men were flown to Darwin to work on the wharf, in the bond store, and in the railway yards. Unfortunately by this time the military authorities and the troops themselves had little respect for the unionists in Darwin and this added to the tensions within the town.

The discord was not confined to conflict between the authorities and the working class of Darwin. Although he could be charming at times, Administrator Abbott was not particularly popular with his subordinates. He tended to be overly protective about his position of authority and quickly quashed any encroachment on what he regarded as his preserves. Preparations for war increased existing tensions between Abbott and the rest of the public service. This was exemplified in his relations with the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) organisation which was formed in June 1940. Arthur Miller, who had been appointed Chief Surveyor only a month previously, became Chief Air Raid Warden, and the other wardens were recruited from Lands and Survey and other branches of the NT Administration. From its inception, the ARP ‘received only the most niggardly official support’, and Darwin citizens treated it as ‘a bit of a joke’. Abbott was no help. In his oral history interview, Miller recalled overhearing Abbott deriding the ARP and telling his dinner guests that it was called ‘Aubrey’s Roses and Pansies’. Miller and his wardens were not supplied with any funds to equip the ARP appropriately until it was too late to matter, and Abbott refused their request that he urge the government to grant some legal status to the wardens so they could enforce their orders about building air raid shelters, maintaining blackouts, etc. On 26 January 1942, most of the wardens resigned in protest at official neglect and the Administrator’s intransigence. The situation changed on receipt of the news about Pearl Harbour, and the townspeople became immediately more co-operative about war precautions.

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204 Bartlett, “Port of Darwin,” vol.1, p.106.
206 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, pp.49-50.
207 Helyar, They Led the Way, p.42.
A very large number attended the next ARP public meeting, but Abbott maintained his hostility towards the wardens until the end.

There was also little love lost between the military and the public servants in Darwin, in spite of Abbott’s later claim that relations between the two were ‘excellent’. The influx of troops and workers employed on military contracts imposed an intolerable strain on Darwin’s infrastructure. The town was bursting at the seams, and the situation was becoming increasingly chaotic. As an example, Abbott was concerned about the arrival of servicemen’s wives and children as it increased the demands on housing and facilities. He wanted the three Services to cease authorising their transfer. As early as 1938, he suggested that a coordinating Committee be set up consisting of himself and the commanding officers of the three Services. The War Cabinet referred the suggestion to a committee which rejected the notion of a non-military person such as Abbott chairing a planning committee dealing with military matters as well as civilian concerns. The Cabinet then suggested that a less senior public servant be invited to attend the committee when civilian matters were being considered. The Darwin Defence Co-ordination Committee (DDCC) was therefore formed in 1939, but, as Powell pointed out,

It was a shoddy compromise, brought on by the reluctance of service officers to give the civil power due recognition. The Administrator would know only what the Services chose to tell him about their plans and operations – and he was left unsure of his civil powers in an emergency.

When the war actually came to the Territory, the lack of any clear lines of authority or an effective co-ordinating body caused serious problems in dealing with the emergency.

Amongst the troops themselves, life was equally unsatisfactory. The authorities did their best with limited funds to provide some entertainment for the men, and in 1939 the Presbyterian and Methodist churches combined to build the Inter-Church Club to provide recreation facilities which did not involve drinking and gambling.

209 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.52.
210 Abbott, Frontier Province, p.69.
211 NAA: A1196, 15/501/174PART1, Darwin Inter-Service Committee Part II”.
212 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.23.
213 Donovan, “History of the NT,” p.86.
215 Grant, Palmerston to Darwin, pp.101-2.
But the majority of AIF troops were unhappy, bored and frustrated. The most common source of discontent amongst the troops from 1939 through to February 1942 was the knowledge that other soldiers had been posted overseas and were actually engaged in military combat while they were stuck in the backwater of Darwin suffering mundane irritants such as the excessive heat, the mosquitoes and flies, the lack of recreation facilities, and the dearth of female company. Policeman Ron Brown noted that ‘rape became a serious problem in Darwin during the war years’. On a more light-hearted note, Owen Griffiths recalled that:

They were roaring days in Darwin in 1941. Wages were high and work was plentiful. Naval, army and air force personnel flooded the town with full pay envelopes and nowhere to spend them. The hotels and gambling houses did a brisk business.

He qualified this by adding that:

For all the wild pace set, Darwin was not without respectability. From Government House circles, a decorous and gentile (sic) atmosphere permeated throughout the community. A military brass band played at evening in the town reserve. The Darwin Literary and Debating Society flourished, amateur theatrical and dramatic societies performed to appreciative audiences, the School of Arts Library was well patronised and the various church services and functions were unobtrusively crowded.

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217 Brown and Studdy-Clift, Darwin Dilemmas, p.43.
218 Griffiths, Darwin Drama, p.32.
219 Ibid, p.36.
Discontent flourished however amongst the ‘lower orders’, and in 1941 the unrest exploded into a full-blown riot. After a serious melee at a boxing match at the Darwin stadium on 29 August, the troops were still tense and excited on the following day. A trivial incident at the Hotel Victoria sparked a rampage and the men trashed and looted the bar and the hotel lounge, smashed the windows of the Rendezvous Cafe next door and did the same to Roslyn Court. They crossed Smith Street and looted Lorna Lim’s store and the neighbouring jeweller’s shop.\textsuperscript{220} The police called for reinforcements from Larrakeyah Barracks and the riot was quelled, but the troops remained disgruntled and unsettled until Darwin was bombed on 19 February 1942.

![Damage to the Hotel Victoria caused during the riot on 30 August 1941](image)

**Conclusion**

In the space of a few years, Darwin was transformed from a sleepy little village to a bustling military base. Each section of the community – the military personnel, the white civilians, the Coloured population and the Aborigines – was thrust together on the Darwin peninsula, meeting each other through their work, on the playing fields, in the pubs and at the cinema, yet at the same time keeping to its own separate ways of life. The physical landscape had changed dramatically. The population was now spread as far as Berrimah, and homes and institutional buildings were spread across the town area which was nevertheless still dotted with untidy vacant lots.

The Commonwealth government had at last spent some serious money on the town. Admittedly most of it was expended on military installations, but the town’s infrastructure had been improved. There was still a distressing tendency among the bureaucrats in the south to treat the citizens of Darwin, and even the public servants working there as second-class citizens, but with government money flowing and with a significantly increased population, the economy was in the most buoyant state it had ever been. The people living in Darwin in 1941 could have been very optimistic about the future had it not been for the threat of war in the Pacific.
Figure 9: Sketch map of Darwin, ca. 1940s

Based on the map in Powell, *Shadow’s Edge*, p.55.
Chapter Seven

Darwin at War, 1941-1945

As far as the development of Darwin is concerned, the years following the first bombing raid on the town on 19 February 1942 were an interregnum. Darwin became a war zone, and normal business and everyday social interactions between the different sectors of Darwin’s society no longer existed. Details of the events and interactions which occurred in Darwin during these years had little relevance to life before the war and life after the war. This chapter therefore provides only a brief overview of the main events in Darwin and the hinterland in the period from the first bombing raid to the return of civilians in 1946.

Evacuation

The realities of war achieved immediacy for the people of Darwin at the end of 1941. Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December and her rapid move south, conquering all who lay in her path was no surprise to either the military or civilian authorities in Australia. The War Cabinet had already approved Abbott’s plans for evacuating all non-essential civilians in Darwin, and on 16 December the Standard printed a compulsory evacuation order, signed by Abbott. Lockwood claimed that this order was to some extent a ‘confidence trick’: it had no legal validity at all because the National Security Regulations had not yet been gazetted.2 Over two hundred women refused to leave at first. Lockwood’s wife was one of a number of white women who managed to avoid the order by getting employment in one of the ‘essential jobs’, which included ‘telephonists, boarding house proprietresses, nurses, the Administrator’s wife and her domestic servants, and stenographers and clerks employed by the government and the services’.3 Other women managed to hide from the wardens who came to collect them, and a few who did not read English were not even aware of the order. The majority however, did not protest about being forced to leave Darwin, and the evacuations went ahead relatively smoothly, although there were many complaints about the process.

2 Lockwood, Australia’s Pearl Harbour, p.12. The regulations were not gazetted until four days after the first air raid on Darwin.
3 Ibid, p.16.
The evacuation order stated that the first party, comprising ‘sick in hospital, expectant mothers, aged and infirm and women with young children’ would ‘leave within the next 48 hours’. They were also told that their ‘personal effects must not exceed 35 lbs’ and this caused much bitterness among the women, particularly those with a number of children. There were just over two thousand people to be evacuated so it was a massive undertaking.

The *Koolinda*, one of Western Australia’s state ships, left Darwin on 19 December with the first 225 evacuees on board. The *Zealandia* left the following day with 530 evacuees, which included ninety-three Chinese women and children. The captain of an American luxury liner, the *President Grant*, which happened to be in port, was persuaded to participate in the evacuation, and the ship left on 23 December with 222 passengers. In January 1942, Burns Philp’s ship, the *Montoro*, left with 187 passengers for the east coast, and the other Western Australian state ship, the *Koolama*, took a further 173 evacuees to Fremantle. After returning to Darwin, the *Koolinda* took the final batch of seventy-seven evacuees to Freemantle just four days before the Japanese first bombed the town.

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4 “Evacuation Order,” *Standard*, 16 December 1941. 35lbs = 15.876kg.
6 James, *No Man’s Land*, p.139.
7 These evacuation figures are available in Powell, *Shadow’s Edge*, p.54, Bartlett, “Port of Darwin,” vol.1, p.108, and elsewhere. Bartlett recorded that the owners of the *President Grant* claimed £100 per passenger even though the normal fare was £25.
The women and children lucky enough to be shipped out on the President Grant enjoyed a luxurious trip, but the other evacuees were not so fortunate. The normal passenger load for the Koolinda was sixty-five less than the number of evacuees on board, and the Montoro exceeded her usual limit by forty-seven. The evacuees on the Zealandia had the worst experience. Not only did this ship, which was labelled the ‘Hell Ship’, carry eighty-four more passengers than its recommended load, it was also carrying three hundred Japanese internees and two hundred soldiers. Travelling through tropical waters in the middle of the Wet season and enduring unbearably crowded accommodation, inadequate rations, and brackish water made this a nightmare voyage for the unfortunate men, women and children on board.

The five ships evacuated a total of 1,414 civilians before the first bombing raid, and other people left by air or by train. With some justice, Ganter dubbed these operations the ‘colour coded evacuations’. White women and children were offered first chance to be moved out and ‘Asian and coloured civilians were fitted in where possible’. It certainly seemed that the mode of transport depended to a large extent on race and social status. Many women and children from white families who could afford to pay their own way, left by air before the compulsory evacuations commenced. Some officers’ families were also flown out, courtesy of the armed forces. For the most part, the ships carried white and a comparatively small number of Chinese evacuees. Most Asian and mixed-race women and children were transported out on a long and tedious journey by train followed by a truck journey down the rough track that connected the railhead at Birdum and the terminus at Alice Springs. A large number of Coloured families ended up spending the war years at ‘an improvised camp on the racecourse at Balaklava’ in South Australia. Joe McGinness’s mother, and his brother’s family were among the evacuees at Balaklava, and Mary Lee, who was also at the camp, later observed that ‘in Darwin no one thought anything about colour, but down there we felt the colour bar. People would cross the street whenever they saw us’.

8 These figures were derived from data available in Bartlett, “Port of Darwin,” vol.1, pp.108-9.
9 Janet Dickinson, Refugees in Our Own Country: The Story of Darwin’s Wartime Evacuees (Darwin: HSNT, 1995), p.27. At the age of two, the author was evacuated on the Zealandia with her mother, Glad Litchfield, and her siblings.
10 Ganter, Mixed Relations, p.216.
11 Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.259.
12 McGinness, Son of Alyandabu, p.31.
13 Peter Forrest and Sheila Forrest, Federation Frontline: A People’s History of World War II in the Northern Territory (Darwin: Centenary of Federation Northern Territory, 2001), p.81.
Preparing for an Attack

With most of the women and children out of danger, some claimed that life in Darwin ‘proceeded more or less normally right up to the day of the first “blitz”’. Others described the mounting tension in the town. National Geographic staff writer Howell Walker claimed that ‘night and day during the month before the bombs actually fell, we all expected a raid.’ ‘Tropical languor vanished,’ he wrote. AIF troops ‘no longer drank out of boredom. They toasted the future’. The civilians were also galvanized into action. They were now taking the time to excavate slit trenches near their homes as a precaution against air raids. The work was extremely difficult however, as most of the Darwin peninsula was covered with a layer of extremely hard ‘porcellanite’ under a comparatively thin layer of topsoil, and many of the trenches were still unfinished in February 1942.

As the Japanese advanced through South-east Asia, any Allied shipping in the area was in grave danger, and some ships had taken refuge in Darwin harbour. The Japanese threat escalated each day. On 14 February 1942 a convoy bound for Timor left Darwin carrying 1,800 troops, plus ammunition and supplies. It consisted of three American and one Australian merchant ship, protected by four warships. Three days out from the port forty-four Japanese aircraft attacked them. Twenty-nine men were injured in the attack, one of whom died later, and the convoy was ordered back to Darwin. They arrived at Darwin on 18 February thus bringing the total number of ships in the harbour to fifty-two.

The First Raids

When the Japanese bombers attacked at about 10 a.m. on 19 February 1942, most of the ships were firmly anchored to their positions and some were hemmed in at the wharf by other

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14 Griffiths, Darwin Drama, p.53.
17 These were the USS Houston, USS Peary, HMAS Warrego and HMAS Swan. See Garrison, “Darwin 1942,” p.45.
18 Many books and papers have been written about the bombing raids on Darwin, and there are some discrepancies in the statistics, including the number of ships in the harbour at the time of the first raid. Air Commodore Garrison, who presumably had access to official files not available to the general public, claimed that there were ‘49 named ships of various sizes and types located within Darwin harbour or the immediate vicinity, and three unnamed auxiliary craft.’ See Garrison, “Darwin 1942,” p.47.
ships. The military authorities could have provided a warning twenty minutes before the
enemy aircraft arrived. Father John McGrath at the Catholic mission on Bathurst Island sent
an urgent message reporting that ‘an unusually large air formation’ was heading towards
Darwin. Staff at the AWA Coastal Radio Station passed the message to RAAF Operations at
9.37 a.m.\textsuperscript{19} There were eleven American P40 Kittyhawks in the sky at the time,\textsuperscript{20} and the
RAAF officers were still debating whether it was these aircraft that Father McGrath saw
when almost two hundred Japanese aircraft crossed the coast. The air raid siren finally
sounded at almost exactly the same time as the first bombs fell, so the ships had no time to
weigh anchor and move into more open waters where they had a chance of dodging the
bombs.

\textbf{The destruction of the Zealandia, 19 February 1942}

The Japanese concentrated on the harbour on their first pass over Darwin and they wreaked
terrible damage on the ships and the wharf. When they made a second pass they released
their bombs over the town. The raid lasted about forty minutes but the people in Darwin
were still recovering from the shock of the ferocious attack when a further fifty-four Japanese
planes from an airfield in the Celebes arrived and proceeded to drop bombs on the RAAF
base.

Garrisson claimed that ‘in retrospect, the first Darwin raid was in fact one of the three or four
heaviest single air raids sustained by the Allies in the war’.\textsuperscript{21} Whether other historians agree
is a moot point, but the carnage was certainly dreadful. Eight of the ships in the harbour were

\textsuperscript{20} Bob Alford, \textit{Darwin’s Air War 1942-1945: An Illustrated History Commemorating the Darwin Air Raids}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}
\textsuperscript{21} Garrisson, “Darwin 1942,” p.77.
sunk, and, as they returned to their aircraft carriers, the Japanese managed to destroy two other ships which were in the vicinity of the Tiwi Islands.\footnote{Details of all these ships can be found in Powell, \textit{Shadow's Edge}, pp.78-80, Griffiths, \textit{Darwin Drama}, pp.73-4, Sophie McCarthy, \textit{World War II Shipwrecks and the First Japanese Air Raid on Darwin, 19 February 1942}, Technical Report Series No.1 ([Darwin]: The Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1992), and Garrison, \textit{“Darwin 1942,”} pp.76-7.} When the wharf was hit almost simultaneously by \textquote{several heavy bombs},\footnote{Garrison, \textit{“Darwin 1942,”} p.56.} not only were about twenty-one stevedores killed, but the oil pipes were ruptured and oil spread across the harbour and was set alight by the fires burning on the bombed ships and elsewhere. The unfortunate sailors on the stricken ships were forced to jump into this inferno or die as the ships went down. Other ships in the harbour did not survive unharmed. Four ships were beached, and eleven ships were seriously damaged. These included the hospital ship, the \textit{Manunda}, which suffered a near miss and a direct hit. Twelve people died on this ship, including the army nurse, Sister Margaret de Mestre.\footnote{Powell, \textit{Shadow's Edge}, p.80.} The \textit{Manunda} was patched up and left Darwin the following day carrying the most seriously wounded people to Fremantle.\footnote{Arch Grant, \textit{Australia's Frontline Matron: Edith McQuade White} (Dee Why NSW: Frontier Publishing, 1991), p.9. See also Ellen Kettle, \textquote{A Brief History of Royal Darwin Hospital} (Research paper, 1986) (CDU Library Special Collection, photocopy), p.7. According to Powell, \textquote{two hundred and twenty cot cases went out in \textit{Manunda}.} See Powell, \textit{Shadow's Edge}, p.191.} Nineteen patients died on the voyage.\footnote{Lockwood, \textit{Australia's Pearl Harbour}, p.46.}

\begin{center}
\textit{‘Smoke billowing from the oil tanks behind the Qantas Flying Boat Terminal after a Japanese bombing raid’}
\end{center}

The Japanese managed to almost completely destroy the heart of Darwin on their second pass over the town. The Post Office, the cable office, the telegraph office and the Postmaster’s
residence received direct hits and were completely wrecked. So too was the Police Barracks, while the nearby government offices and police station suffered near misses and were rendered uninhabitable. The new hospital at Kahlin was also damaged by near misses and Government House suffered some near misses. The Abbotts, their staff, and a visitor were lucky to survive. The new office for the Administrator overhung the cliff on the escarpment, and a strong room had been built underneath it between the concrete pillars supporting the structure. The Abbotts were advised to shelter there rather than rely on a slit trench. They were assured that only a direct hit would put them in danger. One of the first bombs to fall on the town landed directly on the office which collapsed. The only thing that saved most of those sheltering beneath it was the strong room door which was blasted open by the bomb and propped up one corner of the structure above it. Only one person died: a part-Aboriginal maid, Daisy Martin, was crushed under the debris. Hilda Abbott described Government House after the raid was over: ‘The end of the house, with its odd gables, looked skew-whiff and all the garden tubs of glorious crotons in front of it were burst to bits’.

The Club Hotel on the corner of Herbert and Mitchell streets was destroyed while the Hotel Darwin remained intact. Note the military installations on the town oval behind the Hotel Darwin

The second raid, which concentrated on the RAAF base, caused an equal amount of damage. According to Australia’s official history of the war, a total of twenty-six Australian and American aircraft were destroyed and three were badly damaged. The base itself was

28 NLA: MS4744, Box 8, Folder 5, Hilda Abbott, “Saved by the Strong Room: Raid on Darwin 1942”.
29 Ibid.
almost completely demolished. Garrisson recorded that Major General Blake visited the base later in the afternoon and ‘he reported that it had been “blasted off the face of the earth’”.  

The Death Toll

Estimates of the number of persons killed or wounded in these two raids vary considerably, but in order to comprehend the scale of the disaster it is, I think, necessary to provide some figures. Most historians agree that at least 242 people died. No less than 172 people were killed immediately on the ships, and nineteen later died of their wounds; twenty-one were killed on the wharf; and fourteen were killed in town. There were fourteen airmen killed, seven of whom were USAF military, and two soldiers of the Australian army were also killed outright. In the years since the Japanese raids, people have disputed the official death toll, claiming that many more people were killed, especially in the harbour where they were not counted because their bodies washed up on distant shores or were caught in the mangroves.

As far as Darwin’s citizens were concerned, the most distressing deaths were those on the wharf and in the carnage which occurred at the Post Office precinct. Postmaster Hurtle Bald had spent some time building a splendid trench in his back yard. When the bombs started to fall, he and his wife and their daughter Iris hurried to their trench. They were joined by other staff, including four female telephonists, some of whom had come up to Darwin to help the permanent staff cope with the increased workload. A surviving staff member described the horrifying scene where nine people were killed instantly when a bomb fell directly onto the trench:

> a huge crater now existed in the limestone rock and strewn amongst the rubble and debris were the remains of the Postmaster, together with several male members of the staff and the whole of the female staff.

After the Japanese planes left, the men who survived the raids had the terrible job of retrieving the bodies and rescuing any survivors still swimming in the burning waters of the harbour. As they worked, the whole town was rocked by a mighty explosion. The Burns

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31 Ibid, p.65.
32 The Northern Territory Library’s ‘Roll of Honour’ provides biographical details of 236 people who were killed or who subsequently died of wounds received during the bombing raids on Darwin. It is available online at http://www.ntlexhibit.nt.gov.au/exhibits/show/bod [accessed 7 January 2014].
34 “The First Enemy Air-raid on Darwin: 1005 Hrs on 19-2-1942” (NTL, NAC, photocopy). The tenth person in the trench died later of his wounds. The author of this report is almost certainly Harry Hawke, the senior Post Office engineer ‘who went about the task of restoring telephone and telegraph communications.’ See Garrisson, “Darwin 1942,” p.62.
Philp cargo and passenger ship, Neptuna, which was berthed alongside the wharf and which was carrying a cargo of depth charges and ammunition, had received a direct hit and was burning fiercely. The fire finally reached the hold and the ship blew up, ‘killing 45 members of the crew, including the master, Capt. Michie’.\textsuperscript{35} George Haritos was working on military installations across the harbour at Mandorah at the time, and he recalled seeing ‘the debris of steel plates “up in the air like magic carpets”’.\textsuperscript{36}

The Aftermath

Reports of the Japanese advance towards Timor showed that their usual procedure was to mount two bombing raids then follow those up with a landing party. Although most historians now discredit the idea that Japan was planning to do the same in Darwin, it is not surprising that the people who experienced the raids of 19 February expected at any moment to see an invading force on the shores of the harbour.

There was a great deal of confusion in Darwin following the raids, and many citizens and some of the troops simply grabbed any sort of vehicle available and left town. Lowe reported that ‘even the Municipal sanitary carts were pressed into service and for some days the town was without a sanitary service’.\textsuperscript{37} The mass exodus was ‘known in local legend as the “Adelaide River Stakes”’.\textsuperscript{38} The situation was made worse by confusion at the RAAF base where the men were ordered to move ‘to a point “half a mile down the road then half a mile inland, where arrangements would be made to feed them”’.\textsuperscript{39} In a classic case of ‘Chinese whispers’ the verbal order became garbled as it was passed from one person to another, and the men ‘began to stream off the station’.\textsuperscript{40} Four days later 278 men were still missing from the base.\textsuperscript{41}

In spite of the unprecedented situation they were in, there were many people who remained in Darwin and who carried on dealing with the problems which arose from the raids. Abbott,\textsuperscript{35} K. Buckley and K. Klugman, “The Australian Presence in the Pacific”: Burns Philp 1914-1946 (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p.347. Most of the crew were Chinese.\textsuperscript{36} Helen Maria Haritos, “A Sense of the Past,” Journal of Northern Territory History 13 (2002): p.64.\textsuperscript{37} NAA: A431, 1949/687. Commission of Inquiry Concerning the Circumstances Connected with the Attack Made by Japanese Aircraft at Darwin on 19\textsuperscript{th} February, 1942: Reports (sic) by Commissioner (Mr. Justice Lowe), Together with Observations Thereon by the Departments of the Navy, Army, Air and Interior, [hereafter The Lowe Report, 1], CPP, 1945 (Canberra: Government Printer, 1945), p.11.\textsuperscript{38} Birt, Letters from Wartime Darwin, p.43.\textsuperscript{39} Garrisson, “Darwin 1942,” p.66.\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.\textsuperscript{41} Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.85.
for example, continued to oversee civilian activities in Darwin until he moved to Alice Springs on 2 March 1942. He assisted his wife and the domestic staff to leave Darwin for Alice Springs, and then he toured the town, assessing the damage and liaising with the military when he could find them. He and the remaining NT Administration staff set up an office at the Lands and Survey building about two kilometres from Government House, and established a mess at the Roman Catholic convent just across the road. He arranged that the uninjured sailors from the wrecked ships were housed in the old hospital above Doctors Gully, he ordered the release of the thirty-nine prisoners in the gaol, and he took steps to protect government property from the looters. He also finalised arrangements to remove all the remaining NT Administration records to Alice Springs where the public administration of the Northern Territory continued until after the war.

In the meantime, Chief Warden Miller collected his ARP officers together and set up a control centre at the Parap Police Station. His first priority was to round up the last women and children in Darwin and evacuate them to Alice Springs. ‘There were,’ he said, ‘63 women, and we found 2 little kids about this high – half-caste, and little Sunday bonnets on, they’d been hidden from general evacuation’. In spite of an unexploded bomb on the line near the RAAF gates, he managed to persuade the railway authorities to allow a train to take the evacuees to Birdum.

Another man who worked efficiently during the chaos following the raids was the senior member of the Post Office staff who managed to muster up about fifty of the staff to ‘re-establish telegraph facilities at the 10 mile’. He even took the trouble to organise that these men were fed and that a proper camouflaged camp was set up for them in the nearby bush. A short time later he set up a temporary civilian Post Office at the Haritos store in Daly Street. It ‘was closed on the evening of 19 March 1942, and its functions assumed by the Army Postal service’.

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42 Most of the information in this paragraph is taken from Abbott, *Frontier Province*, chapter XII, pp. 89-98.
44 NTAS: NTRS 226, MILLER, Arthur, TS 285, p.16.
46 “The First Enemy Air-Raid on Darwin”.
48 Ibid, p.91.
The Reaction

The reports which reached the authorities in Canberra were devastating. The huge death toll, the destruction of so many ships and major buildings, the lack of preparedness among the three services, the inability of the RAAF and USAAF to defend the town, and the spiteful reports of underhand dealings by Abbott caused consternation in Canberra. Most distressing was the news about the so-called panic, and the exodus which followed. This created a shamef ul image which the reports of individual acts of bravery failed to mitigate. In retrospect, however, many people who were in Darwin on 19 February 1942 dispute contemporary reports that there was widespread panic in the town. American pilot, Bob Oestreicher, for example, told Alan Powell:

I don’t think it was a panic at all ... The people had been bombed. It was suggested they leave Darwin and I felt they left in an orderly fashion. I saw no evidence of panic – screaming or yelling or fighting among people to get hold of a cart or a car ... I didn’t see any of that.\(^\text{49}\)

There may have been no need for shame over the exodus, but much of the looting which began just a few hours after the raids was inexcusable. Both civilians and military took part in ransacking the hotels, offices, shops and private homes in the town, and taking anything that could be of value. This looting for gain was inextricably mixed up with the unavoidable appropriations made by military and civil authorities in their efforts to cope with the situation. Within Darwin itself, some people, including the police, had to scrounge food, shelter and even clothing because their homes and offices had been destroyed. There was also the authorised requisition of material such as galvanised iron from the homes in Chinatown. The damage to the wharf meant that essential supplies were very slow to arrive and this material was desperately needed to build bomb bay shelters at the airfields down the track.\(^\text{50}\)

There were also many instances where urgent need justified the ‘theft’ of items in the town. Jack Mulholland, an anti-aircraft gunner stationed at the gun pit on the old oval, explained that after the second raid on 19 February the gunners were trying to clean the guns. They faced difficulties because the rifling inside the barrels had become sharp with the firing and was tearing the ‘army issue cleaning rags’ to bits. They had to get the guns cleaned in

\(^{49}\) Powell, *Shadow’s Edge*, p.90. Two journalists working in Darwin at the time vehemently refuted Paul Hasluck’s claim that 19 February 1942 was a ‘day of shame’. See “The 40th Anniversary of ... A Day of National Shame?” and other relevant articles in *Northern Territory News* [hereafter *NT News*], 19 and 20 February 1982.

\(^{50}\) Jones, *Chinese in the NT*, p.98.
preparation for the next raid whenever it happened, so they ran across to the Hotel Darwin and helped themselves to ‘linen serviettes, table cloths, sheets and so on’. While distressing to the owners it is likely that even they would see the justice of this action, and they would perhaps have also forgiven the soldiers who helped themselves to items such as ‘easy chairs and inner spring mattresses’ which made the men’s lives more comfortable in the military camps.

The worst looting, however, was that done purely for personal gain, and the worst offenders here were members of the provost corps, two of whom were tried and convicted by court martial. Garrisson described the wholesale nature of the looting:

they took furniture, stoves, refrigerators and even pianos and clothing. It even reached the stage where items such as refrigerators and radios and even sewing machines, were being taken in army vehicles to the wharf and being sold to sailors in exchange for cigarettes and tobacco.

In an angry memorandum to the Department dated 28 May 1942, Abbott reported that ‘The Hotel Darwin has now been gutted, its beds, furnishing and linen have all disappeared ... Government House, which was a well furnished house, the property of the Government, is almost completely empty ... The citizens who perforce had to leave Darwin have lost everything, not through enemy action but by the acts of Australian soldiers and civilians’.

The Lowe Commission

With alarming reports about the air raids and their aftermath arriving from Darwin, the government reacted in a predictable way. On 3 March it appointed Mr Justice Lowe of the Victorian Supreme Court to inquire into the events surrounding these raids. He flew into Darwin the following day accompanied by ‘a couple of lawyers and one or two officials’ and began hearing evidence at the Parap Police Station. After five days in Darwin he returned to Melbourne where he heard more evidence. A total of 102 witnesses were

51 Jack Mulholland, Darwin Bombed: “Use the 1916 Ammo First” (Loftus NSW: Australian Military History Publications, 1999), p.102. [Note: the cover subtitle differs from the title page: it is The Unit History of 14 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery].
55 NAA: F1, 1942/407.
56 Powell pointed out that it was a measure of the government’s bewilderment and indecision that the authorities appointed a civilian judge to inquire into military matters. See Powell, Shadow’s Edge, p.94.
57 Birt, Letters from Wartime Darwin, p.6.
58 NTAS: NTRS 226, DARKEN, Bob, TS 188.
interviewed\(^59\) and on 27 March, he issued his first report,\(^60\) followed a fortnight later by his final report.\(^61\)

Lowe presented a scathing criticism of military ineptitude which delayed the air raid warning so that it was not sounded until the bombs started falling. He was also critical of the cumbersome chain of command amongst the military authorities in Darwin and was particularly scornful of the poor management and lack of leadership at the RAAF base. He praised some individual RAAF officers for their actions following the raid, but he was not so generous about the Administrator. He claimed, with some justification, that Abbott’s obstructive attitude toward the ARP had hampered that organisation’s efforts to evacuate the remaining civilians, and to help the police keep order after the raids. He was less than fair, though, when he accused Abbott of a lack of foresight and planning. Since the militarisation of Darwin began, Abbott had been hindered by a lack of direction as to what his responsibilities were and what should be left to the military leaders in Darwin. His account of his actions after the raids seems perfectly reasonable, and many of the criticisms offered by witnesses at the hearings seemed to be motivated by spite. Lowe himself noted that ‘some sections of the population’ showed ‘a lack of confidence in and resentment towards the Administrator’.\(^62\) Lowe also laid a large portion of the blame for the disastrous loss of lives, and the destruction of ships and buildings on the federal government and the military authorities in Canberra. According to Lowe, their approach to establishing Darwin as a military post was half-hearted at best. The facilities were inadequately equipped and the military officers were poorly trained for their responsibilities and duties.

**Dispersal of the Military to Inland Bases**

With the fear of invasion in the forefront of their minds, military authorities belatedly realised the folly of establishing the headquarters of each Service in Darwin. They knew that a Japanese land attack could not be resisted effectively and that the military headquarters of each Service would be overrun immediately. The Navy of course had no choice but to

\(^{59}\) Grose, _An Awkward Truth_, p.221.


remain at the harbour, but the Army and Air Force moved out of Darwin and established command centres at inland locations.

The area north of Birdum was placed under military control just two days after the first air raids, and the Top End became a network of military establishments. RAAF administration was set up at Birdum and by July 1942 ‘there were 65 airfields and strips established or under construction in the Top End north of Daly Waters’. Army headquarters for the 7th Military District were moved to Katherine, and by the end of 1942 ‘there were major camps at Mandorah, Birdum, Larrimah, Mataranka, Pine Creek and at several locations between Adelaide River and Darwin’.

An Army camp at West Point, Mandorah

According to Abbott, ‘Australian, American, and Dutch forces poured into northern Australia and 100,000 men were concentrated there’. In order to cope with the massive increase in traffic travelling across the continent, transport infrastructure had to be improved. The North Australian Railway (NAR), which had followed the military’s lead and transferred its headquarters to Katherine, moved the railhead to Larrimah, a few kilometres north of Birdum. The new site was preferred because Birdum tended to flood during the wet season. The road between Birdum and Tennant Creek which had been completed in December 1940 by road-making teams from Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia in a record-

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63 Bender, “RAAF Station,” p.143.
64 Donovan, Defending the Northern Gateway, p.121.
65 Ibid, p.119.
breaking time was sealed in 1942\textsuperscript{67} and the road between Tennant Creek and Mount Isa was sealed in the following year.\textsuperscript{68}

Other infrastructure was established. The army farms, for example, made a major contribution to the food supplies in the region. The first farm was opened at Adelaide River in 1940 and seven more were established in 1942,\textsuperscript{69} feeding as many as 55,000 people by 1945.\textsuperscript{70} There were also ‘supervised camps’ set up to house Aboriginal workers and their families,\textsuperscript{71} and ‘37 hospitals and convalescent camps’ were ‘dotted throughout the Territory’\textsuperscript{72} and staffed by military medical teams. Open air cinemas and other recreation facilities were set up in the army camps and at the airfields to help the troops cope with the boredom of living in the middle of nowhere (as they thought), with little, if any, female company,\textsuperscript{73} and very little to do but wait for an invasion that never happened.

**Life at Darwin During the War**

Meanwhile, back in Darwin the Navy had control of the town centre and the port, while the Army maintained ‘the coastal defence at East Point, West Point, and Wagait Batteries on the

\textsuperscript{67} Alan Smith, *Outback Corridor: World War II Lines of Communication across Australia from Adelaide to Darwin and Mt Isa; Northern Territory Wartime Experiences; Army Women’s Services in the NT* (Plympton SA: Alan Smith, 2002), p.67. In 1941 the Governor General named this road the Stuart Highway, but it was not gazetted until March 1957. See Carl Cossill, “A Lands Department History of the Litchfield Shire: Session 1, 1863-1980” (Paper presented to the staff of the Litchfield Shire Council, 2009), p.2.

\textsuperscript{68} Helyar, *They Led the Way*, p.38.

\textsuperscript{69} Powell, *Shadow’s Edge*, p.194.

\textsuperscript{70} Donovan, *Defending the Northern Gateway*, p.100.

\textsuperscript{71} Bauman, *Aboriginal Darwin*, p.22.

\textsuperscript{72} Alcorta, *Australia’s Frontline*, p.46.

\textsuperscript{73} Women from the Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) and other branches of the Services, arrived in the Top End in 1943, but their numbers were still comparatively few. See R.N. Alford, “The Territory at War,” in *The Territory at War*, ed. Australia Remembers 1945-1995 (NT) Committee, p.3.
Cox Peninsula’.\textsuperscript{74} It would be a mistake to think that all the civilians left the Darwin region at this time. Redmond claimed that ‘hundreds of public servants stayed in Darwin’.\textsuperscript{75} He explained that a new Works depot was established ‘20 km down the Stuart Highway’ and the staff were engaged in many duties, including maintaining essential services such as water, electricity, and the fuel pipelines. Other architects, engineers, tradesmen and workers continued to work on military construction projects and on repairing bomb damage in Darwin, while administrative staff were involved in tasks such as paying the wages and managing the government stores.\textsuperscript{76} Judge Wells and one policeman also remained in Darwin to deal with matters of civil law. The military took control of the whole of the Territory north of Alice Springs on 9 March 1942\textsuperscript{77} but martial law was never proclaimed. Civil wrong-doing was still tried by civil courts, and ‘Wells continued to sit, both as a Judge of the Supreme Court and in the Local Court and in the Magistrates Court and other Lower Courts, throughout the whole of the Northern Territory during the whole of the period of the war’.\textsuperscript{78}

**Further Enemy Attacks**

The raids of 19 February 1942 did not mark the end of Japan’s interest in northern Australia. On 3 March 1942 Wyndham and Broome were bombed, and Darwin suffered its third raid on the following day. Katherine aerodrome was damaged and an Aborigine was killed in an air raid there on 22 March 1942.\textsuperscript{79} Japanese reconnaissance flights and air raid attacks on Darwin continued until 12 November 1943. Appendix 1 in *Darwin’s Air War 1942-1945*\textsuperscript{80} lists a total of 105 Japanese missions over the Top End which included a total of sixty-four bombing raids on Darwin. What Wells described as ‘the “unamusing pastime of bomb dodging”’\textsuperscript{81} made for a stressful life in Darwin during this time, although, thankfully, the horror of 19 February was not repeated, and by the end of March 1942, the RAAF had the defence capability to challenge Japanese supremacy in the air.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{75} Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.31. Jim Gayton, who arrived in Darwin in January 1942, was one of the workers who remained in Darwin during the war. See NTAS: NTRS 226, GAYTON, Jim, TS 216.  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, pp.31-2.  
\textsuperscript{77} Powell, *Far Country*, p.196.  
\textsuperscript{78} Mildren, “Administration of Justice in the NT,” p.29.  
\textsuperscript{80} Alford, *Darwin’s Air War*, p.187.  
\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in Mildren, “Administration of Justice in the NT,” p.33.  
\textsuperscript{82} Alcorta, *Australia’s Frontline*, p.45.
By the end of 1942 it was clear that the Japanese were not going to invade the Top End and the Allied forces in the region began to revise their strategy. Activities changed from defence to aggression and the Top End became a staging post for sorties into the Netherlands East Indies and beyond. Troops moved back into Darwin and the town was divided into zones occupied by the Army, the Navy, the Australian Air Force, the US armed Services and the Australian Women’s Army Service.83

![The Australian Women’s Army Service barracks in Darwin](image)

**Conclusion**

The war years had, in some respects, a profound impact on Darwin. The physical landscape was transformed, firstly by military construction which added new buildings and other structures to the skyline and then by the bombing raids and looting which left the town a battered wreck. As far as the government was concerned, the attacks on northern Australia forced the authorities to rethink their attitude towards national security. Writing in 1944, W. MacMahon Ball stated that ‘in the past we had thought of war as an expedition. In 1942, for the first time, we thought of war as an invasion’.84 ‘As the new slogan has it,’ he wrote, “Europe’s Far East is Australia’s Near North”’.85 Powell made the same observation: ‘the Japanese attack on the north’, he wrote, ‘shook Australians from the complacency of their

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83 Abbott, *Frontier Province*, p.103.
84 W. MacMahon Ball, “Australia’s Interests in the Pacific,” *Far Eastern Survey*, 13, no.23 (15 November 1944): p.216. At the time of writing, Ball was head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne.
well-insulated Imperial world’, and the strategic importance of Darwin remained an issue with the authorities from this time on.

From another perspective, however, the story of Darwin during these latter years of the Second World War is, in a sense, irrelevant to the history of the development of the town. This may seem a bizarre statement when one considers the damage to the physical landscape, yet most of the permanent citizens were not in residence during the war years. The social interactions and networks which traditionally operated in Darwin no longer existed and society functioned on conventions based on military rank and the arm of the services to which each individual belonged. In addition to this, administration of the town was taken out of the hands of the local bureaucrats and the Minister of the Interior and his staff in Canberra. For the most part, the War Cabinet and the individual branches of the armed services made decisions about Darwin which had everything to do with the war effort and which had little relevance to the future of Darwin. It was not until the civilians returned in 1946 that one can see the sequential history of Darwin resuming.

Both the bank and the Hotel Darwin survived the bombing raids with very little damage

86 Powell, Far Country, p.223.
Chapter Eight

Recovery and Reconstruction, 1946-1959

Life was extremely difficult for residents returning to Darwin after the war. For five years or more, they struggled with the conditions, but matters eventually began to improve, and the 1950s can be seen as a watershed in the history of Darwin as the prospects of unprecedented growth and prosperity appeared on the horizon. This chapter describes the initial difficulties and the subsequent advances during this period, and I attempt to show how the Commonwealth government both hindered and fostered the development of the town during the latter 1940s and the 1950s.

Peace at Last

In May 1945 Germany was defeated and peace returned to Europe, but the war in the Pacific continued for a few months. Japan finally surrendered on 15 August 1945 and the surrender documents were signed aboard the battleship USS Missouri on 2 September. The war caused many deep-seated changes to Australia. As Alexander observed: ‘Australia emerged from the war with a new sense of Asian as well as trans-Pacific involvement which was to persist in her postwar foreign policy’.  

Alexander also pointed out that internally, the war ‘strengthened Commonwealth authority at the expense of the States’, but that the bureaucracy was ill-equipped to cope, especially as departments and other federal instrumentalities were still scattered around the State capitals, with most sited in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

Civilians Return to the Top End

The military authorities were in no hurry to allow civilians back into the Northern Territory. It was not until December 1945 that they were permitted to return to Pine Creek and all areas south of that town while Darwin remained a restricted area until 28 February 1946. Some old residents defied the regulations and returned to Darwin before the ban was lifted, but the majority were more law-abiding and Pine Creek’s population swelled for a short time as people waited there for permission to return home. Acting Administrator Giles noted that as

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid, p.150.
soon as the Emergency Control regulations were repealed, ‘not only former residents who had been evacuated in December 1941, and early 1942, but many new arrivals began to flock into Darwin’.\footnote{Annual Report, 1945-46, p.5.}

The authorities had delayed allowing citizens to reoccupy Darwin because most of the habitable buildings were still occupied by military personnel and there were no shops, medical facilities, or other services available to the civilians. In the first months after civilians returned, the Army was obliged to provide food and other provisions to the incoming residents. Eddie Quong recalled that the Army was in control of everything. The civilians had to obtain bread from Vesteys\footnote{The Army occupied Vesteys at this time.} and meat from the Q-store\footnote{This was also called the Victualling Yard.} in what is now Goyder Road. The Quong family drove into Darwin early in January 1946 and settled into their old home. With the Army’s help, they established a bakery under their house and it became a popular meeting place for residents who used to bring their food to eat there. The Quongs took advantage of the opportunity and ‘set up a little shop which sold drinks and a few other odds and ends’.\footnote{Alcorta, Australia’s Frontline, p.85. This cannot have happened immediately after the Quongs arrived, because Abbott, in a memo to the Secretary of the Dept. of the Interior dated 20 November 1945, commented that while a civilian butcher was opening up in a few days’ time, he was still trying to find someone to start a bakery. See NAA: A431, 1946/81.} Other enterprising residents like the Haritos and Kafkaloudes families were also quick to seize the chance, and it was not long before ‘shops, garages, restaurants and cafes had been opened in all suitable existing buildings and soon applications to erect temporary premises on vacant lands were being received’.\footnote{Annual Report, 1945-46, p.5}

**First Impressions**

The former residents who returned to Darwin were faced with an appalling situation. Many families found that their houses had been the victims of Japanese bombs and the fires which plagued Darwin in the last years of the war. For those who were lucky enough to find their homes still intact, all their belongings were gone and their houses were extensively damaged by the depredations of military personnel who had made free of the buildings during their occupation of the town. Evidence of mindless vandalism was everywhere.
The Chinese suffered the worst. As Abbott reported, no doubt with a great deal of satisfaction, ‘the whole of the obnoxious China-town area has been obliterated’. Jones claimed that Abbott schemed to make sure Chinatown was not rebuilt, and Reynolds stated unequivocally that the destruction of Chinatown ‘had been deliberate, the looting tolerated, and when the government planned the post-war reconstruction of the town there was a clear and official intention to prevent the re-development of Chinatown’. Certainly the archival records bear out these claims, and Abbott went so far as to express the belief (or hope) that ‘If land is acquired from the former Chinese residents there is really no need for them to return as they have no other assets’. Abbott was to be disappointed. The Chinese did return and, as Glenys Yee recorded, new Chinese stores gradually appeared further down Cavenagh Street and some were also established in Smith Street.

Cavenagh Street, 1941.
Gordon’s Don Hotel is half-way down the right hand side of the street

96 Jones, Chinese in the NT, p.101.
99 Yee, Through Chinese Eyes, p.60.
The destruction of Chinatown did have one important outcome however. Most of the Chinese no longer lived in accommodation on their business premises as they had done before the war. Their homes were eventually built in residential areas in Darwin itself and in the burgeoning suburbs, so the closed enclave that made up the Chinese community before the war was dismantled, and the Chinese were able to integrate more easily into the wider community.

**Return of the Civilian Authorities**

Many public servants had already settled back in Darwin by the time the civilians started to arrive. Aubrey and Hilda Abbott returned on 6 August 1945 and Hilda set about restoring Government House to its former glory. Aubrey lost no time in setting up NT Administration offices in the former Lands and Surveys Office in Cavenagh Street, which, he wrote, ‘will be known in future as Northern Territory Administration (Temporary Offices).’

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Abbott shared the private residents’ dismay at the condition of the town: ‘I must say that I am appalled at the condition of the town’, he noted in the same letter. He observed that many houses were infested with white ants and added that ‘I can see no hope for the appearance of the town, and its care, unless civil life is restored as early as possible, because men cannot take care of houses or surroundings nearly as well as women’. In a later memo, he observed that ‘the town and buildings are filthy beyond description so far as the majority are concerned. Surface drains are choked, fires have been lit in house areas, fences have been destroyed, and the shabbiness and deterioration of buildings is quite indescribable’.  

Over the following months, the NT Administration and branches of other federal departments which were independent of the NT Administration moved back to Darwin from Alice Springs. In November staff from the Department of Works and Housing returned and saw evidence of the enormous amount of work facing them in their efforts, not only to restore the town to some semblance of normality, but in providing for future expansion of the population. The Army returned post and telegraph services to civilian control in February 1946, and, in a sentimental gesture, the staff officially moved into their temporary offices on 19 February in memory of the day on which the former Post Office was bombed by the Japanese and so many of their colleagues were killed.

101 NAA: A452, 1956/34. Abbott to Secretary Dept. of Interior, 29 August 1945.
A Change of Administrators

Abbott did not remain in his position as Administrator for very long after he returned to Darwin. His contract was due to expire on 30 June 1946 and he had come into conflict with too many important people to have a chance of being offered an extension to his term of office. In Alice Springs, for example ‘he fought a never-ending battle with the local area commander, Brigadier N.M. Loutit’, and shortly after he returned to Darwin he came into conflict with naval authorities over the Navy’s occupation of so much land in the town. Herbert V. Johnston, who became Minister for the Interior in July 1945, noted in a Cabinet submission that on his visit to the Territory he observed Abbott for a number of weeks and came to the conclusion that ‘there is every justification for making a change in the appointment’.  

Many people criticised Abbott for his peremptory manner, his insistence that due deference be paid to him as Administrator, and his frequent refusals to consult with colleagues before making his decisions. Yet for all his faults, Abbott believed wholeheartedly in the future of the Territory and was committed to developing Darwin into an attractive and vibrant capital city for the region. He was determined to retain Darwin as the Territory’s capital and fought strenuously against a proposal put forward by the Director-General of Works in 1942 that the Department of the Interior establish the capital at Alice Springs.

102 Bender, “RAAF Station,” p.124.
103 Abbott’s belligerent attitude is clearly shown in a report on a visit to Darwin and the Northern Territory by R. J. Walker from the Department of Works. See NAA: A688, Item 8.
104 NAA: A2700, Item 1142.
105 Bartlett, “Port of Darwin,” vol.1, p.130.
Abbott left Darwin on sick leave on 26 May 1946 and never returned. He was replaced by a relatively young man, Arthur Robert Driver who became Administrator on 1 July. Born in Albany Western Australia in 1909, Driver, who was commonly called ‘Mick’, had served with the AIF in Darwin in 1941 and 1942. A civil engineer in civilian life, he was working for the Public Works Department in Western Australia at the time of his appointment. Less than a month after Driver took office, he was faced with an unusual situation. A twelve-year-old Indonesian boy, Barabas (Bas) Wie, stowed away in the landing wheel housing of a DC-3 aircraft flying from Koepang in West Timor to Darwin. He was unconscious and badly burned when he was found. The government bowed to public pressure and permitted him to stay in Darwin, where he lived with Driver and his family for five years.

Like many of his predecessors, it was not long before the new Administrator was struggling to cope with the squabbles and rivalry between the officers of the NT Administration and the staff of other departments operating in Darwin. At a time when urgent housing and infrastructure needs were paramount, Driver was unable to persuade departments such as Health, Works and Housing, and the NT Administration to co-operate. Hugh Barclay, who took up the position of Director of Lands after the war, recorded in his oral history that Driver ‘faced an impossible position’. Driver’s correspondence with the Department of the Interior contained many complaints and he urged a change to the administrative structure so that the Administrator had a ‘degree of delegation covering the authorities and policies of other Governmental Departments in the Territory’.

**The Government’s Acquisition of Land**

When the formation of a town plan for Darwin was being investigated in the 1930s it was suggested that the government compulsorily acquire all land in the town itself and in the surrounding undeveloped area. The plan was seized upon as it solved some long-standing problems. The most important benefit was that land acquisition would at last get rid of the absentee landowners who had caused untold difficulties since Darwin was first founded in 1869. Abbott was also quick to see that compulsory land acquisition would allow the
authorities to more closely control the crowded, insanitary and unsightly allotments in Chinatown. In 1944 the Central Hirings Committee in Canberra reported to Cabinet that it was an ideal time to acquire the land because many of the buildings had been destroyed in the war, and the populace had ‘voluntarily’ evacuated in 1941-42, ‘therefore no compensation needs to be paid for disturbance, or loss of business or goodwill’. In short, according to the Committee, the compensation would be far less than would normally be the case. Once the war was over, the government lost little time in passing the *Darwin Lands Acquisition Act* of 1945. The Act was proclaimed on 17 January 1946, and it ‘authorised the acquisition of approx. 90 square miles comprising the town of Darwin and its environs’ and introduced a system of leasehold in the area. Darwin property owners were sent an explanatory letter in which they were entitled to claim compensation.

It is not surprising that many Darwin residents protested vigorously about the acquisition. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Darwin, Bishop Gsell, sent some strongly worded letters of protest to the Minister, and the Bishop of Carpentaria who was responsible for the Church of England parish in Darwin took the opportunity to once again protest at the Navy’s occupation of church land in the town. Ruffled feathers were soothed down, and government plans went ahead with little interruption, but the payment of compensation was a slow process and further complaints were forthcoming from residents. At the first meeting of the newly formed Northern Territory Legislative Council on 16 February 1948, Matthew Luke, one of Darwin’s representatives, complained about the non-payment of compensation, and he repeated his complaint on the 5 August in the same year. Vesteys’ compensation claim for war damage and the military occupation of the meat works was an extremely protracted affair which was taken as far as the High Court and was not settled until 1956. The *North Australian Monthly* reported that Vesteys made a claim for £1,250,000 against the government but finally settled for £250,000.

111 NAA: A461, Z412/1/2.
113 NAA: A431, 1946/81.
114 NAA: A431, Z412/1/2.
Accommodation Problems

The overriding preoccupation for public servants and private citizens, however, was the availability of buildings for their homes, their offices and their businesses. Once the emergency regulations had been lifted people poured into Darwin. The newcomers comprised the evacuees returning home after more than four years’ exile, and public servants transferred from Alice Springs or newly recruited by the Department of the Interior. Short term visitors also increased the population. Acting Administrator Giles noted that ‘the Commonwealth Disposals Commission sales of huge quantities of war and Allied Works materials attracted many legitimate buyers plus a sprinkling of undesirables’.

Once QEA resumed their air service to London via Darwin and Singapore on 8 April 1946, transit passengers regularly stayed overnight or longer while the planes were refuelled and serviced. Darwin’s hotel accommodation was totally inadequate so Qantas bought the old military hospital buildings at Berrimah and established a hostel for its staff and passengers.

By 1946 the civilian population had grown from fifteen in May 1944 to an estimated 3,100 on 30 June 1946. In the next ten years it almost tripled, and by 1960 Darwin’s population was estimated at 13,000. Even though military personnel were leaving at a steady rate, there

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118 Annual Report, 1945-46, p.11.
119 Ibid, p.3.
120 Berzins, Australia’s Northern Secret, p.77.
121 Alcorta, Australia’s Frontline, p.88.
was an extreme shortage of houses to accommodate the incoming public servants and private citizens. The one thing that saved this very difficult situation from becoming a total disaster was the fact that the Army had over four thousand huts in the Territory when the war ended. The Air Force also had camps scattered across the Top End with similar accommodation for the men. These huts were left behind when the troops moved south, and they were quickly utilised for various purposes, with the bulk of them being used as housing for the incoming population.

The old military and works camps within Darwin and its immediate surrounds were mainly located at Stuart Park, Winnellie, Parap, East Point, and Nightcliff. The accommodation was sub-standard. Maisie Austin described the accommodation at the Parap 118 Army Camp where she and her family – all sixteen of them – lived.

The houses at Parap Camp were Sidney Williams huts approximately 60’ x 20’ (many divided in half and called “hutments”) with an “A” shaped roof and walls constructed of galvanized corrugated iron over a steel frame. On the inside of the huts, the walls were reinforced with steel cross-bars. They had push-out windows – some covered with arc mesh. There were no ceilings, no wall linings, no mesh screens or fans of any description.

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124 Austin, *Quality of Life*, p.11. Although called the ‘Parap Camp’ this area was actually situated in what is now Stuart Park.
Many of the huts were divided into two so they could house two families. They had no reticulated water or electricity and the installation of sewerage mains in Darwin did not commence until 1948.  

Driver noted that it would take considerable time before the sewerage system operated throughout the town, and ‘in the main … Darwin relies on the incinerator latrine introduced by the Services’ which was ‘generally satisfactory’.  

Residents detested these latrines and quickly dubbed them the ‘flaming furies’. They were made with 44-gallon drums and the contents had to be set on fire regularly. The stench of burning latrines permeated the town, smoke filled the air, and families had to rely on a neighbour’s toilet until theirs was cool enough to be used.

As the population continued to rise, even the military huts could not adequately satisfy the need for accommodation in Darwin, and many people – part-Aboriginal, Asian and White – were forced to construct flimsy shacks out of any materials they could scrounge on any piece of land they could find. Others squatted in the old Vesteys meat works buildings or camped on Mindil Beach or in the nearby bush. When Mrs Lou Stewart arrived in Darwin she squatted in a vacant house, only to be moved out by the authorities. This happened several times before she gave in and found some space at the meat works to live. A forceful, outspoken woman, she did not accept the appalling living conditions quietly. She wrote letters to as many important people as possible, including the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and the Queen. She also helped establish the Darwin Housewives Association, ‘a

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deceptively innocent-sounding group that undertook several effective lobbying campaigns to improve conditions for women in the war-torn town"^{127} and she claimed credit for the formation of the housing commission scheme."^{128}

![‘Clearing a camp site, Lee Point Road’](image)

**Construction Problems**

The NT Administration was desperately keen to get rid of these insanitary and unsightly camps, but they were caught on the horns of a dilemma. The men living in the camps, were needed to construct and maintain essential infrastructure and to build the necessary homes for public servants and offices for government instrumentalities operating in the town. Without some sort of accommodation the labourers and tradesmen would leave. There was also a degree of shame in the authorities’ attitude towards the huts. The government owned both the land and the huts, and was therefore the landlord, charging rent of about two shillings a week."^{129} The hut areas were acknowledged as slums and the buildings should have been demolished or significantly upgraded, but the NT Administration decided that building new homes and hostels for its staff had priority.

The situation was made even more difficult by the abysmally slow rate of construction in the town. While many people blamed the government in general and the NT Administration and the Department of Works in particular, the delay was primarily due to the shortage of labour and materials. This shortfall in accommodation was not confined to the Northern Territory. Darian-Smith observed that, one of the results of the depression followed by the war was that

127 James, *No Man’s Land*, p.254.
129 Ibid, p.65.
‘Australia had a deficit of 120,000 dwellings at the beginning of the war, rising to 350,000 by 1945’.¹³⁰ Labour and materials for construction purposes were in demand throughout Australia, and building materials were therefore in short supply. The federal government attempted to deal with the problem by allocating construction materials to each state as they were issued from the factories. Unfortunately the authorities did not include the Northern Territory in this allocation and Paul Hasluck recalled that ‘we had to fight hard to have any allocation of supplies from Australian production to the Northern Territory on the same lines as allocations were made to various States of the Commonwealth’.¹³¹

**Transport Problems**

Not only did the Department of Works and Housing have difficulty obtaining material for the Northern Territory, it was also difficult to get that material to Darwin. According to Bartlett, when the war ended Darwin port facilities consisted of the remains of the old Darwin Wharf, a surviving length of the war-time built Timber Jetty, the Navy’s shallow draft Boom Wharf, a Navy Refitting Jetty, a Navy Landing Stage, a Flying Boat Jetty, a Coastal Tanker Wharf and an odd assortment of sheds and stores. Most of the wharves and many of the buildings were in poor condition, particularly those built of timber.

Bartlett also observed that the wreck of the *Neptuna* was alongside the Railway Jetty which ‘severely restricted access’. The authorities made the best of the problem by erecting a steel structure on the side of *Neptuna*’s hull and using it as a refuelling berth.¹³² In spite of this, with the main jetty almost completely wrecked by bombs, unloading of the ships remained an extremely slow and cumbersome process. It was a common sight to see ships at anchor in the harbour waiting their turn to berth alongside the jetty so that their cargoes could be unloaded. The Waterside Section of the NAWU did not help as the men pursued their ‘rights’ just as aggressively after the war as they did before it, despite Darwin’s desperate need for the food and supplies being brought in by the ships. There were numerous strikes during the 1940s and 1950s, and on occasion ships had to leave the harbour still carrying cargo which should have been unloaded at Darwin.¹³³


¹³³ See NAA: A452, 1955/304, and NAA: A452 1956/1027 PART 1 for details of the problems faced by shipping companies using the port facilities at Darwin.
One benefit of the war which somewhat alleviated the transport problem was the presence of a sealed road between the railheads at Oodnadatta and Birdum but departmental records show that the ‘Rail-Road Co-ordinated transport’ was ‘unsatisfactory’. Matters slowly improved. Two regular shipping services to Darwin were operating by the end of the 1940s. Western Australia’s Shipping Service vessels travelled up the west coast to Darwin about twice a month, while vessels operated by the Australian Shipping Service visited the port once a month from Sydney via Brisbane. The Works Department devoted many man hours to repairing the main jetty and the timber jetty so that they could be used, and the Navy allowed shipping agents to use the Boom jetty but it was only suitable for vessels with a very shallow draft, and a cyclone which hit Darwin on 10 April 1953 put it out of service for a considerable time. In the 1948-49 report Driver noted that plans had been prepared for the new wharf, but the need to use scarce materials and labour on accommodation in Darwin delayed the completion of the wharf until November 1956. The 1957-58 report recorded its completion and also noted that ‘the old Fort Hill wharf’ (the ‘Timber Jetty’) was ‘now fitted for the export of cattle, with loading races, etc. being finished in March 1958.’ Thus, by the end of the 1950s the facilities in the port of Darwin were at last approaching an acceptable standard, but Darwin’s residents had suffered severe deprivations for fifteen years before this.

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134 NAA: E125, 1959/168. This comment was in a memorandum dated 14 July 1955, but the Annual Report for 1948-49 also recorded that ‘the road-rail transport service is not working well’. (p.23).
The Housing Shortage

Shipping difficulties, the shortage of tradesmen and labourers and the difficulty in obtaining materials meant that the army and air force huts remained a feature of Darwin for many years. The 1951 census recorded that there was a total of 1,032 housing units in Darwin and 419 of these were huts and shacks.\footnote{Quoted in Annual Report, 1949-53, p.13.} In the following year, a Cabinet Minute dated 3 July 1952 provided the following statistics:

- of a total population of 6,700 people, 2,550 enjoy an adequate standard of accommodation; 850 people are living in huts of sound construction which do not provide a satisfactory standard of accommodation; 2,400 are living in hostels, camps, defence areas and company establishments; 900 people are living in sub-standard dwellings. Some of the hostels and camps provide a low standard of accommodation and, where the premises themselves are satisfactory, they are mostly overcrowded.\footnote{NAA: A4905, Item 291, p.2.}

Even as late as 1959, when there were 717 government houses in Darwin, and each annual report had recorded a healthy number of private homes being built, ‘about 97 timber or steel-framed corrugated iron huts are still in use as residences in Darwin’.\footnote{Annual Report, 1958-59. p.34.}
Town Planning Problems

In addition to its negligence in not providing the Northern Territory with a fair allocation of construction materials produced by Australian factories, the government’s commitment to applying town planning principles when reconstructing Darwin contributed greatly to the delay in the post-war reconstruction of the town. Cabinet authorised the formation of a Department of Post-War Reconstruction before the end of the war. This, ‘new ogre’, as Abbott described it, was charged with assisting the Department of the Interior to work on plans for rebuilding Darwin. Interest in replanning Darwin was raised in the mid-1930s and the Department of the Interior’s Senior Architect, W.T. Haslam, produced a ‘minimalist plan’ which would beautify the town without ‘wholesale demolition, resumptions, and compensation to private owners’.141

Following the completion of the DDC’s report in 1937, Haslam drew up a more comprehensive plan. This still did not satisfy the authorities and Brisbane town planner R.A. McInnis was asked to visit Darwin and produce a new plan. McInnis presented his report in December 1940, but war time activities delayed implementation of his recommendations. In 1943 McInnis asked permission to revisit Darwin so that he could revise the plan to allow for changes caused by the war, including the destruction of Chinatown. In the same year, three Army officers, no doubt searching for some project to relieve their boredom, devised a town plan for Darwin which was based on the need to reserve large areas for military purposes. The officers were H.J. Symons who was an arts teacher, but formerly worked as a sculptor and designer; H.J. Manning, a property valuer who had local government qualifications and had studied town planning, and L.A. Bullen, who was an architect. Their report, “Darwin Replanned: A Future Tropical City,” was submitted to the authorities in 1943.142

McInnis was given permission to revisit Darwin to inspect the war-torn town, and, with the help of Chief Surveyor Arthur Miller and Lieutenant Symons, he produced his revised plan in

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140 Abbott, Frontier Province, p.105.
141 NAA: A452, 1955/3 PART 1.
December 1944. Once again, he concentrated on retaining as much as possible of Goyder’s original layout and the existing infrastructure, and his report contained ‘detailed recommendations on issues such as zoning, neighbourhood units and housing styles’.144

The two departments, Interior and Post-War Reconstruction, thus had a number of town plans to consider. A serious dispute about the reconstruction of Darwin arose between Minister Collings of the Interior and Minister Chifley of Post-War Reconstruction, and in September 1944 they recommended to Cabinet that an Inter-departmental Committee be set up ‘to examine the question of the post-war requirements of Darwin and associated regions’. The Committee comprised one representative from each of the following Departments: Interior, Post-War Reconstruction, Army, Navy, Air, Civil Aviation, and Railways.145

The Committee met in December 1944 and again in February and July 1945 to discuss the new town plan submitted by McInnis. The Minister was finally informed that the plan was rejected on the grounds that, firstly, the ‘Administrative section’ needed to be placed further to the centre of the peninsula, and secondly, that Naval authorities wanted to retain the area they already occupied and would not agree to moving their operations to an area on the eastern side of the peninsula near Frances Bay.146 McInnis refused to alter his plan so the Committee formed a sub-committee which included representatives from another Department (Works) to devise another plan. As Abbott observed, it was ‘the death blow to immediate planning and reconstruction’ and ‘once more the future of the Northern Territory receded into a mist of indecision’.147

John Walker, the Chief Architect for the Department of Works, worked quickly to produce a new plan for Darwin and this was approved by Cabinet in January 1946.148 It was an attractive, but very elaborate plan which assumed the peninsula was a clean slate. It totally disregarded the existing layout of Darwin and required the abandonment of almost all existing infrastructure. The projected financial commitment was enormous and the

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143 NAA: A2700, Item 898.
147 Abbott, Frontier Province, p.106.
government had neither the time nor the money to set about realising the dream in the 1940s. Yet this plan remained the official plan for Darwin for the next ten years until it was officially announced in an Annual Report that it had been discarded.149

**Problems with Leases**

Meanwhile the authorities were faced with the problem that the growing population of Darwin was living and working in accommodation which conformed to the town’s original alignment. Their solution was to pass the *Darwin Short Term Leases Ordinance* in October 1946 in which leases were granted for a maximum of five years. Needless to say, the banks refused to finance business development in the town and businessmen themselves were reluctant to lay out large amounts of money in constructing permanent and imposing business premises while they were in danger of losing their leasehold at any moment.150 The result was that ‘post-war Darwin became little more than an untidy configuration of fibro and galvanised iron’.151

![Shops in Knuckey Street, between Mitchell and Smith streets, ca.1947.](image)

Some residential leaseholders fared somewhat better. In July 1947, the *Darwin Town Area Leases Ordinance* became law and residents were then able to obtain a specified area on perpetual leasehold.152 Once the Ordinance was passed the Government worked out a policy designed to give preference in the granting of long leases to former owners in respect of their

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150 The main business area in the new town plan was situated in the centre of the peninsula but, on their return to Darwin, business people reoccupied those business premises in Smith and Cavenagh Streets which were not occupied by the Navy. In the new town plan, the original business precinct was to be transformed into a high density residential area. See NAA: A452, 1956/60.
152 Stephanie Anne Sturtz, “Too many beginnings” (Research paper, [1978?], (CDU Library Special Collection, photocopy), p.10. The term ‘Darwin Town Area Lease’ is usually abbreviated to DTAL and this convention will be used hereafter.
former sites adjusted to conform to the new plan, or an alternative site as nearly as possible comparable in situation and location in the re-planned town as the acquired site occupied in the former town layout.\footnote{153} The granting of these preferential leases was prioritised: they went firstly to pre-war owners of land, then to pre-war lessees, then to present owners of buildings \textit{in situ}, then to present lessees.\footnote{154}

While former residents negotiated with the government over purchasing houses and leasing land, the NT Administration’s Lands and Survey Branch worked furiously to survey vacant land and open up new areas on which would-be home owners could build residences on allotments which conformed to the new town plan. A shortage of draftsmen was a problem which could not easily be solved. None could be recruited because there was no accommodation for them. The Lands and Survey Branch cleared some of the backlog of work by recruiting two female tracers.\footnote{155} The first auction sale of town lots finally occurred on 23 April 1949. Twenty-seven lots in Darwin and eleven in the new area of Nightcliff were sold.\footnote{156} This first auction was somewhat disappointing, but subsequent sales exceeded the government’s expectations with many lots selling for well above the reserve price.

**A Change of Policy**

The problem of short term leases, which was a particular hardship to the business people of Darwin, was solved in the 1950s after the Labor Party lost the election in December 1949. The new Liberal/Country Party coalition had no ideological commitment to the Darwin town plan and, while not rejecting it entirely, the authorities began to modify it to allow a more rapid development of the town. The Inter-Departmental Committee set up in 1944 was still meeting to discuss Darwin’s development and in July 1950 it recommended a number of measures which can be regarded as a breakthrough as far as Darwin was concerned. The report of the meeting began with a reiteration that ‘the general policy in the planning of Darwin is to develop a tropical town with buildings set in open spaces with trees’. The Committee then suggested that ‘the Navy should be asked to hand over [to the NT Administration] the area comprised in the Navy Reserve abounded by Bennett and Mitchell streets and the Esplanade’. As a further modification to the plan, it recommended that

\footnote{153} NAA: A452, 1956/60.  
\footnote{154} See NAA: A452, 1955/470 for an explanation of the system of granting preferential leases.  
\footnote{155} Annual Report, 1948-49, p.10. These women were probably living with parents or husbands and did not need the Department to provide them with accommodation.  
\footnote{156} NAA: A452, 1955/542 PART 1. Driver to Secretary, Dept. of Interior, 26 April 1949. Driver took care to mention that Chinese residents bought seventeen of the lots.
‘provision should be made for an adequately controlled minor shopping area to continue at the site of the existing commercial centre,’ and that ‘the site indicated on the plan for a future shopping and business centre be retained and Government buildings such as Post Office be located there’.\(^{157}\) The way was finally clear to grant 99-year leases to business people occupying premises in the original commercial centre of the town, but it proved far more difficult to shift the Navy. Negotiations for a transfer of naval reserves to the NT Administration began in November 1957, but the final handover did not take place until December 1960.\(^{158}\)

**Economic Developments in the Northern Territory**

In most cases, the economic health of an urban centre depends greatly on the prosperity of industries in the hinterland. By the beginning of the 1950s the economic future of the Territory began to look much brighter. The immediate post-war years were spent in yet more investigations into how industrial development in Northern Australia could be achieved. The Northern Australia Development Committee (NADC), chaired by Dr H.C. (‘Nugget’) Coombs, Director-General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, was formed in August 1945.\(^{159}\) The Committee was to investigate ‘ways of developing primary industry, transport, communication and infrastructure in the North’,\(^{160}\) and it included the northern sections of Queensland and Western Australia in its deliberations as well as the Top End. According to Wells, the Committee carried out some useful research but it was disbanded in 1948.\(^{161}\) The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) also started to work in the Top End after the war. It established the North Australia Regional Survey Unit in 1946 and commenced a survey of the Katherine-Darwin region in the same year.\(^{162}\) Two years later, it established the Katherine Research Station.

While these initiatives gave an indication that the government was serious about developing the north, little of a concrete nature was achieved until the end of the 1940s, when new opportunities appeared on the horizon. The mining industry, for example, received an

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\(^{157}\) NAA: A452, 1955/3 PART 1.


\(^{161}\) Ibid, p.7.

\(^{162}\) Kelly, *Beef in Northern Australia*, p.62. The CSIR was the predecessor of the CSIRO.
enormous boost when Jack White discovered uranium at Rum Jungle in 1949. In 1953 the mining company, Consolidated Zinc, undertook to develop the deposit. The new town of Batchelor was built to house the workers, and, on 17 September 1954 Prime Minister Menzies opened the uranium treatment plant in an impressive ceremony which underlined the importance of the enterprise. Further uranium deposits were discovered in the 1950s and other, smaller mines were established in various locations. As Barter observed, ‘the discoveries did much to give impetus to the national post-war commitment to develop the north’. The mining of other minerals was also undertaken. The last Annual Report of the 1950s recorded that, ‘in 1955-56, mining replaced the pastoral industry as the largest source of income, and since then copper, produced mainly at the Peko mine, near Tennant Creek, ... has been the chief commercial mineral.’

The future of the pastoral industry also looked bright at this time. In 1949 the Land Board was re-created and remained in operation for the next thirty years or so. With the Board monitoring matters, the management of Territory pastoral properties improved immensely. Also, in 1948, ‘the first of the British Food Missions came to Australia seeking a meat supply agreement which would effectively guarantee Australia an international market for many years’. After two more visits from the British Food Missions the government signed an agreement with the United Kingdom in July 1952 whereby Britain would purchase ‘specified proportions of Australia’s exportable beef surplus’. Another boost to the pastoral industry occurred when shipments of live cattle to the Philippines resumed in the mid-1950s, and cattle were also sent to Hong Kong. Territorians also began to profit from the wild buffaloes in the Top End when licences were granted in 1959 for the slaughter of five hundred buffaloes for pet meat.

There was also an air of optimism about the future of agriculture, the \textit{bete noir} of Territory development, in the 1950s. In 1952 the NT Administration established an experimental farm

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{164} Ibid, p.18. See also Wells, “Road to Rum Jungle,” pp.10-11.
\bibitem{166} \textit{Annual Report}, 1959-60, p.10.
\bibitem{167} Ling, “Blame and Martyrs,” p.120.
\bibitem{168} Ibid, p.108 and 133ff.
\bibitem{169} Kelly, \textit{Beef in Northern Australia}, p.64.
\bibitem{170} G.A. Letts, “The Darwin-Hong Kong Cattle Trade,” \textit{Australian Territories} 3, no.3 (May 1963), pp.10, 12.
\bibitem{171} G.A. Letts, “Buffaloes of the Northern Territory,” \textit{Australian Territories} 2, no.5 (September 1962), p.15.
\end{thebibliography}
at Katherine, and two rice research stations were set up near Darwin.\footnote{Powell, \textit{Far Country}, p.217. See also J. MacDonald Holmes, \textit{Australia’s Open North: A Study of Northern Australia Bearing on the Urgency of the Times} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1963), p.288. Calley explained that these farms were established at Humpty Doo and the “Sixty Mile”. See Graham Calley, \textit{The Story of Berrimah Farm} (Darwin; NT Dept. of Primary Industry & Fisheries, 1997), p.13.} Two years later the American-Australian company, Territory Rice Ltd., signed an agreement with the Commonwealth which gave the company an option on more than three hundred thousand hectares of land near Humpty Doo for growing rice. After very promising signs at first, the project eventually failed and was abandoned in 1960. At first the migratory magpie geese which decimated the crops were blamed for the failure but it was finally accepted that ‘poor farming techniques, inadequate research into the problems of large-scale rice framing and a bad choice of site were the main reasons for failure’.\footnote{Powell, \textit{Far Country}, p.218.} With the abandonment of the rice venture the government retreated to its usual strategy and a committee headed by Dr H.C. Forster was appointed to inquire into the state of agriculture in the Northern Territory.\footnote{Helyar, \textit{They Led the Way}, p.99.}

The rice project’s failure was only evident at the end of the 1950s, but the revival of the pearling industry seemed a doubtful proposition from the beginning. In 1945, in an effort to ‘kick-start’ pearling operations, Abbott proposed that the feasibility of establishing a pearl-shell button plant in Darwin using Half-caste labour be investigated.\footnote{Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling,” p.28.} Nothing came of this idea, and pearling did not resume until 1948.\footnote{Donovan, \textit{Other End of Australia}, p. 171.} However, the local pearling masters struggled to make a profit. They were competing against the Japanese pearlers who were operating on a much larger scale and were not bound by Australian regulations on the amount of shell they could garner each season. Finally, the introduction of plastics destroyed the market for pearl shell and in 1958 only four boats owned by local pearlers completed the season.\footnote{Shepherd, “100 Years of Pearling,” p.34.} Fishing for natural pearl died out after this.

A few minor initiatives were also instituted during this period. In August 1958, for example ‘the Commonwealth Government approved a six-year programme of forestry research and development aimed at preserving existing forest areas and increasing timber resources’.\footnote{“Forestry in the Northern Territory,” \textit{Australian Territories} 2, no.2 (March 1962), p.32.} Meanwhile, some new ventures in Darwin itself also raised the spirits of the residents.
Arafura Salt Industries established commercial salt-panns at Shoal Bay in 1956, and two breweries, ‘one producing Swan and the other Victoria Bitter’ were opened in Darwin in the same year.

While the agricultural and pearling ventures created a great deal of disappointment, the success of mining and the pastoral industry, the two mainstays of the Territory’s economy during the 1950s, did a great deal to bolster the government’s determination to invest heavily in the necessary infrastructure to encourage people to settle in the region. Immediately following the opening of Rum Jungle in 1954, for example, the government announced ‘the commencement of an ambitious Commonwealth Government three year development plan which would involve the expenditure of 5,192,000 pounds’.

**Changes in the Administration**

The change in the government’s attitude toward the Northern Territory created a far more positive outlook as far as the Commonwealth administration of the Territory was concerned. Even before the development of new enterprises in the Territory, it was realised that large sums of money must be expended to bring about the necessary development and population growth in the region. However, practical difficulties, heightened by misguided policy, made the Labor government’s efforts negligible in the 1940s.

The situation changed in December 1949 however, when the Liberal/Country Party coalition came into power with Robert Menzies as Prime Minister. The new government was even more determined than the Labor Party to develop the north in general and Darwin in particular. The lessons from the Second World War had demonstrated Australia’s security depended, at least in part, on a reasonably well-populated northern region. Post-war events in Asia such as the creation of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, the subsequent establishment of the Republic of China on the island of Taiwan, and the Korean war of 1950 to 1953 almost certainly strengthened their commitment to this policy. The Cold War added to the deterioration of international relations during the 1950s and anxiety about

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180 Willey, *Eaters of the Lotus*, p.112. David Carment recalls being told when he was a child that Darwin was the town with two breweries and no dairy. Pers. Comm., 19 March 2013.

national security was expressed, not only by the government, but also by the Australian people in general.

While defence concerns were probably the prime reason for the government’s resurgence of interest in northern development, other factors contributed to the Commonwealth’s enthusiasm. By 1950 the benefits of assisting in the population growth of Darwin were evident to the authorities. As the town grew in size and adequate housing and other services became available, more people independent of government employment were attracted to the region and the Menzies government showed a willingness to assist this trend with financial and practical assistance. In addition, the future economic development of the Territory looked more promising than it had ever done, especially at the beginning of the 1950s before the agricultural and pearling ventures failed. Also, in spite of a few ‘minor setbacks’, ... the postwar period had been one of remarkable economic growth’ for Australia in general. It was marked by economic stability, full employment and provision of social security and this reassuring situation made the Australian public more amenable to government investment in northern development.

For a number of years the Territory’s Member of Parliament, McAllister Blain had been calling for the creation of a Department of the Northern Territory so that the Minister and his bureaucracy could concentrate exclusively on developing the region. The Menzies government went part way towards this idea by creating a Department of Territories in 1951. At the same time, Minister for the Interior E.J. Harrison was replaced by Paul Hasluck who took over as the first Minister for Territories. This was of profound significance to the Territory in at least two ways. In the first place, Paul Hasluck remained as Minister for almost thirteen years, which was three times as long as any other Minister. He had time to become thoroughly familiar with the Territory, its people, and its problems, and could use this knowledge to argue the Territory’s case with Cabinet and with other Departments such as Treasury and the Department of Works. In the second place, Hasluck

182 Alexander, *Australia Since Federation*, p.211.
183 This Department administered all the Commonwealth Territories, including PNG.
185 Hasluck served as Minister for the Territories from May 1951 to December 1963, a total of 12 years and 7 months. The next longest-serving Minister was G F Pearce who served from December 1921 to June 1926, a total of 4 years and 6 months. See Porter, *Paul Hasluck*, esp. Chapter 7, and B. Beddie, “Pearce, Sir George Foster (1870-1952),” in *ADB*; [database online] available at http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110182b.htm [accessed 17 March 2011].
consistently showed far more enthusiasm and energy for his responsibilities as Minister for the Territory than did his predecessors.

Hasluck (3rd from right) at the Darwin railway station celebrating the arrival of diesel-electric locomotives for the North Australia Railway

Historians have described Hasluck as a ‘Minister of exceptional diligence, commitment and vision’ who ‘brought the dedication, commitment and sense of purpose that had been lacking under previous Ministers,’ and as ‘the innovative and idealistic historian and politician.’

Born in Fremantle, Western Australia in 1905, Hasluck studied at the University of Western Australia where he wrote a Master’s thesis on the history of the State’s Aboriginal policy. His studies led to the publication of a book on the subject and a lifelong interest in Aboriginal Affairs which stood him in good stead during his time as Minister for Territories.

Hasluck joined the Department of External Affairs in 1941, where he eventually became Australia’s first representative at the United Nations in New York. After he resigned from the Department he stood as the Liberal candidate for Curtin and was elected to federal parliament in 1949. Two years later Robert Menzies asked him to accept the portfolio of Minister for Territories.

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186 Porter, Paul Hasluck, pp.90 and 168.
188 There are many books and interviews containing biographical information on Hasluck, but see in particular, Paul Hasluck, Mucking About: An Autobiography (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1977).
189 Paul Hasluck, Black Australians: A Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia 1829-1897 (Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1942).
190 Paul Hasluck, Light That Time Has Made (Canberra: NLA, 1995), p.ix.
It seems that Hasluck’s first visit to Darwin as Minister came as something of a shock to him. He described the town as he saw it in June 1951, almost six years after the end of the war:

the Esplanade was a wilderness of high brown grass from which the rubbish of war had not yet been cleared. Doctor’s Gully was a junk yard. The old post office was still a roofless ruin. The harbour had not been cleared of the wrecks left by the wartime raids and indeed the main berth was a temporary construction on the upturned hull of one of the wrecks. In the main street none of the war-scarred buildings had been repaired.191

He described the main hostel for public servants, which was commonly referred to as ‘Belsen’, as ‘a collection of hutments in a makeshift compound’ and noted that ‘the skyline of Darwin was dominated by the vandalised bulk of the meatworks.’192

Harry Giese, who became the Director of the Welfare Branch in 1953, described Hasluck as ‘a hands-on Minister,’193 and Hasluck certainly made frequent trips to all parts of the Territory which he claimed ‘became one of the most highly valued “fringe benefits” I had as a minister.’194 In this way, he managed to consult directly, not only with the Administrator, but also with heads of the branches in the NT Administration and with senior officers of other federal instrumentalities working in the Territory. While some public servants resented this ‘interference’, people like Giese appreciated the interest Hasluck showed in their work and valued Hasluck’s support and advice.195

Hasluck managed to find an impressive replacement for Administrator Driver who resigned in June 1951. The new Administrator, Frank Wise, was born in Queensland in 1897 and

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191 Hasluck, Pioneers of Post War Recovery, pp.2-3.
192 Ibid, p.3.
194 Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p.89.
195 See, for example, NTAS: NTRS 226, GIESE, Harry, TS 755, Section 3, Tape 10, Side B, p.12.
graduated from the Queensland Agricultural College in 1913. After working on his family’s farm and then for the Queensland government as an agricultural adviser, he moved to Western Australia in 1929. Wise was a long-time member of the Labor Party, and in 1933 he won the Legislative Assembly seat of Gascoyne, which he held until 1951, holding various portfolios during his political career and serving as Western Australia’s Premier from 1945 until his party was narrowly beaten in the 1947 State election.\textsuperscript{196} A reporter for the popular magazine, \textit{People}, claimed that:

because he was a Labor man appointed by a Liberal Government he [Wise] went to the Territory with the immediate goodwill of the people. Unlike some of his predecessors who had been straight out political appointees, it was evident that Wise had been sent to the Territory for the Territory’s good and not his own.\textsuperscript{197}

Wise was absent from Darwin when a national event had its dramatic finale in Darwin. In April 1954 Vladimir Petrov, first Secretary of the Russian Embassy in Canberra, defected and went into hiding. Menzies subsequently announced he had been granted political asylum. About a week later Russian agents took Mrs Evdokia Petrov into custody, intending to take her home to Russia. After boarding the aircraft Mrs Petrov told the air hostess that the men were armed. Reg Leydin, who was Acting Administrator at the time, was ordered to meet Mrs Petrov when the aeroplane landed at Darwin and find out whether she wished to stay in Australia. Downer, a Territory policeman, claimed that ‘the entire available police force in Darwin was alerted and armed.’\textsuperscript{198} Mrs Petrov accepted Leydin’s offer of political asylum and the image of her terrified face as she was rescued from her captors was shown around the world.\textsuperscript{199}

Hasluck and Wise were good friends and, with financial backing from the Menzies government, they made an effective team which immediately began to produce results both in Darwin and in the Territory as a whole. Darwin residents were at last granted long-term leases\textsuperscript{200} and work began in earnest on improving the town’s infrastructure and cleaning up the wreckage caused by the war. The two men also concentrated on developing a well-qualified, efficient team of public servants in the NT Administration, and although many of the public servants served their two or three year posting to the Territory and left, a number

\textsuperscript{198} Downer, \textit{Patrol Indefinite}, p.175.
\textsuperscript{199} See Nicholas Whitlam and John Stubbs, \textit{Nest of Traitors: The Petrov Affair} (Milton Qld: Jacaranda Press, 1974), and \textit{The Royal Commission on Espionage 1954-55}, NAA Fact Sheet 130 (Canberra: NAA, 2009).
\textsuperscript{200} CPD, 26 June 1951, vol. 213, p.382.
of senior officers, like Harry Giese, chose to stay, thus giving an unusual stability to the administration. When Wise retired his position in 1956, he was succeeded by James Clarence (‘Clarrie’) Archer, ‘a tall, rather austere man, who had a background in top public service and administrative positions.’\(^{201}\) Hasluck was equally pleased with this appointment claiming that under Archer, ‘the Territory Administration became a reliable and workmanlike part of government’.\(^{202}\)

### Assimilation Policy

Hasluck is perhaps best known for his introduction of assimilation policy and practices in the Territory. The concept of assimilation did not originate with Hasluck. It was first introduced as a future policy by Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, who issued a White Paper entitled ‘A New Deal for Aborigines’ in 1939.\(^{203}\) The war prevented the policy from being acted upon and it was left to Hasluck to put it into practice. Hasluck was quite clear in his mind on what ‘assimilation’ meant, and he spelt it out clearly:

> assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like white Australians do … Assimilation does not mean the suppression of the aboriginal culture but rather that, for generation after generation, cultural adjustment will take place. The native people will grow into the society in which, by force of history they are bound to live.\(^{204}\)

Hasluck maintained that the future treatment of Indigenous people must be based on their ability to live ‘as we do’ and not on their colour or race. He set about replacing the Aboriginals Ordinance with a Welfare Ordinance, the makers of which assiduously avoided using any racially specific terms. According to McGregor, Hasluck admitted that ‘legislative discrimination was essential, but the grounds for such discrimination must be need, never race’\(^{205}\). The legislation was therefore aimed at making any person deemed unable to function ‘properly’ in white society a ‘ward of the state’ regardless of his or her racial background. When the general populace realised that the new legislation could be applied to white people, a storm of protest arose.\(^{206}\) The draft legislation was therefore changed so that


\(^{202}\) Hasluck, *Pioneers of Post War Recovery*, p.3.


\(^{206}\) Ibid, p.520.
there was ‘careful provision in the Ordinance (without mentioning the word ‘Aboriginal’) to ensure that none but Aborigines could be wards’. Nevertheless, the new Ordinance had a difficult passage through the Northern Territory Legislative Council.

The Ordinance and the policy of assimilation it supported continued to attract criticism. The anthropologists and missionaries were both scathing about Hasluck’s version of assimilation. ‘Wardship’ they maintained was a condition suitable for children and lunatics. They particularly disliked the emphasis placed on the inevitable destruction of Aboriginal culture, and they were critical of the degree of control permitted under the Ordinance. Aborigines under the new Ordinance were more closely supervised than they were under the old Aboriginals Ordinance. Elkin, among others, was anxious that the Aborigines be permitted to preserve at least some remnants of their culture, but, as Moran pointed out, ‘even when through absorption and assimilation policies governments moved to include Aborigines, the basis of that inclusion was the negation of Aboriginality, biologically and/or culturally’.

Hasluck commenced proceedings to formulate the new Welfare Ordinance as soon as he took up his position as Minister for Territories, and when it was enacted in June 1953, he abolished the old NT Administration’s Native Affairs Branch and replaced it with the Welfare Branch with Harry Giese as Director. In order to administer the new Ordinance, however, it was necessary to compile a list of the Aborigines who were to be made wards of the state. This was a long and complicated process, but the Register of Wards, immediately dubbed the ‘Domesday Book’ or ‘Stud Book’, was eventually deemed complete and the Ordinance was gazetted after a delay of four years.

Changing Attitudes

The former protection policy for Aborigines was a policy of exclusion. The Indigenous people were set apart and treated like mendicants or children – or both. The assimilation policy, for all its faults, was a policy of inclusion and it was one factor in a nation-wide

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change in White Australia’s attitude towards its non-European inhabitants in general and towards Aborigines in particular. In 1948, for example, Australia signed the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and in the same year, the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* meant that all Aborigines automatically became citizens of Australia.\(^{213}\) Closer to home, ‘Aboriginal war veterans, defence members and those not subject to the Aboriginal Ordinance’\(^{214}\) were granted voting rights in Legislative Council elections, and even the NAWU constitution was amended to permit the admission of Aboriginal members.\(^{215}\)

Meanwhile, the Aborigines in Darwin were becoming more dissatisfied with their treatment and more assertive in their demands for equality. When the war ended the Army’s Aboriginal employees and their dependents were returned to Darwin where they were housed in the Army’s reserve at the former Aboriginal settlement at Bagot. The Native Affairs Branch took over the Reserve in March 1946, and the Retta Dixon Home for part-Aboriginal children was opened at Bagot later in the year. A shortage of accommodation at Bagot prompted the authorities to move the full-blood Aborigines to the former RAAF camp at Honeysuckle Flat at Berrimah in September 1946,\(^{216}\) leaving part-Aboriginal families and the Retta Dixon children at Bagot.

The Aborigines at Berrimah readily found jobs in Darwin and they were taken into town by bus each morning and returned at the end of the working day. The conditions at Berrimah


\(^{214}\) Mildren, “Role of Legal Professions and Courts,” p.51.

\(^{215}\) Brian, “The ‘One Big Union’,” p.8. See also Wells, “Town Camp or Homeland?” p.81 which notes that most Aborigines could not afford the cost of membership.

\(^{216}\) “Bagot Aboriginal Reserve,” p.2.
were even worse than those experienced by the white residents in Darwin and on 28 November 1950 the Berrimah residents refused to go to work.\textsuperscript{217} They demanded a wage of £7 per week but ‘they were told the current wage of £2 and all found including food, clothing and tobacco would not be exceeded, but they were free to accept jobs at higher wages if they were offered’. The leaders were Laurence Urban of the ‘Worgait’ (Wagait) tribe and Tommy Play-up Jimmy from Melville Island. They complained that when an Aborigine was convicted of a crime, he was usually sent away from Darwin and they regarded this as an extra punishment. The Administration remained firm and told the strikers that ‘unemployed Aborigines will not be tolerated in the Darwin area, nor will incorrigibles’.\textsuperscript{218}

The Aborigines persisted, and held another strike on 15 January 1951 which lasted for three days, during which Laurence Urban organised a protest march from Berrimah into town. Some three hundred Aborigines\textsuperscript{219} joined the march, with about fifty having armed themselves with iron bars and sticks. Another strike was held on 12 February but Aborigines returned to work the following day. The Administrator held all the cards: he had the power to banish all Aboriginal troublemakers from Darwin and its environs.

This happened to Fred Waters, a Larrakia elder, who was sent across the harbour to Delissaville after being convicted of drunkenness. He organised a strike at the community there a few days after the first strike at Berrimah. Moy, the Director of Native Affairs summarily sent Waters to Haasts Bluff Aboriginal Reserve in Central Australia hundreds of kilometres from his country. The NAWU took this matter to the High Court, where it was dismissed, so they sent some of their officials to the southern capital cities to publicise the matter to fellow unionists and other interested people.\textsuperscript{220} The story reached newspapers in England and elsewhere and the Commonwealth government was flooded with letters of protest from overseas. Chief Justice John Latham sent a letter to the Minister of the Interior pointing out that ‘reports of such matters published in other countries do a great deal of harm to the reputation of Australia’ and demanding that matters be cleared up.\textsuperscript{221}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{217}] NAA: A431, 1950/3697. Unless otherwise specified, the details in the remainder of this section are taken from this file.
\item[\textsuperscript{218}] Ibid. Administrator Driver to Director, NT Affairs, Canberra, 29 November 1950, p.3.
\item[\textsuperscript{219}] McGinness, \textit{Son of Alyandabu}, p.58.
\item[\textsuperscript{220}] Ibid, p.60. Joe McGinness, a part-Aboriginal, was one of the NAWU officials.
\item[\textsuperscript{221}] NAA: A431, 1950/3697.
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While the full-blood Aborigines were carrying on this struggle, the part-Aboriginal residents of Darwin were also asserting themselves. In March 1951 they established the North Australian Half-Caste Progressive Association in order to ‘ensure better treatment in our own land.’ The Association demanded complete exclusion from the Aboriginal Ordinance and full citizenship rights. At this time, the new Welfare Ordinance was being drafted and the Association lobbied to have Half-castes exempted from the provisions of the new law. Hasluck agreed to this and thus ‘effectively, Northern Territory “mixed-bloods” were granted citizenship in 1953, at the same time as “full-bloods” were confined to the legal status of “wards of the state”’. From this time on, the Half-caste population of Darwin was finally free of official discrimination.

**Housing at the End of the Decade**

By the end of the 1950s, the housing situation had been considerably improved, although there was still a shortage of accommodation. The government had contributed significantly to the advances. The authorities’ first priority had been to provide accommodation for married and single public servants. The Administrators’ reports provide information on housing construction during the 1950s. In 1953, for example, there were 261 departmental houses in Darwin and 170 officers were still waiting for a house. By 1959 the number of government homes had risen to 717. In 1953, single NT Administration officers were accommodated in two hostels and another hostel was under construction. The NT Administration took over the Department of Works’ two hostels (including the infamous ‘Belsen’) in 1954 making five in total. Single women were housed at three locations: one hostel was provided when the NT Administration converted the old Don Hotel in Bennett Street and renamed it ‘Abbott House’; the old hostel, Marrenah House, which was built before the war, was repaired and re-occupied, and so too was the Town Mess in McMinn Street which provided accommodation only. Single men lived in pre-war hostels, all of which were seriously decrepit, until the new Peel Street Hostel was ready for occupation.

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222 NAA: A431, 1951/889. B Damaso, Secretary of the Australian Half-Caste Progressive Association to the Prime Minister, 12 March 1951. The name was later changed to the Australian Half-Castes’ Progress Association.
225 Annual Report, 1958-59, p.34.
226 Nan Bell, ed., *Between the Bombs and the Big Blow Perspectives on Education in the ‘Top End’ of the Northern Territory of Australia 1954-1974* (Darwin: Nan Bell, 1996), p.1. See also, Annual Report, 1957-58, p.13 for details on the capacity of each hostel. Abbott House was situated where the ABC office now stands. The Travelodge Hotel was built on the site of Marrenah House and the Town Mess was on a block near the *NT News*. 
This new hostel housed 184 men and was progressively occupied as various sections were completed. Belsen was finally demolished in 1957.227

Private housing also improved during the 1950s. In 1958-59 the number of private homes built in Darwin reached 187, while 180 were still being constructed.228 The government also assisted significantly in this boom in private housing. In 1953, the Northern Territory Housing Loans Scheme was implemented ‘to assist persons of moderate and low means to establish permanent homes in the Territory.’229 Five years later, Hasluck announced that the federal Cabinet had approved the establishment of a Housing Commission for the Territory. This body took over the responsibility of housing the Coloured families in Darwin.230 The Commission wasted no time: during the 1959-60 financial year it constructed its first fifty-one houses.231 As more housing became available the hut areas were improved. In 1953, for example, work began on improving the camps in Stuart Park. Half the residents were housed elsewhere and every second hut was demolished allowing the remaining occupants more space, while the provision of essential services such as power and water were extended. There were still ninety-seven army huts being used as private residences in 1959, but the large camps had disappeared.232

227 Dewar, No Place Like Home, p.98.
228 Annual Report, 1958-59, p.34.
231 Dewar, No Place Like Home, p.6.
232 Annual Report, 1958-59, p.34.
The government was of course, fully aware of the long-held discontent of Territory people about their lack of any power whatsoever over decisions made regarding their region. Yet the politicians were adamant that the people could not have any real control while their economy relied so heavily on Commonwealth funding. After the war, however, the politicians seemed more amenable to giving the people an opportunity to have some say about Territory affairs. In 1946, Minister H.V. Johnson announced that the government had decided to establish an ‘elective Legislative Council’ in the Northern Territory and steps were already being taken to ‘amend the ordinance with a view to defining the zones which will return members to that body’. The *Northern Territory (Administration) Act*, which enabled the creation of this Council, was passed on 14 May 1947. The Council consisted of the Administrator as President, seven appointed official members and six elected members. Most of the official members were to be heads of various Departments or Branches of the NT Administration, while the elected members represented five electoral districts with two representatives for the Darwin district, one each for the urban areas of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, and one each for the rural areas of Stuart and Batchelor.

By November 1947, Administrator Driver had chosen the official members and he wrote to the Department begging them to ratify his decision quickly so that he could arrange to hold

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the first Council meeting in February 1948. Not all the official members were happy at being nominated for the Council. Leonard Lucas, the Director of Works and Housing, sent a letter of protest to the Administrator when he learned that he had been nominated, saying that it was not in his job description when he accepted his appointment. His disgruntlement at having to attend the first meeting is evident in the Hansard record, although he did assure the members that he ‘will co-operate in every way possible’.

Despite Driver's difficulty in finding a suitable venue, the first meeting of the first session of the new Council took place in February 1948. At the meeting the elected members used the opportunity to voice particular grievances. Lawyer Dick Ward representing Alice Springs, pointed out that ‘even with this Council ... we enjoy about the same measure of self-government as the people of England enjoyed under the Stuarts’. He added that the government could ignore the people even when ‘90 per cent. of the people want a certain thing’, and explained that, with seven official members to the six elected members, and with the Administrator, as President of the Council, having both a deliberative and a casting vote, the elected representatives had very little power indeed.

The Legislative Council’s first meeting was held in the newly built Court House. Driver had planned to use the elegant Commonwealth Bank building erected just before the war, but the Navy would not release it. The Navy also refused to release ‘Brown’s Building’ in Smith Street for permanent Chambers, even though it was only being used to store ‘clothing and motor parts’ which, Driver claimed could easily be moved to another building in the Naval Reserve. Driver struggled to find a suitable building and failed, so his successor, Frank Wise, decided to build the Chambers on the site of the bombed out cable company and Post Office buildings. The official Legislative Council Chambers were opened on 25 March 1955 with an impressive ceremony attended by Governor-General Sir William and Lady Slim.

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236 Ibid, L. Lucas to Administrator, 4 December 1947.
237 NTLCD, 16 February 1948, vol.1, p.11.
239 Ibid, p.20.
241 Annual Report, 1953-55, p.9. The government was anxious to highlight the important of this event. Plans for the ceremony can be found in NAA: A462, 193/2/7.
Inauguration of Session of the Legislative Council by His Excellency the Governor General, Field Marshal Sir William Slim, making the inaugural speech, 25 March 1955.

During the first meeting in the new Chambers, a Parliamentary deputation presented a Chair for the Presiding Officer of the Council and a footstool formerly used in the House of Representatives. Shortly after the ceremony the NT Administration vacated its temporary office in Cavenagh Street and occupied rooms in the Chambers until its offices were erected nearby. The decision to locate the Administration centre at the southern end of the peninsula was the death knell for the Darwin Town Plan, and Hasluck seemed to express satisfaction over this when he wrote that ‘it would now appear that Mr. McInnes’ plan has been vindicated.’

While they could always be outvoted, the elected members of the Legislative Council took their duties seriously and had significant influence on future Northern Territory legislation. The frustration of lacking real political power gradually took its toll however, and in April 1956, with the support of the nominated members, the Council decided to establish a Select Committee to inquire into all aspects of the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act*; including ‘the constitution, function, powers and operation of the Legislative Council under that Act’; whether these should be altered or extended; and whether ‘some greater measure of self-government is warranted’.

The Select Committee presented its report in November 1957. The major recommendations were:

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that the Territory be given Senate representation; that the Territory representative in the House be accorded full voting rights; that an Executive Council be established; that the assent and disallowance provision be made less subject to arbitrary decision by the government; that the elected membership of the Council be increased by one; and that a form of limited autonomy in financial affairs be instituted with the Council having control over local expenditure.\textsuperscript{245}

After receiving the report, Hasluck had to wait for advice from legal experts before preparing a submission for Cabinet. Council members became impatient as they waited for a response from the Minister, and in April 1958 all six elected members resigned their seats ‘as a protest against the off-handed manner in which the Minister, the Honourable Paul Hasluck, has treated this Council on the question of Constitutional reform’.\textsuperscript{246}

In a show of support for their representatives, Territory voters re-elected all six members at the subsequent election in May, and in July the members of the Council were invited to Canberra to meet with Hasluck and others to discuss the Committee’s report and its recommendations.\textsuperscript{247} As a result of these events, the \textit{Northern Territory (Administration) Act} 1959 was passed to allow for a Council comprising six appointed official members, eight elected members, and three appointed citizens. These three appointed members thus held the balance of power in the Council, and ‘saw it necessary to demonstrate their independence by often voting against the government’.\textsuperscript{248} Hasluck later claimed that he was cast as ‘a villainous opponent of freedom’\textsuperscript{249} by members of the Legislative Council, but on viewing archival material it is clear that he was anxious to give the people of the Territory as much power as possible without relinquishing control of the Commonwealth purse strings. Another long-awaited reform was instituted at the same time when the Territory’s MHR was given the right to vote on ‘all measures relating solely to the Territory or any motion for disallowance of regulations made under an Ordinance’.\textsuperscript{250}

\textbf{Self-determination: The Municipal Council}

In view of the conditions under which Darwin residents lived when they returned after the war, it is not surprising that they found ways to make their dissatisfaction known to the authorities. A number of lobby groups were formed or re-formed. In November 1945 for

\textsuperscript{245} Heatley, \textit{Government of the NT}, p.34.
\textsuperscript{246} NAA: F425, Item C119. Letter of resignation from W.H.F. Petrick, Legislative Council Member for Stuart, to the Governor-General, 18 April 1958.
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid, Minister Hasluck to Administrator J C Archer, 3 July 1958.
\textsuperscript{248} Porter, \textit{Paul Hasluck}, p.183.
\textsuperscript{249} Hasluck, \textit{Pioneers of Post War Recovery}, p.4.
example, Abbott reported that the few traders in Darwin were already re-establishing the Chamber of Commerce and the Darwin Housewives Association was formed in 1949 ‘to lobby for better conditions for families.’ The Administration was also anxious to foster community participation in developments in Darwin. When the Darwin Town Advisory Committee was formed in 1946, representatives from NAWU, the Development League and the Chamber of Commerce were invited to join the four senior public servants on the Committee. The Committee operated for a year before it was replaced by the more formal statutory body, the Darwin Town Management Board (DTMB) comprising Government Secretary Leydin, three other senior public servants, and a ‘resident of the town appointed by the Administrator to provide liaison between townspeople and Administration.’

In the same year the government also sponsored the formation of the Darwin Civic Committee consisting of fifteen people representing commercial interests and community groups such as the CWA, NAWU, the RSL, craft unions, the Society of Art, and sporting bodies. In a move which would never have occurred before the war, a Chinese businessman, Charles See Kee, was elected President of the Committee. The Committee considered all aspects of municipal management and it offered its advice to the DTMB and to government departments. As Heatley pointed out, ‘as an advisory body, its effectiveness was always limited but it did provide an avenue for articulation of grievances’ and served a useful purpose in the town.

The DTMB attracted a great deal of criticism from both the community and from government officers. In 1950 the legislation was amended to make it a more powerful body with duties specifically aimed at the control and management of the town. It now had five government members who were more senior officers than those in the original DTMB. The new Board was chaired by the influential Government Secretary, Reg Leydin, who was committed to the “fostering of a civic consciousness” in Darwin. With this aim in mind, and after a series of consultations with community groups, Darwin was divided into five zones, each of which

252 Dewar, No Place Like Home, p.69.
254 NAA: A452, 1955/87, Wise to Secretary, Dept. of Territories, 7 April 1953. The annual reports of the DTMB can be found in NAA: A452, 1956/485.
255 Heatley, A City Grows, p.15.
256 Ibid.
was to have a progress association. Nightcliff and Fannie Bay already had progress associations and elections were held to set up committees in zones called Temira, Port Darwin and Stuart. The people living outside the town’s boundaries at Berrimah and beyond were not included in this scheme until the Maranga and Districts Association was added later. Each of the associations sent two delegates to the Darwin Progress Association which replaced the Civic Committee as the advisory body.

With so much activity of an advisory nature being carried on, it is surprising that Darwin residents were not enthusiastic about reviving the Municipal Council. Perhaps the citizens were fearful of being charged excessive fees for services now supplied free of charge by the government. Also, many of the long-term residents remembered the disheartening struggle the former Town Council had in providing basic municipal services to the town and perhaps feared that a new council would face the same problems. Hasluck and Wise, however, were determined to reinstitute a municipal council and in 1955 they held a meeting with representatives from community groups to discuss the matter. Details on the devolution of functions were hammered out at the meeting and the government set about drafting the necessary legislation.

The Legislative Council passed the Local Government Ordinance in the same year. The authorities then had to spend many months working out which municipal functions were to be transferred to the new Council and how the financial arrangements were to be managed. The process took a great deal of time and the election for the first Municipal Council was not held until 29 June 1957. A Mayor and twelve Councillors, (including Chinese businessman Harry Chan), were elected from thirty-six candidates and the new Council took office on the following day. This event was a significant milestone for Darwin and the decade ended with another achievement, when the Status of Darwin Ordinance was passed in 1959 and Darwin at last became a city.

258 This body was later called the Central Council.
Conclusion

Darwin was transformed in the fifteen years following the Second World War. The battle-scarred landscape of 1945, with the rubble of ruined buildings littering the streets and the harbour scattered with wrecked ships had become, by 1959, an orderly town spreading out to the north and along the Stuart Highway, with an estimated population of 10,900. Both the private citizens and federal politicians and public servants had faced a herculean task of reconstruction when the town was reoccupied. Initially, the government’s refusal to deal with the problems in a realistic, pragmatic manner, the interdepartmental rivalries in Darwin and Canberra, and the unavoidable practical problems all created difficulties and delays for Darwin’s permanent and transient residents in the years immediately following the war, and it took many more years to bring the town back to normal than it should have done. The 1950s, however, brought a change in the official outlook and the advent of Paul Hasluck as Minister and the arrival of a series of competent Administrators and senior staff went a long way in making the transformation possible.

Smith Street, 1960

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Chapter Nine

Progress Interrupted and the Transfer of Powers, 1960-1978

The rate of growth in Darwin increased rapidly during the 1960s, fuelled by the government’s increasing investment in the city. Its determination to develop the north was probably strengthened by Australia’s tense relationship with Indonesia following that country’s annexation of Dutch New Guinea in 1962. Australia’s support of the United States and South Vietnamese forces in Vietnam from 1962 to 1975 also added to national concerns about border security during this period. Aside from these concerns however, the 1950s had finally proved that with enough money spent on the north, and with a realistic and energetic pursuit of development, it was possible to achieve a respectable level of settlement in the region. The Northern Territory was at last starting to find its feet, and by the beginning of the 1960s, the government would have found it impossible to abandon its commitment to the region. Too much had been spent and too much promised to make this a viable alternative.

This chapter discusses events in Darwin during the final eighteen years before the Commonwealth government handed control of the region to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly in 1978. In spite of all the careful planning, the period was not without its difficulties. The steady growth prevailing through most of this period was violently interrupted on Christmas day 1974 when Cyclone Tracy passed over the city, destroying almost all that lay in its path. Another period of reconstruction followed the disaster, and Darwin’s recovery was remarkably swift. By the time self-government was granted in 1978, the city had almost returned to its pre-cyclone level of development.

Economic Development of the Territory

There were some advances in the pastoral industry during this period. William Angliss, a subsidiary of Vesteys, built a meat works at the Ten Mile on the outskirts of Darwin in 1961, and another abattoir was opened in Katherine the following year. According to McLaren and Cooper, the effect on the pastoral industry in the north was ‘dramatic’. The government also

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assisted the industry by spending almost seven million pounds between 1962 and 1966 on constructing and maintaining beef roads in the Territory.²

It was, however, mining which remained the big income earner in the Territory.³ In 1965 the Francis Creek Iron Mining Corporation (FIMCO) undertook to supply Japanese steel mills with three million tonnes of iron ore over a period of eight years.⁴ Production commenced the following year and the government began to construct loading facilities at Fort Hill. The hill, which had been modified extensively to accommodate the boom wharf infrastructure during the war, was now razed and the historic landmark was completely destroyed.⁵

![Darwin, July 1972. The iron ore wharf is at the bottom left of the photograph](image)

The first load of iron ore was railed to Darwin in December 1966,⁶ and in June 1967 the first vessel to sail from the new Fort Hill wharf was the Darwin Maru, laden with 35,673 tonnes of ore.⁷ The new facility caused some problems however. Darwin residents began to complain vociferously as the wind distributed iron ore dust from the stockpiles all over the town. Administrator Roger Dean claimed that the dust even got into the Government House refrigerator.⁸ Unfortunately, nothing could be done and the residents had to endure the nuisance until the Francis Creek mine closed.

² Ibid.
³ See Gamble, “History of Mining in the NT,” p.33 for a list of the Northern Territory mineral provinces as they were known in the 1960s.
⁴ Ian R. Stevenson, The Line that Led to Nowhere: The Story of the North Australia Railway (Adelaide: Rigby, 1979), p.144. Stevenson noted that this was later enlarged to ten million tonnes.
⁵ Helyar, They Led the Way, p.116.
Other mining ventures were commenced during this period. In 1965 the Groote Eylandt Mining Company (GEMCO) commenced mining for manganese, and the first shipment of 10,989 tonnes of manganese ore left the island in March the following year. Then a Swiss-Australian consortium, North Australia Bauxite and Alumina Company (NABALCO) commenced mining on the Gove peninsula in the early 1970s, and the town of Nhulunbuy was built for the workers and for government offices. In another development the Warrego flash smelter, which cost twenty-three million dollars, began production at Tennant Creek at the beginning of 1974.

The small uranium mines in the Top End closed during the 1960s and mining at Rum Jungle ceased in 1964, but the plant continued to process stockpiled ore until 1971. Various mining companies, including Queensland Mines and Pancontinental Mining, continued to explore the Top End, but opposition from the community delayed further development of uranium mining. It was not until August 1977 that Prime Minister Fraser announced that uranium mining would recommence under strictly controlled conditions.

Other industries were being established at this time. Although the pearl shell industry had died a natural death, the Paspaley Pearling Company continued to fish for shell which they used for the production of cultured pearls. Other marine resources were being exploited. By the end of the 1960s, for example, prawning had developed into another major industry for the Territory. Also, Darwin was starting to attract increasing numbers of tourists at this time. As a result, the Northern Territory Tourist Board was created in 1962, and tourist bureaux were set up at Darwin and Alice Springs in the following year. In the annual report for 1964-65, the Administrator observed that ‘for the twelve months ending 31 October 1965, approximately 33,000 tourists will have brought to the Territory business valued at

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10 Donovan, Other End of Australia, p.219.
14 Conn, NT Chronicle, p.30.
approximately £5.7 million’. Berzins noted that, as a result, ‘the early 1970s saw considerable money invested in Darwin accommodation’, and ideas for making the city more attractive to tourists were discussed at length. In short, the residents of Darwin in particular, and of the Northern Territory as a whole, had at last become aware of the economic potential of the region and were actively seeking ways in which to exploit its resources.

![The Cherry Blossom Motel, Darwin, 1972](image)

The Cherry Blossom Motel, Darwin, 1972

The economic growth in the Top End had a considerable impact on Darwin. While most of the development occurred outside the city’s environs, many enterprises were established in the city itself. These included support services such as small engineering works, mechanical repair shops, and retail outlets for mining equipment and other items. Staffing these enterprises added to Darwin’s population which in turn gave further stimulus to businesses supplying goods and services to the residents. The government achieved considerable success in keeping up with the demand for services such as health and education and housing although the shipping services and facilities remained inadequate for many years after the war. The interdependence between the urban centre and the hinterland explained by

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19 Berzins, Australia’s Northern Secret, p.206.
McCarty in his description of the ‘commercial city’\textsuperscript{21} became more evident in the story of Darwin’s progress during the 1950s.

**The Administration**

Australia had six Prime Ministers\textsuperscript{22} between the time Menzies retired in 1966 and the granting of self-government to the Territory in 1978, and the region was administered by no less than ten Ministers\textsuperscript{23} under a Department which underwent four changes of name.\textsuperscript{24} The continuity which had so benefitted the Territory during most of the 1950s was at an end, and while the government’s financial commitment continued to grow at a more than satisfactory rate, its interest in the details of Northern Territory development returned to the somewhat perfunctory level it maintained before Hasluck took over as Minister.

Hasluck’s reign as Minister for the Territory came to an end in December 1963 when he was appointed Minister for Defence.\textsuperscript{25} Charles Edward Barnes became Minister and he remained in that position for over four years. Barnes could have continued Hasluck’s practice of consulting extensively with those who lived and worked in the Territory, but, as Donovan noted, he ‘preferred to allow matters simply to continue in the established manner’\textsuperscript{26} and control of the Territory returned to the bureaucrats in Canberra. Once again the Administrators and public servants in Darwin had their communications with the Minister filtered through the Canberra public servants who, more often than not, reworded reports and requests to suit their own particular purposes. Thus, the Administrators who followed ‘Clarrie’ Archer had far less influence on the course of Territory development than either Frank Wise or Archer had under Hasluck.

\textsuperscript{21} McCarty, “Australian Capital Cities”. See also the section on ‘Regional Development’ in Chapter One of this thesis, pp.36ff.

\textsuperscript{22} Menzies was succeeded by Harold Holt, followed by John McEwen, John Gorton, and William McMahon as leaders of the conservative coalition. The Labor Party under Whitlam won the election in December 1972, but was ousted in November 1975 and the coalition again took control under Malcolm Fraser.

\textsuperscript{23} Hasluck was followed by C.E. Barnes, P.J. Nixon, R.J. Hunt, L.H. Barnard, K.E. Enderby, R.A. Patterson, P.J. Keating, I.M. Sinclair, and A.E. Adermann. Keating and Sinclair only served as Minister for one month each, and Barnard held the position for fourteen days.

\textsuperscript{24} In 1968 the Department of Territories disappeared and the Northern Territory was once more placed under the control of the Department of the Interior. A Department of the Northern Territory was established following the Labor Party’s electoral victory in December 1972. This was replaced by the short-lived Department of Northern Australia in June 1975, but the government returned to the Department of the Northern Territory six months later.

\textsuperscript{25} He remained in this position for a year before transferring to External Affairs. On 10 February 1969, the Queen announced his appointment as Governor-General of Australia and, at the same time, his elevation to a knighthood. He succeeded Lord Casey as Governor-General in April 1969. See NAA: A1200, Item L34780.

\textsuperscript{26} Donovan, Other End of Australia, p.186.
The power and influence of the Administrators was even further eroded when the Labor government took office in December 1972. H.C. Coombs claimed that he had proposed to Whitlam that there be a Department of the Northern Territory which should serve both as the territorial administration and as the main source of policy advice. This Department should be based in Darwin and the Secretary should be the head of the Administration with the position of Administrator becoming one of ceremonial and representative importance like that of a State Governor. Certain functions including Health, Education, and Aboriginal Affairs, should be retained by control by the relevant Federal Department rather than administered by the Department of the Northern Territory.

Politicians, bureaucrats and many ordinary citizens of the Territory had deplored the rule by remote control from Canberra for many years. Politicians, who no doubt picked up the term from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts’ reports, mentioned it in parliament at various times from the late 1950s. The Legislative Council had also been agitating for a Department dealing solely with the Northern Territory and with headquarters based in Darwin since at least 1967. With this in mind, Whitlam followed Coombs’ advice and the Department of the Northern Territory was set up in December 1972 with Keppel (‘Kep’) Enderby as the Minister. Alan O’Brien, ‘since 1971 the Deputy Administrator and also a long-time friend of Enderby, was appointed ... to head the new Department’. Coombs noted that the move did not ‘prove popular with the Northern Territory Establishment, partly because of the functions retained by Federal Departments, especially Aboriginal Affairs, but primarily because the “Old Guard” of the Territory Administration was not in charge in the new Department’. 

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27 H.C. Coombs, *Trial Balance* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1981), p.300. Coombs was head of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs at the time and he was energetically promoting his policy of self-determination as an alternative to Hasluck’s assimilation policy. He claimed that the Department as a whole and the NT Administration in particular were ‘wedded to paternalistic and assimilationist policies and resented the existence of the Council’ (p.279) and he frequently clashed with the public servants in Darwin, particularly Harry Giese.


31 Coombs, *Trial Balance*, p.300. Coombs could not entirely hide his triumph at the downfall of this ‘Old Guard’.
Coombs’ comment was an understatement. The arrangement totally fragmented the Administration. Departments, branches and sections, such as Aboriginal Affairs, the survey and drafting section of Lands and Survey Branch, and the Police, to name a few, were transferred to relevant departments in Canberra. The co-ordinated administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Territory was split up and distributed among the departments of Aboriginal Affairs, Health, and Education. 32 Harry Giese was moved to the sidelines and deprived of all his authority, and other senior officers suffered the same fate. 33 The Administrator was also stripped of any administrative responsibility and his role was reduced to ‘a quasi-regal’ 34 one where ‘his prime responsibility, apart from the ceremonial aspects, related to the assenting to of ordinances passed by the Legislative Council’. 35 The new arrangements skirted on breaching the provisions of the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act*, but Enderby was able to avoid problems by persuading the then Administrator, Fred Chaney, to retire in August 1973, making O’Brien, as Department Secretary and Deputy Administrator, legally authorised to carry out duties normally assigned to the Administrator. 36 The Administrator’s position remained vacant until December when Jock Nelson, former MHR for the Northern Territory, was appointed to a vastly different position from that his predecessors held. 37

The transfer of the Department to the Territory resulted in more government functions being transferred to Canberra than were moved to Darwin, so it mattered little that only three people from the Canberra office were willing to take up positions in Darwin. 38 When the Territory’s Member of Parliament, Sam Calder, heard of the proposed administrative changes, he predicted that the government officers in Darwin would be ‘office boys and that is all’. 39 To a large extent, this was the case, and the public servants were up in arms about

34 NTAS: NTRS 226, FINGER, Martyn, TS 48, Tape 4, p.16. Finger was appointed as one of three Assistant Administrators in the NT Administration in 1968.
37 Chaney, who had served as the Liberal MHR for the Perth electorate from 1955-69, was appointed Administrator by a non-Labor government. His term of appointment expired in March 1973, but he remained in position until Enderby persuaded him to retire. Nelson was the Labor MHR for the Territory from 1949-66 and was therefore a politically safe appointment for the Whitlam government.
38 CPD, 24 May 1973, Hof R, vol.84, p.2673. Enderby informed the House that three people offered to move to Darwin, but in their oral history interviews both Martyn Finger and Harry Giese said only two officers came from Canberra.
the situation. So too were the elected members of the Legislative Council, but little could be done. ‘Kep’ Enderby was defiant and claimed that the creation of a department based in Darwin was a major step forward. It marks the end of the bad old days when the Northern Territory was just a tucked away appendage to the grab-bag ministry of the Interior, to be visited infrequently by its Minister and thought about even less.40

The name of the department changed in June 1975 to become the Department of Northern Australia. Throughout this period, the federal government and many citizens in tropical Australia were advocating the formation of a new state called ‘North Australia’ incorporating the tropical portions of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, with its capital in Darwin. The two State governments however, were very much against the move, and six months later the department once again became the Department of the Northern Territory.

The People

Darwin was emerging as a far more inclusive community in these decades. No doubt there was a great deal of individual racism, but as the enclaves of Chinatown and ‘Greek town’ and the ex-army camps such as ‘K9’ in Stuart Park were demolished and the residents dispersed among the new suburban developments, the Whites began to accept their non-British neighbours in a way they never had before. There were still ethnic divisions, but they were often a matter of pride rather than defensiveness. The Chinese and Greeks already had thriving ethnic societies which began to welcome all residents of Darwin to their various functions. The Italian Club was launched in January 1961,41 and the first meeting of the Filipino Australian Association of the Northern Territory was held in 1973.42

41 Forrest, In the Hope to Do Better, p.26.
Specific ethnic groups became known for their expertise in various enterprises in the city. The Greeks, for example were recognised as the dominant group in the construction industry, although the Italian builder Angelo Maddalozzo, won some lucrative contracts, including those for constructing Stage one of the Darwin High School in 1961 and the Supreme Court building in 1963. The Chinese had always been known for their prominence in the retail sector. They now began to enter the administrative and political fields in increasing numbers. Raymond Chin was the first to enter the public service in 1953, and four years later he also became an executive member of the Darwin branch of the RSL, and remained on the Committee until 1971. Harry Chan’s political successes became world news, especially in China. He became the first elected president of the Legislative Council in December 1965, and at a local government election six months later, he became the first person of Chinese descent to hold the office of Mayor of an Australian capital city.

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43 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.223.
44 Forrest, In the Hope to Do Better, p.27.
46 Ganter, Mixed Relations, p.234.
Meanwhile, public attitudes towards Indigenous Australians were changing for the better throughout the nation, and much of it was due to actions taken by Northern Territory Aborigines. In 1962 the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was amended to give Aborigines the right to vote. In the following year, after the federal government gave the go-ahead for Nabalco’s mining enterprise at Gove, the Yolngu people from north-east Arnhem Land sent a bark petition to Parliament demanding recognition of native title to their land. They took their case to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory in 1968 but they were unsuccessful. The change in the official attitude towards Indigenous Australians was made clear in 1964 when the Territory’s welfare legislation was changed and ‘all major restraints upon Aborigines’ was lifted. Baumann observed that with the new legislation ‘the concept of protective wardship ended for the Northern Territory’s 18,000 Aboriginal people’.

Further advances followed. In 1965 Aboriginal workers in the Territory pastoral industry won their right to equal pay for equal work, although the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission gave the pastoralists until 1968 before the regulation was to be enforced. This did not satisfy the Gurindji people from Wave Hill Station and they staged a walk-off in 1966 demanding a proper wage. Their continued assertiveness eventually paid off and in 1975...

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Prime Minister Whitlam handed the station’s lease over to the leader, Vincent Lingiari.\textsuperscript{55} The Wave Hill strike was followed by a federal referendum in which the Australian people overwhelmingly voted in favour of changing the constitution so that Aborigines could be counted in the census and the Commonwealth could legislate for Indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{56}

**Race Relations in Darwin**

In Darwin there was little action among the Aboriginal population in the 1960s, but a few government-sponsored changes to the Bagot Reserve occurred. A complex of cottages replaced the original Retta Dixon home which provided dormitory accommodation for part-Aboriginal children. Minister Hasluck officially opened this complex in July 1961.\textsuperscript{57} Four years later the Reserve was reduced from 358 acres to fifty-seven acres after the government decided to use most of the excised land for housing with some land reserved for a radio transmitter.\textsuperscript{58} As the housing estates encroached on Bagot land, and after the government lost the power to compel Aboriginal residents to live at Bagot, Indigenous camps of fringe-dwellers proliferated in Darwin.

During the 1970s the Aboriginal people in Darwin became more proactive. The Larrakia residents of Bagot, for example, became increasingly dissatisfied with their situation, and in 1972 they lodged an official application for a lease of land surrounding the Kulaluk waterhole.\textsuperscript{59} They were unsuccessful, and in 1975 Larrakia elder Bobby Secretary began legal proceedings to obtain the land. It was a protracted struggle, but they were finally granted a Special purpose Lease on 25 August 1979.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{55} Reynolds, *Dispossession*, p.211.
\textsuperscript{58} Wells, “Town Camp or Homeland?” pp.29 and 225.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p.36.
\textsuperscript{60} Day, *Bunji*, p.146. Bill Day, A Caucasian, helped in the campaign for Kulaluk in many ways, not least by producing a regular newsletter, “Bunji”, which disseminated news to Indigenous people about the Larrakia’s fight for the land.
By and large, the non-Aboriginal residents of Darwin accepted the justice of the elders’ claims, and considering the deep-rooted racism which prevailed in earlier times, there was surprisingly little public protest about the Larrakia claim. While this claim proceeded through the courts, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill* was introduced into the Commonwealth Parliament. It was assented to in December 1976 and, appropriately or not, was proclaimed on Australia Day 1977. By this Act, the powerful lobby groups, the Central and Northern Aboriginal Lands Councils, were created.

Meanwhile, the authorities began to express concern about the camps surrounding Darwin. In October 1972, the District Welfare Officer listed the ‘Fringe Communities’ and their residents. The camps included Kulaluk, ‘the 9 Mile’, ‘the 10 Mile’, the ‘Camp Opposite Delaney’s Store’, ‘Knuckey’s Lagoon’, ‘Moo’s Piggery’, ‘5 Mile Camp’, ‘Camp at East Point’, and ‘Camp on the Esplanade at Rear of the Parker Residence (Doctor’s Gully)’. The government attempted to provide sanitary and other services to the camps and the Aborigines also took matters into their own hands as far as possible.

They formed the Aboriginal Development Foundation which applied for a lease of land around Knuckey’s Lagoon, and bought ‘Gees Food Centre’ which was used as an ‘Aboriginal

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61 See, for example, “Kulaluk Area Wanted for Aboriginal ‘Sanctuary’,” *NT News*, 13 May 1975; and “More Land Wanted by Aboriginals: Kulaluk Claim Extended,” *NT News* 16 May 1975; and subsequent articles.
62 Conn, *NT Chronicle*, p.28.
63 Read, “Northern Territory,” p.293.
64 NAA: E460/0, Item 1976/1201.
Business and Community Centre’. They also arranged accommodation for transient Aborigines visiting Darwin for medical treatment and other purposes.65

The Whites’ more tolerant attitude towards people of other races can be clearly seen in the case of the ‘Stayputs’.66 These three Malaysian-born pearlers had been stranded in Darwin when the pearling industry collapsed. They made their homes in the city and found other jobs. The three men had been living in Darwin for seven, nine and twelve years respectively.67 In September 1961 the Immigration Department decided to deport them, but the citizens, supported by the unions and led by Jim Bowditch, editor of the NT News, Jock Nelson, MHR, and other prominent figures, rallied around the men who went into hiding in Melbourne while their cases went through the courts. Less than three months later, three naval ratings deserted from a Portuguese ship and claimed asylum, and this case received as much publicity as the former one. According to Klaus Neumann, the long drawn out legal and political battles for both the Malaysian pearlers and the Portuguese sailors ‘became one of the causes celebre of the White Australia policy’.68 All these men were eventually granted residence permits and allowed to stay in Australia.69

**New Arrivals in Darwin**

The community was less welcoming to other people who arrived unannounced in Darwin. By the late 1960s, a large number of hippies had reached the city. Nonie Long pointed out that ‘Darwin was the first port of call from hippies overlanding it from England and Europe ... and Lameroo Beach was a hippy headquarters’.70 The hippies camped in other places too, most of which were popular recreation spots such as Mindil Beach and East Point, crowding out the residents and putting a strain on the available facilities. These people also travelled up from the southern States and they all caused the authorities untold problems. Dr Ella Stack referred to them as ‘the silly hippies coming up, full of hepatitis B and drugs’,71 and in an undated memo to the Department of the Interior, the Administrator reported ‘a sharp

65 NAA: E460/0, Item 1983/237.
69 Ibid, pp.9-10.
70 NTAS: NTRS 226, LONG, Nonie, TS 814, p.18.
71 NTAS: NTRS 226, STACK, Dr. Ella, TS 907, Tape 3, Side A, p.8.
increase in drug trafficking accompanied by an influx of “hippie” type people. A Drug Squad was formed and commenced operation on 2 February.\textsuperscript{72}

There was some justification for the residents’ consternation about other arrivals in the 1970s. The influx of refugees into Darwin began with the arrival of people fleeing the conflict in East Timor. The first group arrived in Darwin on the ship \textit{Macdili} on 14 August 1975 while the people of Darwin were fully occupied in the reconstruction of the city following Cyclone Tracy. According to the correspondent for \textit{The Canberra Times}, ‘the majority of the refugees were the wives and dependents of Portuguese troops serving in East Timor’, while the remainder of the passengers were ‘other foreign nationals and some Australians’.\textsuperscript{73} Most of these refugees left almost immediately, but by September 2,238 refugees had arrived in Darwin\textsuperscript{74} and more than three hundred remained. Authorities were forced to set up the Migrant Education Centre to provide schooling for the East Timorese children, 106 of whom were enrolled in the third term of 1975.\textsuperscript{75}

In April 1976 the first small contingent of Vietnamese ‘boat people’ arrived in Darwin. There were only five refugees on the boat, four of whom were ethnic Chinese.\textsuperscript{76} They were followed by 106 more by the end of 1976, and during 1977 a further 862 refugees in twenty-

\textsuperscript{72}NAA: F423, Item S62. According to its position in the file, this was probably written in 1971.
\textsuperscript{73}“Portuguese Timor: Refugees Going to Lisbon,” \textit{The Canberra Times}, 16 August 1975.
\textsuperscript{74}Conn, \textit{NT Chronicle}, p.16.
\textsuperscript{76}Chan, \textit{Cathay of the North}, p.8. Chan noted, (p.7), that these Chinese and the Chinese refugees from East Timor had little in common with the Darwin Chinese or with each other. They spoke different Chinese dialects and had been educated ‘in the Portuguese, French or Vietnamese systems’.
four boats arrived in Darwin from South-East Asia. The first refugees received the sympathy and support of the local residents. As the number of arrivals increased however, news reports claimed that Darwin people were ‘fed up’ with the influx of boat people, and the waterside workers arranged a series of short stop-work protest meetings after 218 people arrived on 21 November 1977. Citing the front page stories of the *NT News* and ‘Darwin’s short-lived weekly newspaper the *Star*’ as evidence, Riddett noted that ‘by the end of 1977 the boat people were being seen as a malign element, as dishonest, crafty and diseased!’ Perhaps because of this prejudice, many of the refugees moved to other Australian and overseas cities after they recovered from their voyages, but a significant number remained in Darwin and contributed greatly to the social and economic life of the city.

![Vietnamese boats and refugees in Darwin harbour](image)

**The Lifestyle**

When Hasluck saw the Northern Territory in the early 1950s, he decided that one of the major obstacles in the way of advancement was the negative attitude towards the region held both by people in the south and by the residents themselves. He observed that ‘this part of Australia was not thought of as a normal place to which normal practices and standards applied,’ and that many old-timers thought of themselves ‘as doomed by distance and by

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77 Conn, *NT Chronicle*, p.32.
climate to be a neglected people’. He became determined that Darwin in particular, and the Territory in general would have ‘much the same basic community resources, in cultural, social and economic terms, which would be available to communities of roughly the same size elsewhere’.

Apart from the natural justice of this decision, Hasluck realised that the provision of these resources would have the benefit of helping the government attract competent public servants to the Territory and perhaps encourage them to stay for longer than the usual two-year posting. He therefore began what could almost be described as a crusade as he, a very junior member of the government, fearlessly took on countless battles with Cabinet, with other departments, and even with his own departmental staff in Canberra to obtain the necessary funding and public service establishment approvals. Treasury, for example, was particularly obdurate, and it took a great deal of work for Hasluck to persuade the officials there that the people of Darwin deserved the same level of facilities as the people of Canberra.

Darwin shops in 1955 compare favourably with facilities in southern Australia

As the bureaucratic establishment increased in Darwin, so too did the population. From an estimated 11,000 residents in 1960, the census figures show an increase in Darwin’s population to 14,753 in 1961, 20,261 in 1966, and 43,344 in 1976.

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80 Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, p.82.
82 Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, p.84.
83 An Inter-Departmental Committee on the Growth of Darwin set up in 1965 reported that each additional public servant sent to Darwin led to an increase of 6.4 in the total population of the city. See NAA: A5841, Item 470.
84 *Annual Report*, 1959-60, p.11.
The growth was also stimulated by the developments in mining and tourism in the region. The larger population stimulated the growth of small industries in and around Darwin, including small mixed farms in the immediate surrounds of the city, factories producing products such as beer and reconstituted milk, and companies supporting the construction industry. Professional services such as lawyers, doctors, opticians, and chemists expanded, and new shops and services stations were established. The government gave generous grants to community organisations, and its own services also expanded rapidly with a larger and more efficient electricity supply, the provision of public halls and sporting facilities, and more extensive health and education services. Transport and communications had been considerably improved in the 1950s with the opening of both the new Stokes Hill Wharf\textsuperscript{85} and ‘one of the most modern airport terminals in Australia’\textsuperscript{86} in 1956. The local newspaper was issued five times a week, and by 1963 Darwin residents had the luxury of both a commercial and the ABC radio stations.\textsuperscript{87} Television broadcasting began in the city in 1971.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} Flynn and Willey, *Northern Gateway*, pp.11-12.
Hasluck’s dream was becoming a reality. Darwin was at last becoming a ‘normal’ city, comparable to any city of its size in Australia. With their creature comforts taken care of, both permanent and transient residents of Darwin threw themselves enthusiastically into the available activities, or, if none of the many club and societies suited them, they formed their own groups. The sporting options were abundant. In addition to the usual football, cricket, golf and tennis organisations, there were also sports such as water-skiing and parachuting.

More service organisations appeared at this time, including Apex, Rotary and the St John Ambulance Association. Young people were catered for with active Brownies, Girl Guides, Sea Rangers and Scout groups in the city and suburbs. The CWA was the first women’s group to be formed and was ‘virtually the linchpin of social life in Darwin’ in the 1960s. A few years later the women’s groups included no less than three Penguin Clubs, the Housewives Association, and the Business and Professional Women’s Club.

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89 NTAS: NTRS 467, Darwin City Council Minutes, 21 September 1972. See also NA Monthly (October 1962): p.27.
90 NA Monthly (November 1961): p.29. Unless otherwise stated, the information in this paragraph is taken from various issues of the NA Monthly.
91 Doran, Women in Isolation, p.28.
In addition to the regular sporting fixtures in the city, there were many annual events during the dry season which were eagerly anticipated, including the Darwin Show and the Eisteddfod which usually attracted an amazing number of contestants, including many Aboriginal children and adults from remote communities. For the more active residents, the fifteen-mile Walkabout organised by the *NT Times* was a popular annual event. The CWA also organised the colourful Mardi Gras each year, and the Darwin Theatre Group and the Darwin Musical Comedy Society each staged one or two plays or musicals every year. In 1969 the community pulled out all stops to celebrate the centenary of white settlement in the Northern Territory. It was clear that for many people Darwin was a vibrant, exciting city to live in during the years immediately before the Territory was granted its independence.

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92 In 1971, for example, 360 Aboriginal contestants came in from the communities accompanied by 127 teachers and assistants. See NAA: F941/0, Item 1971/261.

93 15 miles = 24.140 kilometres. In 1962 over 300 people, including 82-year-old Mrs Nellie Flynn, participated in the event. See *NA Monthly* (October 1962): p.29.
The Physical Landscape

The 1960s seemed to herald a new era when many of the last vestiges of the war were removed from the Darwin cityscape. In 1949 local identity Carl Atkinson acquired the salvage rights to two of the wartime wrecks in the harbour. He removed artefacts from the wrecks, but ten years later the harbour was still littered with the remains of the ships sunk in 1942. The Fujita Salvage Company, entered negotiations with the Commonwealth government and Atkinson and his partner Nick Paspaley to remove the scrap metal take it to Tokyo. Salvage work began in 1959 and continued for several years. Atkinson claimed that while carrying out the salvage the Japanese workers lived on the wreck of the British Motorist and were not allowed in Darwin. Yet Powell reported that ‘Fujita also took away every available piece of scrap steel in Darwin, including bombed-out oil tanks from Stokes Hill, old locomotives, rolling stock and even the 9.2-inch coastal defence guns at East Point’. In spite of mixed feelings expressed by Darwin residents over the presence of the Japanese workers, the project successfully cleared the harbour of debris and, in a good will gesture to the people of Darwin, Mr Fujita had metal crosses made from the salvaged metal and donated them to the newly built War Memorial Uniting Church where they were attached to the ends of the pews.

Darwin beaches were also littered with wartime debris consisting mainly of star pickets and barbed wire and an occasional bomb. The responsibility for clearing the beaches and controlling the campers who occupied all available sites was mainly in the hands of the City

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95 Powell, Northern Voyagers, p.325.
Council, although occasionally community groups also pitched in to help with what seemed a never-ending problem.  

The increased pace of construction work in Darwin in the 1960s was unmistakable. ‘Aunty Billie’ Pitchender, a noted philanthropist in Darwin, claimed that the city ‘really took off in 1960/61’. She said that there was a ‘general bursting out’ and buildings ‘started to crop up all over the place’. The government played a significant role in this accelerated development. In 1960, for example, the Housing Loans Scheme approved a total of 145 loans, most of which were for the construction of homes in Darwin. The number of Housing Commission houses and flats completed in the Northern Territory each year rose from seventy-five in 1960 to 275 in 1964, and the annual figures remained at over two hundred for the rest of the decade. In Darwin these homes and the homes occupied by public servants rose from 758 in 1960 to 1,095 in 1966 and continued to rise thereafter. The streetscapes became more varied as the elevated, asbestos-clad homes for public servants, which were commonly called ‘Government Greys’, were interspersed with the ground level brick Housing Commission homes and private dwellings.

The Housing Commission’s Kurringal flats under construction in Dick Ward Drive, 1967

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97 See NTAS: NTRS 467, Darwin City Council Minutes for details on the beaches. See also NAA: E72/1, Item 373/1.
99 Annual Report, 1959-60. p.99. Other statistics in this paragraph have been taken from various annual reports.
A striking feature of the 1960s and ‘70s was the proliferation of new construction providing facilities for tourists and residents alike. The permanent Seabreeze Hotel at Nightcliff, for example, was built opposite the original temporary structure on the cliff top, and was opened in March 1962. In the early 1970s, the Poinciana Motel, the Territorian International Hotel, and the ten-storey Darwin Travelodge were also opened. Recreation facilities abounded. After many problems during its construction, the Olympic-sized swimming pool provided by the Darwin City Council was opened in May 1960. The open-air theatre built by Michael Paspalis opened in Parap eleven months later, and the first drive-in cinema, also built by Michael Paspalis, opened in Nightcliff in 1964. The ‘Sound Shell’ in the Botanic Gardens, was opened in 1966, and continues to provide a popular venue for rock concerts and other entertainments today. In the centre of Darwin, after strenuous fundraising, the CWA built ‘a rest room and meeting place’ in Knuckey Street which provided a haven in the city for visiting mothers and children. Finally two modern and very elegant churches became landmarks in the cityscape. Dame Pattie Menzies opened the new United Church in Smith Street in July 1960, and the St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, also in Smith Street, was completed in 1962.

The new United Churches of North Australia church, Darwin, 1965

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101 Barter, From Wartime Camp, p.35.
102 Berzins, Australia’s Northern Secret, p.206. The Travelodge was Darwin’s tallest building for many years. It sustained very little damage during Cyclone Tracy.
103 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.212.
104 Ibid, pp.218-9. Gibson claimed that this was a serious humiliation for the Darwin City Council which refused permission for its construction. The Council took legal action after it was opened, but the courts ruled that the Council had no powers relating to building permits.
105 Spall, Our Darwin, p.59.
106 Doran, Women in Isolation, p.17.
Privately owned, multi-storeyed office blocks, such as the New Zealand Victoria Insurance Group building, also appeared on Darwin’s streets, and new government offices were also constructed. Many public servants were at last moved out of the crowded, uncomfortable, unsuitable Sydney Williams huts and derelict houses into modern air-conditioned quarters. The Postmaster-General opened the new, permanent Post Office building on the corner of Smith and Knuckey Streets on 13 July 1961. Two years later the first two air-conditioned Administration blocks were completed on the land next to the Legislative Council building, dwarfing the nearby Administrator’s residence. These were large, three-storeyed structures but they failed to accommodate the existing civil establishment and both the Commonwealth Parliament’s Joint Committee of Public Accounts (JCPA) and the Legislative Council criticised the authorities for leaving technical staff such as architects and draftsmen to ‘work with towels to avoid perspiration dripping onto their work’ while ‘the clerical and administrative staffs’ were ‘occupying the most modern accommodation available in the Southern Hemisphere’.

The government’s promise to build further office blocks was delayed in the following years but the number of public servants in Darwin continued to rise. Finally, in 1971, a $3.28

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109 Conn, *NT Chronicles*, p.5.
110 Williams, *NT: A Postal History*, p.96.
111 Redmond, “Public Works in the NT,” p.23. The Legislative Council was extremely upset that this building was approved and constructed ‘without any consultation with the Council’. See *NTLCD*, 4 June 1963, pp.661-2.
million contract was let for three additional government office blocks,\textsuperscript{114} and a total of nine blocks eventually occupied the site.

**Town Planning Problems**

At times during these years Darwin was the fastest growing city in Australia\textsuperscript{115} and the speed of development began causing serious problems. It became evident that the authorities needed expert town planning advice. Writing in 1963/64, journalist Keith Willey claimed that town planning had ‘reached the Alice in Wonderland stage’.\textsuperscript{116} While prone to exaggeration and distortion in his writing, Willey had some justification for saying this. The Parap Shopping centre, for example, was a nightmare for motorists because some shops had been allowed to open onto the rear alleyway, and the cinema was on a site which interfered with the parking facilities.\textsuperscript{117} An even more serious mistake was the decision to build the government offices on the tip of the peninsula. The only major road connecting the city centre with what are now called the ‘northern suburbs’ became blocked with commuters during peak hours.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Intersection_of_Bagot_Road_with_the_Stuart_Highway_and_Snell_Street,\_1976.jpg}
\caption{Intersection of Bagot Road with the Stuart Highway and Snell Street, 1976}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{115} CPD, 12 September 1968, H of R, vol.60, p.964. There was a 34.1 percent increase in the population between 1960 and 1961, a 37.3 per cent increase from 1961 to 1966, and between 1966 and 1976 the population grew by 113.9 per cent. The increase over the sixteen years was an impressive 294.036 per cent.
\textsuperscript{116} Willey, *Eaters of the Lotus*, p.6.
\textsuperscript{117} See NAA: E125, Item 1959/592, Minutes of the Darwin Town Planning Advisory Committee, 8 September 1960; and NTAS: NTRS 467, Darwin City Council.
The government planned to build the ‘Palmerston Freeway’ which would have roughly followed the route of the present Dick Ward Drive, and the ‘Frances Bay Bypass’ going through the Winnellie industrial area, but Tracy interrupted the projects.\textsuperscript{118}

To add to the difficulties relating to planning, there was a great deal of confusion over who was actually in control of Darwin’s development. There were planners in Canberra providing some input, the City Council was responsible for some roads and other aspects of the development, the NT Administration provided the funds and made many of the decisions, and the Legislative Council tried to interfere. This confusion caused a great deal of friction between the three governing bodies in Darwin. The City Council was especially frustrated by the situation. In 1964, for example, it requested the NT Administration to locate the proposed new government offices outside the city centre. It suggested that the technical officers in the government could easily do their work in offices located at East Point for example, and that would leave the existing offices for ‘administrative, financial and social functions best associated with the commercial centre’.\textsuperscript{119} The government ignored the suggestion.

Action was finally taken to recruit a qualified town planner. Harcourt Long arrived in Darwin with his wife and three children in 1963 and immediately began preparing a coherent town plan with the help of his small staff. As a further step towards regularising Darwin’s development, a Town Planning Ordinance which created a statutory body called the Town Planning Board was gazetted on 24 July 1964.\textsuperscript{120}

As Long explained, Darwin presented some unique problems to the town planner. In the first place, ‘Darwin has less suitable land within a ten mile radius of the city centre than any other Australian city. Within this radius approximately two-thirds of the area is either water or swamp’.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, the available area was considerably reduced by the reserves excised for the Aboriginal settlement at Bagot and for military and other purposes, the most obtrusive and extensive being the combined RAAF and civilian airport. In the second place, it was almost impossible to calculate the projected population growth of the city. With such a large

\textsuperscript{120} NTAS: NTRS 226, REDMOND, George, TS 764, Tape 4, p.1. Redmond, who was Director of Works in the Territory, was Chairman of this Board.
\textsuperscript{121} Long, “The Greater Darwin,” p.470. Unless otherwise indicated, the following information is taken from this paper.
proportion of the population working in the public services, the rate of growth depended primarily on government policies which were liable to change at any moment, rather than on the steady economic development of the region.

Long had one factor in his favour: Darwin land was held under lease and was controlled by the government. His plan therefore did not need to adapt itself to previously developed freehold land as was necessary in planning for other Australian cities. Long’s solutions to the dilemmas of the site and the economic development of the city was to design ‘neighbourhood units’. The units accommodated about 650 houses. They had street patterns ‘around a nucleus of a primary school, and streets were designed to discourage through traffic. Groups of neighbourhoods were ‘created to form districts provided with a commercial centre, high school, parks, public utilities and other district services, (p.471). The rate that these neighbourhoods were established could, to a certain extent, be modified according to the fluctuations in the growth of the population.
Long expected Darwin’s population to reach 40,000 in ten years: double the number it was in 1965, and he calculated that the government would have to establish one neighbourhood per year ‘with all its attendant services’. His plan allowed for eighteen neighbourhoods and it was put on display for public comment before being gazetted on 24 July 1964. The government set about following Long’s timetable and its progress can be followed by tracing the establishment of the neighbourhood schools and other educational facilities. In 1963 Darwin High School moved from the old Primary School area between Cavenagh and Woods streets to Bullocky Point, and the Adult Education Centre took over the old buildings. Nightcliff Primary School opened in 1961, and it was followed by primary schools at Larrakeyah (1963), Rapid Creek (1964), Stuart Park (1966), and Ludmilla (1967). Darwin’s second high school was built at Nightcliff in 1970, and Jingili Primary School, the first air-conditioned school in Darwin, opened its doors in the same year. Alawa, Moil, Nakara, and Wagaman primary schools and the Casuarina High School were opened in the early 1970s, and on 9 March 1974, the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Darwin Community Lockwood, *Front Door*, p.265.

NTAS: NTRS 226, REDMOND, George, TS 764, Tape 4, p.2.


Bell, *Between the Bombs*, pp.17ff. passim.

Ibid. See also CPD, 11 October 1972, H of R 81, p.2394.
College, which three years later offered the first local degree level course available in Darwin.  

Figure 12: The suburbs of Darwin

Long underestimated the rate of population growth, and by 1974, the city of Darwin housed 47,938 Aboriginal, Asian and white residents. The amount of land available for development was dwindling rapidly and by the beginning of the 1970s the authorities had become very concerned about the issue. They engaged P.G. Pak Poy and Associates ‘to prepare a structure plan for the long-term development of Darwin’, and at this stage the Canberra-based National Capital Development Commission became involved in the planning for Darwin. Pak Poy released its report in 1973 and, another planning authority, the Cities Commission, established an office in Darwin in the same year. As Redmond pointed out,

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127 Baiba Berzins and Peter Loveday, *A University for the Territory: The Northern Territory University and Preceding Institutions 1949-1999* (Darwin: NTU Press, 1999), p.25. The first degree course was the Bachelor of Education. External degrees from other institutions had been available for some time before this date.

128 NAA: NTAC 1979/86/1, Item CA75/103.

129 CPD, 26 August 1971, H of R, vol.73, p.794.
‘town planning-wise, we were now at the mercy of two Canberra departments’. Pak Poy recommended that fourteen square miles of land east of Darwin be compulsorily acquired. This land was to be used to establish ‘Darwin East’, an autonomous satellite city, thus avoiding the construction of residential areas on the narrow strip of available land stretching along the Stuart Highway. The Whitlam government decided to take a more wholesale approach and acquired thirty two square miles of land stretching as far as the Howard Springs Reserve in July 1973. The landowners were furious and both the Legislative Council and the Opposition party supported their efforts to block the development. Matters relating to Darwin’s development had reached this stage when disaster struck the town on Christmas Day 1974.

**Cyclone Tracy**

At the beginning of December 1974, the Bureau of Meteorology issued warnings that Cyclone Selma was approaching Darwin. No doubt some residents took note of the warning and removed or secured loose items in their yards, taped up windows to stop broken glass flying through the air, filled their baths with water, renewed batteries in their radios and set aside enough food for three days. But Selma, after coming within fifty-five kilometres of Darwin, veered off and moved safely westward. When the first warnings of Cyclone Tracy were broadcast on 21 December, the people of Darwin were occupied with Christmas preparations and, by their own admission, felt ‘a little blasé’, and the broadcasts about the potential threat were largely ignored.

Tracy formed in the Arafura Sea and travelled across to the north of the Tiwi Islands which were ‘seen by many as a natural guard against major storms’. The cyclone turned south and then east, crossing the coast ‘between Nightcliff and East Point at about 0400 hours’.

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130 NTAS: NTRS 226, REDMOND, George, TS 764, Tape 4, p.3. The Cities Commission was originally the National Urban and Regional Development Authority. The name was changed in June 1973. The Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development subsumed it in 1975. See Libraries Australia; [database online] available at http://nla.gov.au/anbd.aut-an35010417 [accessed 15 April 2013].
132 Cossil, “A Lands Department History,” p.5. ‘Darwin East’ was eventually named ‘Palmerston’.
133 Heatley, “Labor’s Love Lost,” p.18. 32 square miles = 82.88 square kilometres.
135 Murphy, *Big Blow Up North*, p.56.
136 Bunbury, *Cyclone Tracy*, p.20.
137 Bowditch and Dean, *Whispers from the North*, p.65.
on Christmas Day 1974. The destructive winds started battering the city just after midnight and continued until dawn.\textsuperscript{139} From the many oral histories dealing with the cyclone, a vivid picture emerges of the roaring wind, the freezing cold rain, and the utter blackness of the night as the power poles were wrenched into weird shapes and the street lights died. The peoples’ terror is easy to imagine as they clung together while their houses shook violently, and as they moved from room to room when their windows smashed. Most of them ended up in either the bathroom where the maze of pipes in the walls helped strengthen the structure, or in the sturdy storeroom underneath the elevated houses. Some were less fortunate. A number of families had to take shelter in their cars, and historian Barbara James and her family ended up sheltering behind a cyclone fence praying that the flying debris, especially the lethal sheets of corrugated iron, did not come their way.\textsuperscript{140}

![Scene of devastation after Cyclone Tracy](https://example.com/cyclone_tracy_aftermath.jpg)

\textbf{Scenes like this met the dazed survivors as they emerged from their shelters on Christmas Day 1974}

After hours of battering by the noise, the rain, the wind, and flying debris, the dazed survivors emerged to a scene of utter devastation. In many streets not one house remained standing. Those trees which remained standing were denuded of leaves and branches, and the landscape was choked with fallen trees, building materials, household, furniture, whitegoods, personals possessions, and cars and caravans, many of which were wrecked. There was no electricity, no running water (and therefore no sanitation), very little shelter, and practically no communication with the outside world. The children’s Christmas presents had disappeared, and Christmas feasts were already starting to rot in the refrigerators which

\textsuperscript{139} Stretton, \textit{Furious Days}, p.15.
\textsuperscript{140} NTAS: NTRS 226, JAMES, Barbara, TS 581; and Bunbury, \textit{Cyclone Tracy}, pp.35-6.
littered the landscape. Keith Cole, who had moved into his new house seven days before the
cyclone hit, claimed that the first thought of almost everybody who emerged from their
shelters as daylight arrived, was “‘How on earth do we clean up this mess?’”\(^{141}\)

Community leaders managed to gather their wits and hold a meeting in the city centre, but
little was done beyond deciding to meet again the following day. By that time, however,
Major-General Stretton had arrived in town with authority to take charge of the situation. By
an extraordinary coincidence, the Australian government had set up the Natural Disasters
Organisation (NDO), with Stretton at its head, just a few months before Tracy hit Darwin.\(^{142}\)
The people of Darwin had managed to send news of their plight out to the crew of the M.V.
_Nyanda_ who started to relay messages south,\(^{143}\) but the NDO actually heard of the
catastrophe earlier through the Tropical Cyclone Warning Centre in Perth.\(^{144}\) Stretton
immediately activated ‘the most massive relief operation in Australia’s history’, wondering
all the while whether he was over-reacting. In the course of a few hours he managed to
gather together a group of five doctors and two nursing sisters, with medical supplies, who,
along with Stretton and his aide Major Frank Thorogood, boarded a VIP flight for Darwin,
stopping off at Mackay to pick up the current Minister for the Northern Territory, Dr Rex
Patterson, en route. They landed at the ‘smashed Darwin airport’ on Christmas night.\(^{145}\)

Meanwhile, back at Darwin, thousands of cold, wet, hungry, homeless people were making
their way to schools and other official buildings which remained standing. As Cole pointed
out, most of the destroyed structures were private homes: ‘the heavier construction of public
buildings, schools, offices and modern blocks of flats survived more successfully although
not without very extensive damage in many cases’\(^{146}\). These buildings became the refuge for
those left homeless by the disaster. It has been estimated that Casuarina High School alone
sheltered up to five thousand people in the days following the cyclone.\(^{147}\) Hundreds of
injured people arrived at the hospital and the staff were coping valiantly in spite of their own

\(^{141}\) Cole, _Winds of Fury_, p.74.
\(^{144}\) Stretton, _Furious Days_, p.22. Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is taken from this
publication.
\(^{146}\) Cole, _Winds of Fury_, p.25.
\(^{147}\) Ibid, p.39.
shock and grief. A large room at the Darwin police station was converted into a temporary mortuary and Stretton graphically described ‘the wet floor which was becoming covered in an ever-widening pinkish stain as blood mingled with the pools of water from rain dripping from the ceiling.’

![The Registration centre at Casuarina High School](image)

After consultation with the health authorities, Stretton decided to evacuate as many people as possible leaving a maximum of 10,000 people to help clean up the city. Some citizens voiced loud protests but most accepted the necessity, and, according to Patterson, ‘in view of the stark evidence available, particularly the threat of contagious disease, ... this action was completely justified.’

There was also concern that the misery of living among the ruins of their houses, suffering deprivation and the discomfort of the continuing heavy rain would have a seriously negative effect on people’s morale. Thus, in scenes strongly reminiscent of Darwin’s war-time evacuation, people began leaving the city at 4 am on Boxing Day. Within six days, 25,628 people had been flown south and many more families left by car. Darwin had a population of 48,571 in December 1974. By the first week in January 1975, it had been reduced to 11,119. The Legislative Assembly passed the Cyclone Disaster Emergency Ordinance on 3 January and, in an effort to prevent people returning too soon, this legislation

149 Cole, Winds of Fury, p.45.
introduced an entry permit system which was bitterly resented by many Darwin residents, including Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Dawn Lawrie and Ron Withnall.\textsuperscript{151}

The people who stayed in Darwin had two priorities. The first was to search the wreckage for injured survivors or dead bodies, and the second was to clear the streets to allow traffic to flow once more. Interstate police were flown in to prevent any looting and to search for missing bodies. The Darwin people were grateful for their help in this grisly job, but the Queensland police caused great offence by “treating the place like a frontier town and marching around like little tin-pot cowboys with guns”.\textsuperscript{152} Their casual shooting of abandoned pets outraged the residents, although many acknowledged that it must be done.

There was a far more positive response to the arrival of the Navy. Only days after the cyclone passed, a fleet of thirteen ships steamed into Darwin harbour and gangs of sailors immediately began clearing the rubbish. By living on board their ships these men were not putting any further strain on the limited resources of the city, and nearly every person interviewed about the cyclone mentioned how much it improved morale to see these men moving through the suburbs, working assiduously at making the place less desolate for the inhabitants.

Stretton only remained in Darwin until 1 January 1975.\textsuperscript{153} Almost everybody approved of the job he did, but quite a few community leaders wondered why he was needed. Harry Giese, for example, observed that ‘given support from a national organisation located in Canberra, we had the resources – the manpower and womanpower resources – in the Territory to undertake the task that had to be done’.\textsuperscript{154} Before Stretton left, he oversaw the establishment of about twenty-four committees to deal with various aspects of the disaster relief.\textsuperscript{155} These


\textsuperscript{152} Cole, \textit{Winds of Fury}, p.67. This was a quote from Dr Ella Stock, the post-cyclone Mayor of Darwin.

\textsuperscript{153} “Stretton Calls It Quits,” \textit{NT News}, 1 January 1975.

\textsuperscript{154} NTAS: NTRS 226, GIESE, Harry, TS 755, Tape 39, Side A, p.2.

committees continued to operate under the co-ordination of ‘Supremo’ Ray McHenry who took over from Stretton as Director of Emergency Services.156

When news of the disaster reached the rest of Australia, the public response was overwhelming. Gifts of money, clothing and other necessities came pouring in. Offers of help came from everywhere. During the week following the cyclone, many members of the Cabinet, including Acting Prime Minister, Jim Cairns, visited the stricken town. Gough Whitlam was overseas, but he abandoned his trip and flew back, arriving in Darwin on 28 December. In spite of renewed suggestions that Darwin be moved inland, Whitlam promised on behalf of the government to do everything in his power to ‘rebuild the city where it stood’.157

On 30 December the Interim Reconstruction Commission was set up to ‘plan, co-ordinate and undertake the task of reconstructing the city’.158 The Committee met on 6 January and decided to prepare a new planning scheme for the rebuilding of Darwin, to produce a revised building code, and to establish a Citizens’ Advisory Council ‘to keep it informed of public opinion and community requirements’.159 The Darwin Reconstruction Commission was established on 28 February 1975.160 It consisted of a full-time General Manager and eight part-time members who were drawn from the public service and representatives of the Legislative Assembly, the City Council, and the Darwin Citizens’ Council. According to Gibson, ‘the political manipulation and machinations of many involved with the Darwin Reconstruction Commission created enormous tensions in Darwin’.161 Dawn Lawrie, for example, described the DRC as ‘an octopus reaching out its tentacles into every fabric of our life in the Northern Territory’.162 As the Commission issued radical schemes for the replanning of Darwin, the citizens banded together in protest. They resented the idea of

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159 Ibid.
161 Gibson, “Beyond the Boundary,” p.255.
Canberra planners once again dictating the way the city would be rebuilt. As MLA Grant Tambling said, ‘the job is reconstruction; it is not remodelling, replanning or changing’.\textsuperscript{163}

‘Meeting of the Darwin Reconstruction Committee (sic), 16 December 1977’
L-R: Ron Thomas, Ian Morrison, Phil Spring, Frank Dwyer, John Parsons, Dr Ella Stack, Vern O’Brien, and Grant Tambling

The DRC listened to the people, and the criticism died down. Reconstruction began in earnest, and while the DRC concentrated on the physical landscape, the needs of the citizens were cared for by the Darwin Disaster Welfare Council which was established on 4 January with Harry Giese at its head.\textsuperscript{164}

The immediate problem was to find somewhere to house citizens while the homes left standing were provided with new roofs. Early in January, the government decided to charter the \textit{Patris}, a Greek luxury liner, which remained moored at the iron ore wharf until 14 November 1975.\textsuperscript{165} Once the permit restrictions were abandoned in June 1975 however,\textsuperscript{166} people returned to Darwin in large numbers. In order to house them, the commission bought caravans and ‘relocatable houses’.\textsuperscript{167} The DRC’s report noted that by December 1975 ‘there were some 3,500 vans in Darwin and its environs’.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, p.106.
\textsuperscript{164} NTAS: NTRS 226, GIESE, Harry, TS 755, Tape 38, Side A, pp.9-10.
\textsuperscript{165} Bartlett, “Port of Darwin,” vol.2, p.294; and Cole, \textit{Winds of Fury}, pp.98-9. The charter cost the government $15,000 a day, but it adequately housed up to 1,000 people. Cyclone Tracy hastened the end of the FIMCO mine by severely damaging the wharf.
\textsuperscript{166} Bunbury, \textit{Cyclone Tracy}, p.109.
\textsuperscript{167} DRC, \textit{2\textsuperscript{nd Annual Report to June 1976} [p.6: no page numbers in the original document].
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
The stated aim of the DRC was to restore Darwin within five years, but it ‘had virtually completed its task after three years’. The problems experienced after the war were not repeated and the city was revitalised in an amazingly short time. According to Corbett, ‘by June 1978 Darwin’s population was back to its pre-cyclone level’ of almost 47,000. Nevertheless, the cyclone remains a central event in the history of Darwin. The official death toll was set at fifty-one dead and fifteen were missing, presumed dead. About 140 people were seriously injured, some of them permanently. Over ninety percent of the homes in Darwin were destroyed or badly damaged, and the government paid out over $26 million in compensation for property loss. Even after some recent catastrophic events in Australia, Cyclone Tracy remains one of the worst disasters in Australian history.

Elevated designs were rejected as being less ‘cyclone resistant’

Self-government At Last

In spite of the disruption caused by Cyclone Tracy, the Legislative Council continued its campaign for constitutional change throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It must be pointed out that not all Territorians were in favour of self-government. Carment noted that many Commonwealth public servants in Darwin were nervous about being transferred to the

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169 NTAS: NTRS 226, FINGER, Martyn, TS 48, Tape 6, p.1.
Northern Territory Public Service. He recalled meeting various public servants in the early 1980s who originally thought they would be in Darwin for a few years only and greatly resented being ‘stranded’. He also pointed out that the loss of Country Liberal Party seats in the Legislative Assembly elections shortly before self-government was often ascribed to a growing nervousness among voters about what self-government would mean for them.\textsuperscript{173} The politically active minority however, was determined to gain control of the administration of the Territory and they swept all before them.

The relationship between the Legislative Council and the Minister was often one of confrontation during this period. In March 1961, for example, Hasluck informed parliament that the government had refused to consent to two ordinances passed by the Council.\textsuperscript{174} This began a feud over the government’s right to withhold consent to ordinances passed by the Council. A defiant Council again passed the bills which had been only slightly modified. The government once again withheld consent. The process was repeated for a third time but it was still a stalemate.

Incidents such as this increased the elected members’ resentment at their lack of progress on constitutional reform, and a bewildering succession of protests, resignations, delegations to Canberra and the creation of Select Committees and Joint Parliamentary Committees to inquire into the question of constitutional change followed. One notable event occurred in August 1962 when the Council passed a vote of no-confidence in Minister Barnes and sent a Remonstrance, ‘an archaic device of the Westminster Parliament’,\textsuperscript{175} to the Commonwealth Parliament. The Remonstrance listed nine grievances, complaining of Territorians’ lack of political rights and the government’s lack of respect for the Council. It accused the government of failing to develop the Territory, of ignoring the need to adequately defend the northern coast, and of wasting money ‘in a futile albeit altruistic attempt to advance the aborigines of the Territory’.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{173} David Carment, pers. comm., June 2013.
\textsuperscript{174} CPD, 8 March 1961, H of R, vol.30, p.20. See also Australia. Minister for Territories, “Constitutional Development in the Northern Territory: A Collection of Documents by the Minister for Territories”. (CDU Library, Special Collection, photocopy), p.1. The two Ordinances were amendments to the Licensing Ordinance modifying the penalties for supplying liquor to wards, and the Lottery and Gaming Ordinance which would have legalised betting shops.
\textsuperscript{175} Heatley, \textit{Almost Australians}, p.22.
Grievance number three voiced what was perhaps the most deeply felt resentment: ‘The Legislative Council for the Northern Territory, although responsible for the making of laws for the peace, order and good government, has no voice in the allocation or expenditure of government moneys in the Territory’. For years, Administrators and other public officials, as well as the Legislative Council, had been arguing that the Estimates for the Northern Territory should be reduced to a ‘one-line budget entry’ which would allow people in the Territory to decide on how to spend the budget allocation. The government frequently failed to respond to these pleas, and the budget Estimates tabled in parliament continued to list expenditure items in detail.

In 1965 amendments to the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act* finally gave elected members a majority over the official members. The new Legislative Council consisted of eleven elected members and six official members. Furthermore, the Council henceforth had the right to elect its own presidents, and the Administrator was no longer a member of the Council. The government remained determined however to retain control for as long as the Northern Territory was dependent on Commonwealth financial support. Authorities would not even contemplate giving the Council the power to make appropriations from locally raised revenue. Government policy remained firmly aimed at introducing changes gradually in the Northern Territory. As an alternative, Territorians were encouraged to accept the offer of local government, but for many years Darwin had the only municipal council in the region. The people were also given a taste of administrative responsibility with the formation of statutory bodies, and these proliferated in the 1960s and ‘70s.

The Legislative Council’s persistence eventually brought promising results. In October 1972, the then Minister, Ralph Hunt, presented an ‘Outline of Proposals for the Transfer of a Range of Functions to the Northern Territory Legislature and Executive’ to the House of

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177 Ibid, p.3. The bitterness about this injustice was exacerbated by the Councillors’ knowledge that the people of Papua New Guinea had been granted these concessions. See CPD, 16 October 1962, H of R, vol.36, p.1533; CPD, 12 October 1966, H of R, vol.53, p.1659; and CPD, 4 October 1967, H of R, vol.57, p.1696.
180 These included the Port Authority, the Housing Commission, the Reserves Board, the Tourist Board, and the Museums and Art Galleries Board. For a full list see NAA: A5931, Item Cl655, Appendix A to Attachment 2 of Cabinet Submission No. 1994: ‘Northern Territory Constitutional Development’. 
Martyn Finger described these functions as ‘fairly minor in the sense they were related more to local government functions’, but it represented a significant advance. Unfortunately the offer lapsed because an election was called in December 1972 and the Labor Party under Whitlam’s leadership supplanted the Coalition.

Apparently Gough Whitlam was not in favour of self-government for the Territory. Ron Withnall, who knew Whitlam from law school, told the Prime Minister that the Legislative Council ‘wanted, in effect, to create a separate governmental authority. And Gough Whitlam said: “We want to get rid of the states; we don’t want to create more”’. In spite of this assertion, it was Whitlam’s government which granted Senate representation in 1973 and a fully elected Legislative Assembly to the Northern Territory in the following year.

Hyacinth Tungutalum, MLA from October 1974 to August 1977

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183 NTAS: NTRS 226, WITHNALL, Ron, TS 646, Tape 1, p.10. Withnall, as Crown Law Officer, was an appointed member of the Council from 1954-66. When he retired he remained in the Territory and served as an elected member from 1966-77. There was some concern about what might happen to Aboriginal people if the Territory became a state, and Whitlam may have also had this in mind when considering self-government for the Territory.
184 Powell, Far Country, p.227. The ACT was granted Senate representation at the same time. Each Territory was granted two Senators to represent them in parliament.
Elections for the new Territory legislature were held on 19 October 1974. The result was a disaster for the Labor Party, which by that time was deeply unpopular in the Territory. Seventeen of the nineteen seats were won by Country Liberal Party candidates, including the first Aboriginal member, Hyacinth Tungutalum. Independent candidates Dawn Lawrie and Ron Withnall won the other two seats.  

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser visited Darwin during the federal election campaign following Whitlam’s dismissal in November 1975. During a ‘rowdy public meeting’ on 18 November he promised that the Territory would have ‘statehood in five years’ which ‘came as a bombshell to almost all present, including the local parliamentarians’. Heatley claimed that no-one believed this would happen, but the promise nevertheless committed the new Coalition government to making some serious moves towards transferring executive powers to the Legislative Assembly. Less than a year after the federal election, Minister Adermann announced the first stage of the transfer of functions to the Legislative Assembly. Martyn Finger was given the responsibility of supervising the transfer. Speaking shortly after self-government had been granted, he reported that he had ‘just concluded a demanding but exciting eighteen months of work commencing when the first small units of Administration were transferred to self government on 1 January 1977 and leading up to the major transfer of powers on 1 July 1978’. He further reported that ‘only three important units of administration are yet to be placed under local control’. By 1979 all functions except those relating to Aboriginal land and the mining of uranium had been transferred to the Legislative Assembly.

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187 Heatley, *Almost Australians*, p.53. Withnall claimed that the promise was to grant statehood in three years. See NTAS: NTRS 226, WITHNALL, Ron, TS 646, Tape 1, p.10.
188 Donovan, *Other End of Australia*, p.236.
189 Finger, “The Administration of Government,” p.1. At the time Finger presented this address he was Director General of the Department of the Chief Minister of the new Northern Territory government.
190 Ibid. These were Health, Education, and the Supreme Court.
The Northern Territory was now ‘a body politic under the Crown’,191 and on 28 June 1978, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Chief Minister Paul Everingham met in Canberra and formally signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory government which outlined the financial terms and conditions under which self-government in the Territory would operate.192 The ‘rule by remote control’ was at last a thing of the past, and Darwin residents welcomed the new era in great style on 1 July 1978.

**Conclusion**

The history of Darwin in the eighteen years before the granting of self-government is dominated by Cyclone Tracy, and it remains a pivotal event in the minds of the residents. Even now, almost forty years after the disaster, people refer to the time ‘before Tracy’ or ‘after Tracy’ and many people who experienced the storm still bear the emotional and physical scars. Yet the city recovered remarkably fast and, unlike the post-war era, evidence of the wreckage disappeared rapidly.

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192 Conn, *NT Chronicle*, p.35.
As far as the other events are concerned, the most salient points are the frequent administrative changes which occurred following Hasluck’s retirement as Minister in charge of the Territory, the increasing power of the Canberra bureaucrats, and the struggle waged by members of the Legislative Council/Assembly and other politically aware residents in their efforts to gain some form of independence. The Commonwealth’s financial commitment to the Territory secured Darwin’s prosperity during this period, but Ministerial indifference and bureaucratic obstacles, meant that the ‘anti-Canberra feeling’ remained strong in the city, even after self-government was granted.

A view across Smith Street and St Mary’s Star of the Sea Cathedral to Darwin High School on the horizon, 1974

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Chapter Ten

Conclusion

Theoretical Basis for the Thesis

This thesis traces the social, physical and economic changes in Darwin which transformed the small, sleepy, economically depressed village of 1911 to the vibrant prosperous city of 1978 when the Northern Territory became a self-governing entity.

My aims for undertaking this research were twofold. My first ambition was to write an urban history of the city of Darwin during the years 1911 to 1978 which was soundly based on primary source material backed up by published material on specific relevant topics. My second ambition was to assess the role played by the Commonwealth government administration of the region in general and Darwin in particular.

When writing the thesis, I rejected the postmodernist approach that there can be no ‘objective’ histories, just different ways of telling stories. Instead, I based my methodology on the philosophical and theoretical foundations first propounded from the early nineteenth century by writers such as von Ranke and enlarged upon in the 1950s by historians such as Carr, and in later years by Elton and McCullagh among others. I firmly believe that it is possible to understand the past through a detailed, critical and, as far as possible, an objective examination of archival records, supplemented by a study of photographs and other artefacts, historic buildings, oral histories and secondary sources. I therefore carried out my research on the basis of this belief.

Commonwealth Aims in Assuming Control of the Territory

By 1911 the South Australian authorities had given up hope of developing a viable colony in the north. By the 1890s they were exploring the possibility of handing the region back to Britain. When that failed, they turned to the new federal government. Federal politicians were already concerned about the Northern Territory for two reasons. Firstly, they were aware that Australia was justly liable to criticism from other nations for claiming and occupying a region amounting to one sixth of the continent yet failing to develop it as an
economically productive entity. Secondly, and more importantly, the politicians were aware that the Territory’s coastline was completely undefended. In their minds, it was vital that the area be occupied by a substantial settled white population, backed by an adequate military presence. Transfer negotiations were protracted however, and it was not until ten years after Federation that the Commonwealth finally assumed control of the Northern Territory.

The history of the Commonwealth government’s administration of the Territory and especially its influence on Darwin’s development can be divided into two phases. The period up to the Second World War was characterised by a wavering commitment to developing the region, inadequate funding, vacillating and sometimes inappropriate policies, and inept administrative arrangements. After the Second World War had reinforced the idea that the north must be populated and defended, the government’s commitment steadied into a determination, held by people on both sides of the political divide, to invest large sums of money in the region. The process was assisted by the serendipitous growth of the mining, tourist and fishing industries from the 1950s and Darwin at last began to grow into an economically viable unit, with facilities which were comparable with those available in towns of equivalent size in the south.

The Commonwealth’s role in developing the region

In common with their predecessors in South Australia, Commonwealth politicians and public servants, in the pre-war years at least, never seemed to come to grips with the reality of the Northern Territory. They tended to look at the vast amount of land and believe that an equally vast wealth was there just waiting to be unlocked. Individual politicians occasionally pointed out the problems and warned that development would depend on devoting enormous sums of money, a great deal of time, and the creation of a long-term master plan, worked out on a bipartisan basis and strictly adhered to for decades. But successive governments generally lacked the necessary commitment and courage. Various schemes were devised to cope with particular problems and, when these did not work, the government resorted to appointing expert panels or commissions to look into the matter and then, by and large, ignoring the ensuing recommendations. The government’s most daring and least comprehensible strategy to develop the region was to split the Northern Territory into two, thus duplicating the bureaucracy and making no improvement to its economic position.
It should also be remembered that politicians who were promoting Northern Territory development could be seen as acting against the short-term interests of the people who voted them into office. After the First World War, for example, every State was scrambling to attract settlers to their region. Any people deciding to live in the Territory were settlers lost to the States, and most politicians were understandably reluctant to anger their constituents by supporting ambitious settlement schemes for the Territory.\footnote{This was rarely acknowledged openly, but debates in November 1911 clearly show a general consensus among politicians that the Northern Territory must not compete with the southern states. Members of parliament implied that cattle raised in the Territory must not be sold in the southern states, and settlers must come from overseas. See, for example, CPD, 1 November 1911, vol. LXI, p.2103.} The north-south railway was another case in point. Politicians representing the eastern states were determined to block any legislation authorising construction of a railway from Adelaide to Darwin which would provide a transport corridor that bypassed the commercial/trading network along the east coast of Australia.

**Administrative Arrangements of the New Regime**

The structure devised by the authorities for the administration of the Territory was flawed from the start. Responsibility for the Territory was given to a junior Minister. He had to go cap in hand to that body and to Treasury to get any grants or concessions for the Territory. Treasury in particular was consistently reluctant to acknowledge that Territory residents had a right to similar services enjoyed by people in the south. The comparatively lowly status of the Minister in charge of the Territory, and the frequent changes of Minister\footnote{Twenty-one men held the position of Minister responsible for the Northern Territory between 1911 and 1945. See Appendix 3 below.} meant that, before the World War Two at least, the political interest in the region was patchy at the best of times. This changed in the 1950s with the appointment of Paul Hasluck as Minister for the Territory. His dedication to the development of the region in the 1950s and early 1960s gave the impetus for many reforms. Although his successors exhibited the old lack of interest in the details of governing the region, the creation of a separate Department for the Northern Territory in the 1970s raised the status of both the Minister and the Territory itself to a significant degree.

Even before the Commonwealth took control of the Territory, politicians were commenting on the difficulties of trying to govern such a remote area from Melbourne.\footnote{See, for example, CPD, 13 July 1910, vol. LV, p.369.} In response to this concern politicians would assure the public that all decision making on day to day
matters would be made in Darwin. The role of bureaucrats in the head office in Melbourne and later in Canberra was to assist in carrying out these decisions. The Minister's role was to formulate the policies on which these decisions were to be based. This never occurred. Government records are littered with complaints from the Administrator and other government officers in the Territory who were frustrated with the long chain of command and the delays caused by having to refer matters to head office for decisions and authorisations to act. Vital records which had to be consulted before decisions were made were often retained in the southern offices, and there are many hints that the southern bureaucrats were often guilty of misrepresenting matters when communicating with the Minister about Territory affairs. Conditions in the Territory were so remote and so unlike the conditions in the south that the southern bureaucrats made many mistakes which could have been avoided if local knowledge had been given any credence.

Darwin in 1911

By the time the Commonwealth government took over responsibility for the Territory from South Australia it was clear that Darwin was distinctly different to the southern capital cities. In the first place, the character of Darwin was noticeably at odds with its southern counterparts. The southern capitals had followed the paradigm of the ‘commercial city’ first described by John McCarty. Darwin, on the other hand was more akin to colonial cities such as Penang and Malacca. Its population consisted of a white minority representing the colonising power, an Indigenous population attracted to the town by the promise of its goods and services and the chance of earning money to purchase these, and the ‘intervening group’ comprising Chinese and other Asian entrepreneurs, tradesmen and labourers, and the mixed race population created by the newcomers’ sexual liaisons with the Indigenous women. The multiracial nature of the town influenced its morphology and there were distinct areas which were dominated by the separate races. Furthermore, unlike the southern states, the Northern Territory did not progress from complete dependence on the colonising authority to a limited form of autonomy and then to self-government. It remained subject to the colonising authority represented first by South Australia and then by the Commonwealth until 1978, one hundred and nine years after it was first occupied by white settlers.

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4 According to Harry Giese, Hasluck finally told his staff in Canberra that he wanted to see the original proposals from the Administrator rather than the revised versions that they prepared. See NTAS, NTRS 226, GIESE, Harry, TS 755, Tape 33, Side A, p.7.
The second difference was economic. The southern capitals had generally undergone a few years of struggle after settlement, then, as the primary industries in the hinterland developed, they became prosperous settled urban centres serving the hinterland and initiating secondary and tertiary industries which added to their prosperity. Darwin on the other hand had failed to thrive after the first flurry of entrepreneurial activity in the 1870s and early 1880s. The industries in the hinterland were limited to two – mining and the pastoral industry – and they failed to attract white settlers to the region. Much of the mining was carried out by Chinese settlers, while the pastoral industry relied, in the main, on the local Aboriginal inhabitants. The yeoman farmers expected by the South Australian government did not arrive, and the colony’s later efforts at establishing tropical plantations were also a failure. With this narrow economic base, woefully inadequate port facilities, a railway line ‘that led to nowhere’, a high cost of living, and a difficult climate, the residents of Darwin had little chance of increasing their sources of income and almost no hope of attracting other settlers to the region.

The First Year of Commonwealth Rule

Although there were some delays caused by the then Minister’s absence from Australia and a few difficulties in appointing an Administrator as chief executive officer in the Territory, Darwin soon began to see some changes following the transfer ceremony on 2 January 1911. On the positive side the population started to swell as public servants began to arrive in the town. The large number of bureaucrats appointed to carry out the government’s wishes for the Territory was widely criticised both in the Territory itself and in the southern states, but businesses in Darwin prospered as a result. However, the population boom created a severe shortage of housing and this was to become a perennial problem in Darwin. On the negative side, Darwin’s residents soon became aware that most Commonwealth politicians and bureaucrats regarded them with disdain, if not contempt. They objected to the cavalier attitude shown towards their respected Government Resident, Justice Mitchell, and they resented the fact that the authorities refused to listen to their advice and opinions. Those members of the community who were knowledgeable about political affairs were also forced to face the fact that the people of the Territory had been disenfranchised when the Commonwealth took control. The positive attitude the people of Darwin exhibited about the change to federal control began to fade quite rapidly.
Gilruth’s Term of Office

For the first few years of its administration the government poured money and men into the northern capital. Business prospects looked exceedingly bright for retailers and service providers as public servants spent their wages, and the government invested money in building staff accommodation and repairing and enlarging offices originally built by the South Australian government. The built environment expanded as Asian and Coloured people settled in the ‘Police Paddock’ in what is now Stuart Park, as government officers moved into homes on Myilly Point, as the meatworks was constructed at Bullocky Point, and as the little collection of homes and the railway workshop in Parap grew to accommodate construction workers and railway extensions for the Vesteys project.

It was not only the physical landscape which was transformed after the transfer. Events during the years that John Gilruth was Administrator for the Territory also transformed the social landscape of the town. The recurring theme throughout this period was about power. The government in general, and Gilruth and his staff in particular, sought to control all aspects of the community. Most of the Indigenous inhabitants were gradually penned into the Kahlin Compound and a large proportion of the Coloured and Asian population was banished from the centre of town to the Police Paddock. The Chinese who remained in Chinatown were struggling to live a normal life. The Minister’s directive in 1911 that the government would employ no Chinese meant that many Chinese workers lost their jobs and Chinese entrepreneurs could no longer tender for government contracts if they used Chinese labour. The draconian immigration regulations introduced under the government’s White Australia policy also meant than many Chinese men were only able to enjoy the company of their wives and children for twelve months every three years.\(^5\) Appeals by the local Chinese to the Minister and then to the Chinese Consul in Australia eased the situation slightly, but life in Darwin for these people who had done so much for the town and for the Territory as a whole was far less pleasant after the Commonwealth took charge of the Territory.

The white community was not immune to the authorities’ bid for absolute control in Darwin. The responsibility for enforcing health regulations was taken from the Local Board of Health and assumed by Gilruth himself in 1912, and the duly elected Palmerston District Council

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\(^5\) The period the women and children could stay in Australia was later extended to three years, then five years. See Karlsen, “Cultural Exclusion,” p.26.
was replaced in 1915 by a part-elected, part-nominated Town Council. Gilruth did not tolerate any challenge to his authority. He came into personal conflict with influential citizens such as C.J. Kirkland, and he quarrelled with his senior staff and eventually managed to get rid of many of them. Their duties were taken over by Gilruth’s trusted subordinates H.E. Carey and R.J. Evans so no new contenders for supremacy were appointed.

Gilruth had the upper hand in most of these conflicts, but when he confronted the unions he was eventually vanquished. The unions grew in power as the working class population increased to provide labour for large scale construction projects for the railway and for Vesteys meat works. Under the leadership of Harold Nelson, the unions repeatedly challenged Gilruth’s authority. The Labor government’s ill-fated socialist experiment in 1915 whereby it took control of all the hotels in the Top End gave Nelson a promising base from which to launch his attacks against Gilruth in particular and the government in general.

The government initiated settlement schemes and set up experimental farms in the hinterland, but by the time Gilruth left in 1919, it was clear that these schemes had failed. The unsatisfactory state of affairs which was beginning to unfold on the local front was complicated by the onset of the First World War in 1914. Government attention was diverted away from the Northern Territory and the hitherto generous government expenditure and plentiful supply of locally based public servants decreased significantly. Income from government sources was therefore considerably lessened but the effects were at this time masked to a great extent by the construction of the meatworks and the extension of the railway to the Katherine River, both of which commenced in 1914 and were completed by 1917. Large numbers of men were recruited to work on these projects, and retailers and others reaped the benefit of the larger population in the town. The working class population however, gave the unions – and Nelson – greater power than ever, and this led to Gilruth’s downfall.

The Administrator’s arrogance and intransigence worked against him and the townspeople eventually forced him to leave the Territory. By the time he left, the social dynamics of Darwin had changed dramatically. The former ascendancy of the white middle class entrepreneurs, professional people and senior public servants was gone. The working class was much more influential, and unlike earlier times, news reports of the social and sporting life in the town more frequently featured the activities of the tradesmen and labourers than
the white elite. Relations between the various sections of the community were also tenser and many people felt bitter about their fellow citizens as a result of the conflict during these years. The bureaucracy was also in a parlous state. The senior, more experienced staff had been ousted from office and relations between the NT Administration and the independent departments in Darwin were at a low ebb. The turmoil experienced in Darwin during the latter years of Gilruth’s term of office had also had an unfortunate effect on Darwin’s reputation. Wildly exaggerated reports of the disturbances in southern newspapers led many Australians to believe that Darwin was a hotbed of unrest, peopled by ‘Bolshevists’ whose sole aim was to incite a revolution.

From 1919 to World War Two

The civil unrest continued after Gilruth’s departure. It was not until Gilruth’s supporters, Carey, Bevan and Evans, were also forced to leave the Territory at the end of 1919 and the hotels were once again returned to private enterprise that most of the conflict died down. Darwin residents, however, had no time to feel any relief at the resolution of the conflict, because a new concern raised its head when Vesteys announced in March 1920 that the meatworks would not open for that year’s killing season. At that time the town was filling up with workers expecting lucrative employment at the meatworks and the number of unemployed in the town continued to plague the government for many years after this.

The closure of the meatworks marked the beginning of a serious depression in Darwin almost a decade before the Great Depression experienced by the developed world during the 1930s. There was however one positive note in this tale of woe. It was during this time that Darwin became known as the hub of aviation in Australia. On 10 December 1919, competitors in the ‘Great Air Race’, Ross and Keith Smith landed their aeroplane on an airstrip prepared for them in Fannie Bay. Further flights followed, and during the subsequent growth of the aviation industry, Darwin became known as the first port of call for long-distance flights from Europe.

The appointment of an Administrator who was forceful and intelligent and who held decided opinions on what should be done in the Territory was a failure. The government therefore appointed as Acting Administrator a man who had sympathy for the working class and who was adept at conciliation. Staniforth Smith had some success in reducing the anger and resentment among the Darwin community but many federal politicians claimed he was too
soft for the job, and he was replaced by a martinet, in the form of Frederic Urquhart, who was determined to crush what he saw as an incipient insurgency. The early years of the 1920s were thus marked by the Administration’s efforts to re-establish and maintain some sort of control over the unions, by continued resentment and unrest in the Darwin community, and by the unfulfilled expectation that Vesteys would soon reopen and revitalise the economy. The division of the Territory into North Australia and Central Australia which occurred in 1927 and lasted until 1931 had little real effect on Darwin itself apart from adding another layer of bureaucracy to the top heavy structure already in place.

World events once again influenced Territory affairs in the 1930s. The economic depression experienced throughout the world during the first years of this decade meant that there was little financial assistance for Territory industry and almost nothing was done to improve conditions in Darwin. In an echo of a South Australian strategy, the Lyons government decided in 1933 that the only way to develop the Territory was to offer the entire region to one or more chartered companies. No company or consortium took up the offer. The Territory’s economy limped along and Darwin remained in an almost comatose condition until the government once again decided to take an active hand.

The government’s decision to invest in the development of Darwin was motivated by the possibility that another world war would break out in the near future. The vulnerability of the northern coast of Australia had always been a matter for concern for the federal government and the worsening international situation forced it to improve the defence capabilities of the region. The matter became increasingly urgent during the 1930s but the government still moved very slowly. The first naval oil tanks were installed on the peninsula at the end of the 1920s. The Army’s ‘Darwin Detachment’ arrived in Darwin in 1932 to construct gun emplacements and barracks for the permanent troops who arrived twelve months later. Little else was done for the next few years but by the end of the 1930s military installation and barracks were multiplying and by 1940 there were over two thousand troops stationed in Darwin. The growth in population and the amount of construction work being undertaken in the town and surrounding countryside provided a welcome boost to the town’s economy, but the local businessmen and the public servants became increasingly concerned at the amount of land being resumed by the military.
By this time, authorities had begun to express their dissatisfaction with the existing layout of Darwin. Goyder’s town plan did not cater for a community dependent on automobiles; the townscape was still full of untidy empty lots belonging to absentee landowners; and many of the existing buildings, especially in the areas where the roads had not yet been constructed, had been erected without reference to the official boundary lines of the town lots. Over the next decade, various people, including Brisbane town planner Ronald McInnis, produced town plans for Darwin, none of which was implemented. Their only effect was to cause delays in the reconstruction of the town after the war.

**Darwin’s War**

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the subsequent fall of Singapore prompted the authorities to order the evacuation of all women and children in Darwin. Almost 1,500 people left the city by sea over the next few weeks and many others travelled to the southern states by car or by air. The last shipload of evacuees left Darwin harbour just four days before the first bombing raid over the town. The first two Japanese raids on 19 February 1942 were a disaster for Darwin. The defence preparations were incomplete and the people were untrained in how to deal with the emergency. At least 236 people were killed and between 300 and 400 were wounded. Utter confusion reigned after the attack with no one knowing who was in overall charge. A commission of inquiry into the events of the day followed the debacle and Commissioner Lowe criticised the ineptitude of the military authorities, Abbott’s obstructive attitude, and the Australian government’s half-hearted preparation for war which resulted in poorly equipped facilities and inadequately trained military officers. Bombing raids over the Top End continued for twenty-three months and during that time the bulk of the Army and Air Force moved inland leaving skeleton staffs in Darwin itself, while the Navy continued to occupy the southern part of the Darwin peninsula. The life of Darwin as a civilian town had come to a standstill. Its precincts became, in effect, a battlefield.

The Japanese bombing of Darwin during the Second World War combined with the depredations inflicted by the military occupation of the town caused almost total devastation in the city. The military interlude nevertheless brought about some significant benefits to the Territory as a whole and to Darwin in particular. One major development, for example, was

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the construction of the Stuart and Barkly Highways which at last provided adequate overland routes to the southern and eastern states. Darwin’s infrastructure was improved during this time, and at the end of the war the townspeople inherited more reliable supplies of power and water, telephone communication with the south, and an extended and upgraded network of roads in the city itself.

**Post-War Darwin**

When the evacuees returned to Darwin in 1946 they were not in a position to appreciate these benefits as they struggled to secure a roof over their heads. Accommodation difficulties were overwhelming and the town was littered with temporary huts and hovels. The government’s compulsory resumption of all land in the greater Darwin area was a great advance in that the absentee landowners which had so blighted the development of Darwin since 1869 were at last dislodged and it was subsequently possible to rebuild the city in an orderly manner. However, reconstruction was unnecessarily delayed by the Chifley government’s commitment to imposing a new town plan on Darwin. It was not until after the Menzies government came into power in 1949 that the redevelopment of Darwin began to move forward at a reasonable rate. The new regime did not abandon the town plan immediately, although it was significantly modified to allow more rapid development of the city’s business/commercial centre, and a new Darwin began to emerge from the ruins.

Perhaps the major benefit of the Second World War was the effect it had on southern politicians’ view of the Northern Territory. The bombing of Darwin brought home to all Australians how important it was to both populate the north and to provide adequate military defences in the region. From the 1950s on, the government began to spend serious amounts of money to promote industrial development of the Territory and to make Darwin an attractive place to live with services equivalent to cities of comparable size in the south. As the number of public servants appointed to positions based in Darwin grew, the number of business and professional people also increased and the city’s physical and social landscapes were transformed.

Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Day 1974 seriously interrupted this progress. The destruction was devastating but the Whitlam government’s quick response and the resilience of the townspeople meant that while the emotional scars may remain, the physical landscape was quickly reconstructed. The city was again transformed and the new residential areas were
dominated by ground level homes built to a stricter building code to ensure better protection against future cyclones. Within a few years the buildings destroyed by Tracy were replaced and expansion of the city resumed. By 1 July 1978 when the city celebrated self-government, almost all available land around Darwin was developed, and plans were already in hand to build the satellite city of Palmerston, twenty-two kilometres away.

A Colonial City?

By 1978, many of the features which distinguished Darwin as a colonial city had disappeared. Chinatown and the other ethnic enclaves were destroyed during the Second World War and the authorities took care that they were not rebuilt during the reconstruction period. People of different racial and cultural backgrounds lived more or less harmoniously in the new northern suburbs and there was little evidence of any overt racism between the various ethnic groups. In addition, the gap between the numbers of male and female residents was closing for the first time since the city was established. Until self-government was granted, however, Darwin was still, in effect, a colonial city. The administrators were, on the whole, imported from the south on fixed terms of service. Treasury still maintained a tight control on the budget and southern bureaucrats made many decisions affecting the town. The Legislative Council/Assembly which was established after the Second World War processed Northern Territory legislation, but all decisions had to be assessed by a ‘distant power’ in the form of the Minister controlling the Territory, backed by the Australian government, and ratified by the Governor General. The basic administrative structure of a colonial city therefore remained in force until the people of the Northern Territory took greater control of their own affairs on 1 July 1978. From that day forward Territorians employed their own public servants and made far more of their own decisions about the development of their Territory and its capital city. Darwin moved into the post-colonial phase of its development.

The ‘Un-Lasting City’

In his book _Outback_, Thomas Keneally labelled his chapter on Darwin ‘The Un-Lasting City’.7 He was referring primarily to the fact that ‘Darwin has known three near-total destructions’.8 Certainly extensive rebuilding programmes were necessary following the World War Two bombings and military occupation of the town and the major cyclones in 1897 and 1974, but Darwin has also undergone other far-reaching social and physical

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8 Ibid, p.70.
transformations during the years the Commonwealth administered the Territory. These include the extension of the city’s boundaries when the Commonwealth built houses at Myilly Point and released land for the Coloured residents in Stuart Park, for the meat works on Bullocky Point, and for the extensive post-war suburban development in the immediate hinterland. It also included the changes to the social structure during Gilruth’s term of office when the unions became a powerful section of the community. The militarisation of Darwin during the late 1930s caused another transformation of the physical landscape preceding the destruction during the war years. The slow reconstruction following the war once again redesigned the town before Cyclone Tracy destroyed the residential areas in 1974, and while the reconstruction following that disaster continued to follow Harcourt Long’s town plan for the northern suburbs, the architectural style was decidedly different as houses were built to withstand cyclonic winds. The post-war social evolution of the Darwin community was strongly influenced by events such as the arrival of the hippies and the ‘boat people’ from Timor and Vietnam, by the growth of the tourism industry, and by changing attitudes toward ethnic differences and cultural diversity.

Keneally’s description of Darwin as the ‘un-lasting city’ seems somewhat inappropriate. The quality which strikes me when considering Darwin’s history is its resilience, not its ‘un-lastingness’. It was rebuilt from the ruins caused by cyclones and the war; it rose above the turmoil created by events such as the ‘Darwin Rebellion’, the military occupation, and the influx of boat people and hippies; and it remains the capital city of the Northern Territory in spite of the bureaucrats and politicians who wanted the capital moved inland. The essence of Darwin with its unusual heritage resides in the generations of Aboriginal, Asian, Coloured, and Caucasian families who have come to live and work in the city since it was first established in 1869.
Don Bonson’s family is one of many multi-ethnic dynasties whose members possess talents which have earned them great respect in Darwin.
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1. The National Archives repository in Darwin has been extensively reorganised during the time I have been doing this research. Many records have been digitised and are now available online. Others have been transferred between Canberra and Darwin. I have therefore provided one list of the NAA records without giving the location.
2. I have consulted a great number of NAA records during my research and I have estimated that a detailed list would make the Bibliography longer than the thesis.\(^9\) The following list is therefore limited to the Series number, information on the initiating Agency, and the ‘Accumulation dates’.\(^10\) I have also omitted those Series which consist only of indexes to files in other Series. However, certain important papers which I have found in the archives have been entered as individual items in the section on ‘Published and Unpublished Monographs and Other Material’.

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Appendix 1: Population of the Northern Territory, 1871-1911
Appendix 2: NT Population from 1911 to 1976

* Census Years

Population ('000) vs. Year


- Males
- Females
# Appendix 3:

## Ministers for the Northern Territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TO DATE</th>
<th>MINISTER’S NAME</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>Served: Years-months</th>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1911</td>
<td>Egerton Lee Batchelor</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>External Affairs [1901-1916]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 1913</td>
<td>Josiah Thomas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 1914</td>
<td>Patrick McMahon Glynn</td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1914</td>
<td>John Andrew Arthur</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Nov. 1916</td>
<td>Hugh Mahon</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>1-11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 1917</td>
<td>Frederick William Bamford</td>
<td>National Labour</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Feb. 1920</td>
<td>Patrick McMahon Glynn</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>3-0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 1921</td>
<td>Alexander Poynton</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>1-10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1926</td>
<td>Senator George Foster Pearce</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 1927</td>
<td>Senator Thomas William Glasgow</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>0-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 1928</td>
<td>Charles William Clalan Marr</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>0-10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1928</td>
<td>Neville Reginald Howse</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 1929</td>
<td>Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott</td>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>0-11</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Jan. 1932</td>
<td>Arthur Blakely</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Oct. 1932</td>
<td>Robert Archdale Parkhill</td>
<td>United Australia Party</td>
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<td>Oct. 1934</td>
<td>John Arthur Perkins</td>
<td>United Australia Party</td>
<td>2-0</td>
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<td>Eric John Harrison</td>
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<td>Thomas Paterson</td>
<td>Country Party</td>
<td>3-0</td>
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<td>Apr. 1939</td>
<td>John McEwen</td>
<td>Country Party</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 1941</td>
<td>Senator Hattil Spencer Foll</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>Interior [1932-1951]</td>
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<td>July 1945</td>
<td>Senator Joseph Silver Collings</td>
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<td>3-9</td>
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<td>Dec. 1949</td>
<td>Herbert Victor Johnson</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Oct. 1950</td>
<td>Philip Albert Martin McBride</td>
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<td>May 1951</td>
<td>Eric John Harrison</td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 1968</td>
<td>Charles Edward Barnes</td>
<td>Country Party</td>
<td>4-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 1971</td>
<td>Peter James Nixon</td>
<td>Country Party</td>
<td>3-0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Dec 72</td>
<td>Lance Herbert Barnard</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1973</td>
<td>Keppel Earl Enderby</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
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<td>Oct. 1975</td>
<td>Rex Alan Patterson</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>2-0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 1975</td>
<td>Paul John Keating</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 1975</td>
<td>Ian McCahon Sinclair</td>
<td>National Country Party</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1978</td>
<td>Albert Evan Adermann</td>
<td>National Country Party</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
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</table>
Appendix 4:

Senior Government Officers in the Northern Territory, 1911-1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>START</th>
<th>FINISH</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samuel James MITCHELL</td>
<td>Jan. 1911</td>
<td>March 1912</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>Acting Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Anderson GILRUTH</td>
<td>March 1912</td>
<td>June 1919</td>
<td>7 3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 1919</td>
<td>August 1919</td>
<td>0 3</td>
<td>VACANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry CAREY</td>
<td>August 1919</td>
<td>Sept. 1919</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles Staniforth Cater SMITH</td>
<td>Nov. 1919</td>
<td>Jan. 1921</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>Acting Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederic Charles URQUHART</td>
<td>Jan. 1921</td>
<td>Jan. 1926</td>
<td>5 0</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Copley PLAYFORD</td>
<td>Jan. 1926</td>
<td>March 1927</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>Acting Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Hunter WEDDELL</td>
<td>March 1927</td>
<td>June 1931</td>
<td>10 0</td>
<td>Government Resident for Northern Australia + Administrator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June 1931</td>
<td>March 1937</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Lydiard Aubrey ABBOTT</td>
<td>March 1937</td>
<td>June 1946</td>
<td>9 0</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Robert (Mick) DRIVER</td>
<td>June 1946</td>
<td>June 1951</td>
<td>5 0</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Joseph Scott WISE</td>
<td>July 1951</td>
<td>June 1956</td>
<td>5 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Clarence (Clarrie) ARCHER</td>
<td>July 1956</td>
<td>March 1961</td>
<td>4 8</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Bede NOTT</td>
<td>April 1961</td>
<td>Sept. 1964</td>
<td>3 5</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger Levinge DEAN</td>
<td>Oct. 1964</td>
<td>March 1970</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Frederick Charles (Fred) CHANEY</td>
<td>March 1970</td>
<td>August 1973</td>
<td>3 5</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 1973</td>
<td>Dec. 1973</td>
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<td>VACANT</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Norman (Jock) NELSON</td>
<td>Dec. 1973</td>
<td>Nov. 1975</td>
<td>2 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. 1975</td>
<td>June 1976</td>
<td>0 7</td>
<td>VACANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Armstrong ENGLAND</td>
<td>June 1976</td>
<td>June 1978</td>
<td>2 0</td>
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