Rethinking colonial endeavour in relation to agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory, 1863 to 1945: a critical perspective

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Faculty of Education, Health & Science
Charles Darwin University
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The Northern Territory
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- The Hon CLA Abbott takes over
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- Pastoralism
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- Population
- Roads and stock routes
- A national co-ordination of effort
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**Chapter 16**

- Response to war
- CSIR become involved
- Army Farms
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- Indigenous population during the war
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- Conclusion
Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to 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.

Ian M Hillock

March 2005
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Abbreviations

CSIR  Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research

CSIRO  Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

GRS 1  Minister for the Northern Territory - Correspondence received

NTGRR  Northern Territory Government Resident's Report

NTRS 790  Northern Territory Government Resident - Correspondence received

NTLRU  Northern Territory Department of Lands and Planning, Land Records Unit

NTAR  Northern Territory Administrator's Report

NTTG  Northern Territory Times and Gazette

NTT  Northern Territory Times

SAPP  South Australian Parliamentary Papers

SAPD  South Australian Parliamentary Debates

CPP  Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers

CPD  Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
Conversions

**DISTANCE, AREA AND WEIGHT**

1 statute mile = 1.6 kilometres
1 imperial ton = 1.02 metric tons
1 sq mile = 2.6 sq kilometres
1 hectare = 2.5 acres
1 kilo = 2.2 pounds
Abstract

This work is a study, in historical context, of successive 'colonial' administrations' failure to effect permanent agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory. It seeks to provide greater understanding of why colonial settlement was less successful in the Territory than in the rest of Australia. Conceptualization places this study within a wider framework of studies of colonial economic development and especially that sponsored by government intervention.

Under protracted colonial administration, attitudes to race, the background of world and colonial economics and the changing pattern of immigration all played a part in the Territory's formative evolution. This study explores some specific aspects within their particular political context of change. It traces the failure of policies, first envisaged by the South Australian Government in 1863 to establish agricultural settlement, and examines how succeeding Commonwealth administrations continued in that pursuit with little more success. This study covers the period from 1863 when South Australia first annexed the Territory, its later handover of administration and management to the Commonwealth Government and extends to the years immediately following World War II. The role that past government policy has played in creating the confusing ambience still surrounding the question of agricultural development, past and present is examined.

Despite the fact that the Territory's agricultural and economic development throughout its 'colonial' history was due almost entirely to government intervention and initiative, I contend that, by not engaging with available agricultural knowledge, agricultural settlement was in effect forestalled. Because local autonomy was never encouraged, self-evident political and inherent socioeconomic needs were ignored, and efforts to establish settlement were unable to benefit from the globalized nature of available agricultural knowledge or to profit from local learned experience. Farming, the very premise upon which colonial settlement was based was continuously circumscribed and prevented from constructing, transmitting and using local experience and agricultural knowledge to achieve socioeconomic sustainability.
Introduction

1. Statement of research problem
It is the contention of this thesis that a succession of governments thwarted agricultural development by not allowing local autonomy to develop sufficiently so that the people themselves could contribute in an appropriate and effective way. Strangely, in an age of confidence, governments contributed to a profound lack of confidence in the Territory. Many reasons have been given for this failure, none of which provide satisfactory answers.

The Northern Territory lies in the central section of northern Australia between Queensland and Western Australia, a distance of some nine hundred and sixty kilometers from east to west. From its tropical north it stretches sixteen hundred kilometers southward to the state border of South Australia. Its borders enclose an area of 1,346,200 square kilometers, that is some 18% of the Australian continent.

Until 1978, when it attained the status of a self-governing Territory, its legislative powers were limited. Initially it was administered by the parliament of South Australia and after 1911 by that of the Commonwealth. Both of these 'colonial' administrations were to discover that development costs were a major factor in limiting their ambitions for development. Necessary expenditure on public works, services and various inducements to settlers to accept the risks of the uncertain physical and economic environment were extremely onerous.

Even today, despite its vast area, almost two-thirds of the population of the Northern Territory live in Darwin and Alice Springs. The greater land area is either uninhabited or at best very thinly populated. Settlement outside the two main centres is widely dispersed and concentrated only in a handful of mining towns, a few rural service centres and numerous Aboriginal Community townships.

From the beginning Darwin has had pretensions as a major port and trading settlement. It has, however, developed primarily as an administrative centre, with public sector jobs accounting for half of the city's employment. Located on the northwestern coast, it
serves as a regional centre for the 'Top End', as the northern half of the Territory is called, and is home to half the population. Alice Springs, the second-largest town, is situated almost on the Tropic of Capricorn. Apart from catering to a relatively large tourist industry, it services 'the Centre', as the southern half of the Territory is called, and has a much smaller population.

Communications throughout the Territory still present major problems and the transport system is relatively undeveloped. The Stuart Highway, which forms the backbone of the road system, connects the main urban centres by a sealed road running south from Darwin to Adelaide. All other roads that may reasonably be considered as all-weather lead off this main route. These include the recently sealed Victoria Highway southwestwards from Katherine to Western Australia, the Barkly Highway to Queensland and the Arnhem Highway, which connects Darwin to Jabiru. Floodwaters during the period of monsoon rains cut these main roads regularly, and the majority of secondary rural roads are all subject to temporary closure after rain. Rural settlements when inaccessible by road rely on air transport. Despite controversy, in 2004 a rail connection to South Australia was completed, yet whether this will eventually link with other states is still debated.

In general, the arrangements of land tenure under private enterprise development often involve complex leasehold arrangements. For example, cattle stations, which are often much larger than some American states or groups of English counties together, may vary in size from 1,000 to 8,000 square kilometers. But unlike these, the occupied land in the Territory is held under leasehold from the State, not freehold tenure. The wider Northern Territory is also punctuated by large Aboriginal reserves held under Native Title. The failure 'to populate' the Northern Territory adequately, or only to succeed partially, presents a question. For over a hundred years settlement policies were premised upon developing a thriving agricultural industry. That hope has not been realized.

Despite the best endeavours of successive government administrations, no real 'settlement' has been achieved. South Australia was first granted the right to govern and settle this huge area in 1863, and indicatively in 1911, after over half a century of
colonial development, the estimated population was reckoned at no more than 20 000, of which only 1 700 persons were of European origin. The population seventy years later had only grown to around 80 000.¹

If population growth is taken as an indicator of success of 'colonial settlement', then it is interesting to contrast the rate of population growth with other 'harsh' regions of the world. Texas is often compared with the Territory though at 691 030 square kilometers it is only half the size. It was incorporated into the United States only twenty years earlier than South Australia's annexation of the north. By 1900, however, its population had grown to some 300 000 and by 1980 that figure had increased fourfold. Alaska is another 'harsh' country by anyone's standard. It is larger than the Territory at 1 530 700 square kilometers but today it has a population of over 600 000. Even Greenland, synonymous with a grim and inhospitable environment, with 1 833 900 square kilometers permanently ice-covered, today carries a population of 56 000.²

The intention of this study is to examine the role that past government policy has played in creating the confusing ambience still surrounding the question of agricultural development in the Territory. In an age of successful agricultural colonisation elsewhere, government policies were never able to encourage viable agricultural settlement. In many respects the Territory is 'different' to the rest of Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 1984-85, the average area of the individual agricultural establishment in Australia was 2 800 hectares. The smallest farms were in Victoria and Tasmania and varied from 310 to 390 hectares; in New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia the average size ranged from 1 200 to 6 750 hectares. In the Territory, on the other hand, agricultural establishments are larger than in the rest of the country. They differ from those in other states in that the average cattle station in the Northern Territory is 274 000 hectares,³ and areas under cultivation, though relatively small and unimportant, involve relatively large holdings. Territory agriculture is almost wholly dependent on overseas markets and is characterised by long-term

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Census Returns and Estimates'. Hereinafter ABS, thus ABS.
concentration on a limited range of products that are subject to the vagaries of a variable wet season. As one moves south from the north coast and Darwin region the length of the 'wet' is progressively less and it commences later. Nevertheless, annual rainfall is more reliable than in many parts of Australia's dry continent. The CSIRO have some figures on this. They estimate that for each hundred miles (160 km) south of Darwin there is a delay of ten days between the opening of the growing season and the onset of the 'wet'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Onset of 'wet'</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>14 November</td>
<td>20 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock's Crk</td>
<td>23 November</td>
<td>19 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Crk</td>
<td>28 November</td>
<td>17 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>10 December</td>
<td>15 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mataranka</td>
<td>20 December</td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But the principal reason for the Territory being 'different' is because its 'development' and colonial settlement have met with less success than that experienced in the rest of Australia. Any judgement of particular political, social or economic appropriateness tends to develop from different perceptions. In 1895 John Costello described the Northern Territory as 'an unlucky country'. John McDouall Stuart, after an epic crossing of the continent, had earlier described it as capable of becoming 'one of the finest (lands) under the Crown, suitable of any and everything'. The CSIRO in 1946/47 found that, within a patchy distribution, there were approximately 12 000 square miles (19 200 sq km) - or over seven and a half million acres (3 000 000 hectares) - of good agricultural soils to be found in the 'Top End' alone. Very little of the 'suitable' agricultural soil identified by the CSIRO has yet been settled. The Territory is now considered as being

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3 ABS: from an article reproduced from Year Book Australia ABS Catalogue No. 1301.0.
6 SAPP 19/1895 - "evidence and appendices", p.32. Quoted from John McDouall Stuart's report by Parsons in evidence to the Royal Commission.
7 Christian & Stewart. The 'Top End' of the Northern Territory is generally recognised as being the area stretching northwards from the Tanami Desert and includes the Victoria River District, the Barkly, the Katherine/Daly and Darwin Regions.
'different' from the rest of Australia. To many the Northern Territory remains an enigma. In 1966 Holmes described it as an anachronism.\textsuperscript{8} Bauer, in a 1964 article, suggested ignorance, isolation, and distance as his trinity for subsequent failure. White, very cleverly, uses mastering risk as the key to successful Australian settlement. Others have used differences in perception or assessment of risk and Cameron used 'relocation requires adjustment' as an overarching theme.\textsuperscript{9} These arguments have certain validity but they do not fully explain the conundrum. I contend that the Northern Territory is a clear case of a periphery managed by a centre where decisions and policy were not based on the periphery's realities, thus pre-empting the natural evolutionary process towards local autonomy. State efforts to engender agricultural projects in the Territory were ever stifled.

1.1 Objectives
The purpose of this work is to investigate why successive 'colonial' administrations failed to effect permanent agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory and why colonial settlement was less successful in the Territory than in the rest of Australia. This study examines the role that past government policy has played in creating the confusing ambience still surrounding the question of agricultural development, past and present. Ernest Scott, in his introduction to Sir Stephen Roberts' History of Australian Land Settlement 1788-1922, argues that:

Unless we understand what the problems of Australian land settlement were, and what attempts were made to cope with them, we cannot get to the core of Australian history.\textsuperscript{10}

If that is true of Australia in general it is doubly so of the Northern Territory where the problems of land settlement and an inability to cope with them have dogged government


\textsuperscript{9} Dr FH Bauer, historical geographer, completed detailed study on white settlement in Northern Australia in the 1960s; Colin White wrote a seminal study on the history of 'risk management' in colonial Australia; Dr. Jim Cameron is a Geography and Education researcher with research interest in rural education, historical geography, teacher education, distance education, and curriculum development.
policy since its inception. My study examines the historical context so that those questions arising from the socioeconomic sustainability of agricultural settlement in the Territory may be better understood.

Investigations of satellite photographs by the Northern Territory's Department of Lands have identified the vast amount of previously long since abandoned 'cleared ground',\textsuperscript{11} this, despite the fact that the Territory's agricultural and economic development throughout its 'colonial' history was due almost entirely to government intervention and initiative. Whether this is the result of 'a history of lost opportunity in colonial economic development' and whether, if this is so, it is necessarily a bad thing, is open to question. This thesis attempts to answer these questions by engaging, \textit{a priori}, in an analysis of the Territory's agricultural history within the context of the philosophy of colonial settlement.

My major hypothesis is that distant management and control negated normal development of the necessary local autonomy, which in turn engendered a strangely profound and continuing uncertainty as to the very possibility of successful settlement. True regional autonomy expresses itself in a sense of ownership by the people of an understanding that they have control of their own destiny. Even in the 'global village' or more accurately because of it, the growth and demand for more local autonomy has grown almost exponentially. In an age of instant communication this may present a paradox, but it is, nevertheless, a self-evident truth. The evolutionary development of society worldwide has made an expression of community local autonomy the one essential characteristic common to all.

Unlike its counterparts in other regions, the development of local autonomy in the Territory was never encouraged and the very possibility remained dormant - stultified by the dead hand of a distant bureaucracy. Thus the interlocking nature of democracy, the very fabric of economic development, was unable to evolve normally. In the Territory the people and farmers in particular were unable to utilise their different experiences and


\textsuperscript{11} Personal communication. Dave Howe, Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment

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practices in the struggle to achieve economic sustainability. Whether rich or poor, they were unable to influence and shape scientific endeavour and agricultural knowledge.

Arising from this, all settlement was circumscribed, deprived of necessary vitality by a regime of 'distance management', and all sustainable development of settlement compromised. This was contrary to success achieved in the other colonies. There, agriculturists were able to rise effectively to the challenges presented by changing socioeconomic and ecological conditions. This hypothesis emanates from a body of scholarship exploring the complexities of local knowledge systems that emphasises the importance of locally constructed knowledge which, as a result of local skill and initiative, adds to the corpus of scientific knowledge. Local knowledge, research and problem-solving are never closed or self-contained, but negotiated and reconfigured over time in the light of local, national and global factors. This study analyzes the ways in which farming in the Territory has been circumscribed from constructing, transmitting and using local experience and agricultural knowledge to achieve socioeconomic sustainability.

There are two main research objectives arising from the hypothesis. The first is to identify how women and men in various social groups were inhibited from utilising local learned knowledge, which might have enabled policies that were more conducive to sustainable settlement. Another objective is to ascertain the ways in which successive governments actively prevented this evolution. In consequence, the perception of both warrants an examination of the kind of 'Territorians' that emerged. This calls for an analysis of their struggle to construct and negotiate their very identities as 'settlers'. I contend that by not engaging with available agricultural knowledge, agricultural settlement was in effect forestalled. Self-evident political and inherent socioeconomic needs were ignored, and efforts to establish settlement were thus unable to benefit from the globalized nature of available agricultural knowledge or to profit from local learned experience.

I have chosen the Northern Territory as an area of study because it is a good example of failed settlement during the era of the 'scramble' for land and empire, when agriculture
was considered the primary engine of settlement. Both South Australian and Commonwealth governments aspired to this vision for the Northern Territory.

1.2 Conceptual framework
Conceptualization places this study within a wider framework of studies of colonial economic development and especially that sponsored by government intervention. This does not restrict the work merely to the broader frames, such as post-modernist concerns with local and 'ordinary' history, but places it distinctly within the larger political scene of colonial administration, attitudes to race, a background of world and colonial economics and immigration patterns. This historiography examines some specific aspects within their particular political context of change, tracing the failure of policies first envisaged by the South Australian Government in 1863 to establish agricultural settlement, and examining how succeeding Commonwealth administrations continued in that pursuit with little more success.

In many studies of the Territory's past, extraneous factors often tend to cloud issues. Allan Powell is apposite when he says that 'wild romanticism masquerading as history' has characterised much that has been written of white settlement in the Territory. He suggests that this may be to 'compensate for the dull conformity of [city dwellers] suburban lives'. Certainly the 'frontier image' has had a tendency to curtail constructive discussion. Popular history contains many *non sequiturs* and there remains something more than the 'myth' yet to be discovered by this study.

Agriculture is used as an inclusive term, and I consider issues from both the arable and the pastoral point of view. While principal analyses concern agriculture, and are confined largely to a consideration of that region of the Territory north of the Tanami Desert, known familiarly as the 'Top End', it is a study also of the roots of Northern Territory society.

The work is to some extent informed by personal experience. I have been directly involved in the assessment, management and review of land use in many parts of the world for many years, and this experience carries with it a degree of professional insight.
As well as being familiar with the scientific theory of agriculture, I am well grounded in practical aspects of crop and animal husbandry, planning and evaluation, and can trace my family background in farming for generations. This is relevant to my interpretation and analysis. Though personal, it is a focussed perspective, which draws extensively on a life's work, and allows me to decipher information that cannot be retrieved easily from written records. On the basis of specific experience, scientific knowledge and field research, my study is able to afford significant insights into the ways that farmers cope and creatively adapt technology in their efforts to achieve socioeconomic sustainability. This is relevant to my interpretation and analysis. Within the context of history, I argue that past colonial experience may be used as a corrective to many modern assumptions.

1.3 Scope
This study covers the period from 1863, when South Australia first annexed the Territory, its later handover of administration and management to the Commonwealth Government to the years immediately following World War II. Examining this span has allowed me to explore changes in the ways that generations of farmers have ineffectively struggled to sustain their livelihoods, despite continued efforts under both distant regimes to establish a thriving agricultural industry. Financial constraints, coupled with national and international complexities, have militated against success. But, more often, inept government intervention saw to it that commercial crop production always declined or was abandoned.

Attitudes to race, the background of world and colonial economics and the changing pattern of immigration all had their parts to play in aspects of the Territory's formative evolution under protracted colonial administration. This study examines some specific episodes within their particular political context of change. It traces the failure of policies which were first envisaged by the South Australian Government in 1863 to establish agricultural settlement, and examines how successive Commonwealth Government administrations continued in that pursuit with little more success.

1.4 Significance
This study affords new insights that should prompt further exploration and discussion by students. Disseminated through lectures, seminars, articles and in book-form, it presents a different perspective on some important aspects of Territory history in a way that has not been previously explored. Adding to the existing body of information about the history of the Northern Territory in a coherent way, it can increase understanding of the inherent paradox, when an 'owning' government sponsors the process of agricultural colonization. Rather than simply adding to the existing stock of facts, I have relied upon a degree of interdisciplinary research to deepen understanding and facilitate different perceptions.

In this study there are some implications for post-colonial development policy. Juliet Gardiner has observed that 'history's utter pervasiveness has no point of departure no terminus - just part of the power of explanation'. But I speak to the need for a fundamental revision of the understanding by which agriculture may be planned and implemented in the Territory. I contend that the anomaly of the Territory can only be understood by an analysis of its 'colonial' history, informed principally from the agricultural perspective with which this thesis is engaged.

Many see 'environmental conservation' and 'economic development' as contradictions in terms. Yet to others these concepts are not necessarily scientifically incompatible. It is still undecided whether further agricultural development in the Territory has relevance and, if it has, what the implications are for education in general and agricultural and Aboriginal education in particular. The question is one of more than passing interest, for some of the traumas of a negative past have had a devastating effect.

My research findings have a direct bearing on the functioning and effectiveness of Territory agricultural 'extension'. Policies may be informed by a better understanding of past mistakes. Policy-makers should consider that future administration and management of farming take full account of local agricultural knowledge and experience in ways that

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empower farmers to increased sustainability. They must recognize the importance of local knowledge. They should realize that this knowledge, through which technology is shaped and used, is a process moulded and shared by interlocking interests.

The Territory is emerging from the forge as somewhat less of the 'anachronism' of earlier times, and today can be seen more in the mirror image of Australia at large, for there has been something of a paradigm shift in the philosophy of settlement. It is not possible to understand the national (and ultimately international) politics of sustainability without recognizing the proper historical role that agriculturists themselves might play in the creation of global political coalitions on sustainability. I contend that sustainability rests on the ability of both farmers and 'extension' officers to understand and respond to changes in local environment, so that experiential knowledge provides a continuum of restructure.

2. Literature review
Coltheart has listed well over one hundred publications on the Territory's history from 1924-1982. Her list is by no means exhaustive, but is illustrative of the diversity of opinion and the troubled nature of debate that the history of settlement in the Territory has aroused over the years. In Adelaide, Melbourne and Canberra distant government administrations produced numerous enactments. The South Australian Government alone between 1863 and 1936 brought in over one hundred pieces of legislation relevant to the Territory. Numerous investigations by Royal Commissions, governments and private individuals have endeavoured to discover reasons for repeated failure.

Geoff Raby in his introduction to Mastering Risk states that:

The European occupation of Australia stands as one of the most remarkable achievements of the imperial enterprise. After some four centuries of restless overseas expansion, the European diaspora turned to

Australia. There it found a strange host environment, but one capable of being transformed in the hands of Europeans of the Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{15}

In the Northern Territory colonial context there is little evidence of any 'remarkable achievements'.

Alan Powell's \textit{Far Country} and \textit{The Shadows Edge}\textsuperscript{16} contribute usefully to the general corpus. His treatment does not delve deeply into the question of why, but he is generally dismissive of the Territory's agricultural potential. Nonetheless, in an additional chapter to the fourth edition of \textit{Far Country} printed in 2000, he argues that bad management seems to have been the common denominator but adds, without attempting to explain, that the value of the Northern Territory's production of fruit and vegetables had reached $55\ million\ by\ 1997. In this context it is perhaps useful to note that this has been achieved largely through the efforts of private endeavour.

On the other hand in 1966, JH Kelly, one of Australia's leading rural consultants, presented the results of seventeen years of research and fieldwork into the economy of northern Australia. He contended that the principal reason for failure lay in the handover of government ownership of the northern cattle lands, oil and minerals to international monopolies. He maintained that these powerful groups had used these resources against 'the interests of the economic development of Australia and increased living standards for its people'. He concluded that 'private enterprise' was not capable of tackling this important task. He called for a 'socialist' solution to be implemented immediately, with a government planning authority to centralise all northern development programmes. It should plan to extend communications by replacing 'beef roads' with railways and effect drastic but systematic re-evaluations in every economic endeavour. Some of his solutions can only be described as startling. He proposed an Act of Parliament to provide measures to enforce the 'declaration of all land and vegetation as the property of the Crown'. All large absentee holdings should be broken up, preferably without


compensation, and penalties should be imposed for the neglect of prescribed conditions of leasehold, water conservation and pasture protection.\footnote{JH Kelly. *Struggle for the North*. Sydney: Australian Book Society, 1966.}

In 1964 Bauer wrote what he himself described as a 'sombre' account of Northern Territory settlement up to the 1930s, but he still remained sanguine. His *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of Northern Australia* was prepared as a background paper to further government investigation into whether settlement of the Territory by agricultural enterprise still might 'promise success'.\footnote{FH Bauer. *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region*, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964.}

Colin White in his book on Australian economic history regards the analysis of risk imposed by the particulars of politics, the environment and the market as being crucial to understanding the 'continuing theme of vulnerability' to which economic activity is subject. He argues that both economic affluence and political stability characterize the established society, and that the changing pattern of its economic activity depends upon how well it is able to minimise the effects of either 'elevated risk' or poor resources.\footnote{C White. *Mastering Risk: Environment, Markets and Politics in Australian Economic History*. South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 1992.}

From a practical farming perspective the consideration of elevated risk and poor resources is crucial. These factors seldom seem to have been considered or properly understood in shaping development policy. In his study, Bauer concludes that successive governments have pursued no coherent policy.

Some would agree with Davidson's argument in his book, *The Northern Myth*, that problems posed by the various kinds of risk inherent to northern settlement present such a continuing theme of vulnerability as to make the attempt virtually unattainable. In 1972 Davidson held that, in spite of all technological developments and economic changes, economic grounds cannot justify the proposition of small-scale intensive agricultural
development in northern Australia. He concluded that any agricultural product that could be produced in northern Australia could be produced at lower cost in the south.\textsuperscript{20}

Throughout the history of the Territory there have many investigations into why it has failed to develop as hoped, and many of the reports are examined within the context of this thesis. Since 1945 there have been several analyses which have attempted to ascertain reasons for the Territory's failure to meet expectations. None have been conclusive, but all delve into questions of an agronomic nature and relate to the assessment of land and the technology of the general agricultural environment. Aspects pertaining to economic, social, management and planning imperatives have been examined without producing any definitive answer.

In 1981 the Commonwealth Council for Rural Research and Extension published a paper in which it tried to evaluate different rationales, but found that to rank them in order of importance was an exercise of mere academic interest. It postulated that all previous attempts to produce agricultural success had been conducted \textit{ab initio}, and pointed out the similarity of the Territory to Queensland where there were also many examples of early failure that had with time been overcome in the process of evolutionary progress.\textsuperscript{21} This may well be true, but it does not come any nearer to answering the question of why the agricultural history of the Territory presents such a dismal picture.

At a Canberra seminar in 1976, Professor Homer Aschmann, human/cultural geographer at the University of California and Visiting Fellow of the Northern Australian Research Unit in Darwin, said that the history of Northern Territory development 'is an extraordinary record of failure'. Indeed he went further, and declared that, after twelve months of research, reading and examining the results of past policy, he was now uncertain whether Australia wanted 'to populate the North and make it part of the \textit{ecumene}, part of the inhabited, developing world'.\textsuperscript{22}


MacDonald Holmes simply described the Northern Territory as an anachronism, and argued that the Crown had only granted its temporary annexation to South Australia in the expectation that the people of the Territory would soon seek statehood in common with all other Australian colonies. He described South Australia's attempts at settlement in the north as a 'Wakefield Folly'. Its boundaries could not rationally be considered as being applicable to a state, and thus cohesive community structure was in effect impossible to either create or sustain.  

Valerie Fletcher, in her thesis which looked into the results of the Royal Commission of 1895, attempted to evaluate the reasons for the stagnation of the Territory during the South Australian years. She argued that Britain 'abrogated its responsibility' for the residue lands in Australia by ceding them temporarily to the 'sparsely populated and indigent colony of South Australia'. That South Australia had been granted only temporary rights gave it no real motivation in encouraging development and that this was the root cause of its subsequent mismanagement of affairs in the Territory. In a later thesis covering the negotiation between South Australia and the Commonwealth and the latter's subsequent takeover, she augmented her earlier argument that the failure of the South Australian administration was due to its own small numbers, inadequate finance and poor motivation. She further argued that defence was the primary motive for a Commonwealth takeover and that consequentially it was able to accept the neglect to implement the policies discussed during the transfer debates.  

Peter Donovan's A Land Full of Possibilities and At the Other End of Australia provided further insights into the shaping of Federal government policy and were useful to the understanding of many social and related activities in the early Northern Territory. Bauer's seminal work deals more specifically with agriculture and has provided a very

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useful overview. Similarly, JM Powell’s insightful work on historical geography has proved helpful. Other secondary sources are listed in the bibliography. Many general views are supported in this thesis especially those of Austin, Reid, Reynolds, Rowley and O’Kelly on post-contact relations with Aboriginals.

On Chinese/European relations I have found much for reflection in the works of Timothy Jones, Diana Giese, Eric Rolls, MP Kennett and Margaret Rendell, and the many others mentioned more specifically in the text. These works have helped to place the Chinese in social context, and assisted in understanding specifics of their role in the Territory, particularly their abortive role in its agricultural development.

Primary source materials for the thesis were located in various archives. Unfortunately, certain records have not survived and there is some discontinuity in the historical record. Matters are further complicated because there were never many settlers and they, with a small number of notable exceptions, have left few manuscripts. Even where personal documents might have existed, it is perhaps likely that primitive living conditions in a tropical climate have precluded any chance of their survival.

Losses of official records have possibly occurred in the cyclones of 1897 and 1974; others may have been lost in the bombing of Darwin in 1942, though it is true that most

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27 Bauer.
were successfully evacuated.\textsuperscript{31} It is also probable that some records have disappeared since then. Bill Wilson noted that that a former librarian saw 'the first hand-written letter' by the 'first Commissioner of Police put on a bonfire',\textsuperscript{32} and others have been dismayed to learn of similar document destruction.\textsuperscript{33} A full record of events is difficult and some extrapolation has been necessary, and has been validated as far as possible with contemporary newspaper articles, letters to the editor and other supporting evidence.

The study uses a variety of archival sources, not only archival material in the National Archives but documents in agricultural extension, water supply and historical maps. Other important sources include parliamentary debate, articles in journals, such as the \textit{Journal of Geographical History}, as well as opinions expressed in books, reports and press clippings which are apposite to colonial development elsewhere, as well as those bearing directly on Territory agriculture and development. All of these provide insights into a Territory agriculture that has been unable to achieve any real sustainability based on its colonial past.

The study uses an extensive bibliography. There is very little in the literature that deals specifically with agricultural settlement, particularly in the area of arable farming in the Territory, but the body of literature as a whole provides background material to contextualise perspective.

\textbf{3. Theoretical and methodological approach}

The literature presents a confusing picture. Opinions both past and present differ as to the reason why but most agree that as an exercise in colonial development the Territory emerged in utter failure. I believe that the analysis of the problem demands an historiographical approach but, because hopes of viable colonial settlement were premised upon a rationale of agricultural development, an understanding of the science and practice of agriculture must inform its analysis.

\textsuperscript{33} Personal communication with Australian Archives Service.
This study is inclusive of the socioeconomic sustainability of Territory agriculture, and draws on insights derived from studies in social history, geographical history and interdisciplinary studies that involve agriculture. These include questions involving farming operations. Aspects of management, economics - including costs, availability of supplies and services, transport, storage, processing and marketing facilities and labour - as well as social aspects that had a bearing on deficiencies in regional planning and infrastructure, which resulted in the almost insurmountable inadequacies in the social environment. All are considered in context.

Experience underwritten by history provides viability when retelling experiences of rich and poor farmers' efforts in the past to achieve socioeconomic sustainability. My perspective focusses on the historical and spatial dimensions of agricultural knowledge to allow more comprehensive understanding of its cultural and social complexity. This is central to the proper conceptualization of sustainability at large. As well as reading and interpreting historical written documentation, my research methods include listening to informants and are based on an understanding of participatory rural appraisal.

Finally, my experience and background provide an interior view of agricultural knowledge and how it has been constructed, negotiated, contested and reconfigured over time. This is a necessary contribution to interpreting past practice and to informing a constructed understanding of policy and patterns of authority, which neither fitted farmers' realities and aspirations, nor encouraged any capacity for experimentation that might have generated new soil and conservation techniques that were adapted to local conditions. I use this methodological framework to provide a more rational account of the historical and political forces that were at play in the interaction of contrasting and conflicting policies in the attempt to settle the Northern Territory.

The historiography is sequential to enable analysis and explore various hypotheses, but for clarity within the general corpus, some topics are dealt with thematically so that these may be seen in context. I have divided the work into three parts. Part One gives the historical background to agricultural science, the philosophy and the socioeconomic theory which informed nineteenth-century colonial settlement in general, and that of
Australia and the Territory in particular. Part Two covers the initiation of colonial settlement under South Australia from 1863 to 1910. Part Three discusses the impact of Federal control from 1910-1947. Finally, some comparisons are outlined and indicative conclusions drawn.
PART 1

Rethinking colonial endeavour in relation to agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory, 1863 to 1945: a critical perspective

Historical Perspectives
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Conclusion to Part 1
PART 1

Historical Perspectives

Summary
The proper exercise of power is a symbiosis of regional community and regional authority. As Foucault \(^1\) saw it the proper exercise of power does not rely on coercion, although there were many historical examples of its blatant misuse. There can be many scholarly interpretations of Foucault's philosophy on the use of power but, in my understanding, he saw the coercive use of power as an exercise in futility and insufficient to fundamentally shape or transform society.

A confusing ambience surrounds the question of agricultural development, past and present, in the Northern Territory, and it is generally agreed that colonial settlement was less successful there than in the rest of Australia. It is my contention that a misuse of power by a continuum of distant government thwarted any natural and necessary progression towards the exercise of local power, with the result that throughout the Territory's long colonial history all attempts to establish sustainable development remained stillborn.

In developing my argument it is necessary to state the obvious truth that the development of 'modern' society has ancient roots and that its evolutionary process is founded fundamentally upon agriculture. Thus Part 1 of this thesis summarizes the evolutionary nature of agricultural technology, the global nature of its science and practice, and the essential role which the state had often played locally in furthering its advance. It outlines the theory informing imperial debate within the Australian and other English-speaking colonies particularly in regard to land tenure and the emergence of a regional approach, which in practice provided an increasing degree of local autonomy within the colonies. Overconfidence was a factor in South Australia's understanding of itself when it contrived strategies for its expansion into the Northern Territory. The section is rounded off with an overview of the issues that a democratic South Australia encountered when

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\(^1\) Michel Foucault. (1926-1984). Noted French structuralist philosopher examined concepts and codes by which societies operate and define themselves.
coming to grips with its own particular problems of land settlement, which contributed to its inability to understand the northern enigmas at a distance.

The argument
In 1863 the Government of South Australia took over the administration of the region in north Australia that we now know as the Northern Territory and opened it officially to white settlement. Most writers are of the opinion that South Australia failed in this endeavour and that it was with some relief that it handed the responsibility to the Commonwealth Government some forty years later.²

Annexation came at a period when the British Empire and European colonization were at their height. Europeans were enthused by great projects. The whole world was open to communication in a way that had never before been possible. European culture had now become a major influence in world culture and it in turn received reciprocal benefit. Education was no longer the exclusive preserve of an elite. Technologies and the sciences expanded to inform human horizons beyond earlier imaginings. The Northern Territory, founded at this zenith of global growth, singularly failed to develop in the same way as its colonial counterparts.

Colin White has it that conventional wisdom presents the conception of an Australia in geographic terms as if it existed independently of people. He argues that Australia is in fact more properly understood in terms of its people, whose technologies and institutional organizations have adapted themselves to the 'relevant physical matrix' in which they found themselves.³

Timothy Boon, Head of Collections Development at the Science Museum of London, speaks in more general terms, but has said much the same thing. He argues that the history of all science and, by inference its technology, is informed not only by the impact of that science on a society, but that there are also social factors involved. A history of

colonization includes science and technology and should therefore be 'particularly concerned with social explanations'.

Boon expands this theme, demonstrating how Thomas Kuhn in his *Structure of scientific revolutions* (1962) used historical example to support the view that science has not evolved as a smooth progression but more in a series of separate paradigms during which 'problems' were recognised and solved. He believed that the history of science must be examined within the social contexts in which that science is pursued and quotes Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and punish* (1977) and *The order of things* (1970) in support of that view. Foucault has it, 'that medicine in the past might have more to do with other aspects of life and conduct in the past than with medicine in the present'.

Many traditions and influences - social, political and economic - came together when the Territory was founded. During the nineteenth century agricultural science came of age, and through the medium of colonization and cultural intercommunication the assimilation and absorption of agricultural technologies was enhanced. Any proper understanding of the subsequent shaping of agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory, and the way it was to eventuate, requires some understanding of these factors. This section looks at them in the particular context of the time of first European settlement.

Nineteenth century agriculture was the product of the evolution of sophisticated local agricultural systems and technologies absorbed over centuries. From earliest times agriculture has involved technologies for effective crop cultivation and manufacture of vegetative and animal products for human consumption. The essential nature of agriculture to the wellbeing of ever more complex communities ensured that an interchange of ideas and technical knowledge continued unobtrusively throughout the ages. In British society the science and practice of agriculture had become a fashionable pursuit by mid-century. Issues of land tenure, cropping, marketing, and transport, the particular and general incentives, as well as the skills and financial standing required of the potential farmer had become the subjects of enlightened study and debate. It was

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understood that agricultural development was the necessary precursor to a sustainable colonization. It was understood as demonstrable fact. This paradigm remained virtually unquestioned until well into the 1950s. The cumulative agricultural knowledge and technique available to nineteenth century agriculturists and colonial planners are important factors when considering Northern Territory colonial development at the time of settlement, as much as the evolution of colonial government systems which permitted the development of local autonomous.

**Organisation**

Chapter 1 sets the scene with an overview of the agricultural science, the philosophy and the socioeconomic theory informing nineteenth-century colonial settlement in general, and that of Australia and the Territory in particular. Some salient points in the early growth of agriculture as a worldwide phenomenon are considered. How successful settlement always depended upon the development of agriculture. How ultimately its science and practice was absorbed, experienced, grasped, and routinely employed by an expanding and global European hegemony. How this permeated and formed a backdrop to emergent eighteenth-century enlightenment and gave rise to subtle dichotomies in understandings of socioeconomic theories as they related to the settlement of land.

Chapter 2 examines the dialogue within the British Empire that was both cultural and material and was closely interwoven in the process of colonization, and is relevant to an understanding of policy initiatives employed by South Australian governments and subsequent Commonwealth administrations in the Territory. The particular context of Australian land settlement, relative to immigration patterns throughout the English-speaking diaspora, is examined to show how in practice local autonomy was necessarily permitted within the general context of distant oversight by the home government. Each colony was thus able to emerge as a viable community with its own developed socio-economic pattern, gradually negotiated and reconfigured over time and dictated by local imperatives of climate, soil and demographics.

Chapter 3 outlines the particularity of the mindset of mid-nineteenth century South Australia and its impact on, and relevance to, initial Territory settlement.
Chapter 1

An ancient lineage: social and philosophical underpinnings
Chapter 1

An ancient lineage: social and philosophical underpinnings

Summary
There is a continuum in the development of the science and technology of agriculture from an ancient past towards modernity. All advances arose from, and were dependent upon, the emergence of distinct local autonomies. Over time a global understanding became incorporated into localised European practice and from the eighteenth century onwards the advance of agricultural research, education and economics was rapid. Through the agency of textbooks, education, imperial institutions and improvement societies, its science and technology were inherent in the nineteenth century colonial dialogue. The influence of European economic expansion and the philosophies of the Enlightenment in turn had significant effects on the British settlement of Australia.

1.1 Agriculture: a brief summary of its science and technology

In a review in which the historiography and historical complexity of science as a social practice was discussed Charles WJ Withers quoted from Steven Shapin's *The scientific revolution:

I take for granted that science is a historically situated and social activity and that it is to be understood in relation to the contexts in which it occurs.¹

Organized production of food and fibre and their processing in human communities can be traced back for at least 12 000 years.² The domestication and cultivation of plants and animals have always had the joint objectives of understanding and controlling the human ecological environment to enable the continuance of the human species in ever more

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complex societies. By definition science is about knowledge acquired and developed into
general principles by observation and the classification of natural phenomena and
technique and as such agriculture is one of the oldest of the sciences. Its evolving practice
has embraced the separate sciences of physics, chemistry and biology as well as the
social sciences of psychology and economics. From earliest times agriculture has
included not only the technologies for effective crop cultivation and harvesting and those
necessary for animal production but also has been the catalyst for organising the
manufacture and distribution of product.\(^3\)

Carbon dating and other techniques have shown that agriculture was an established
practice at least 9,000 years ago and that there is indeed some indication of the
domestication of animals many thousands of years earlier.\(^4\) Climatic change is no new
phenomenon.\(^5\) Evidence suggests that from 11,000 to 9,000 years ago the climate
became warmer and wetter in the Middle East thus altering its ecosystem from steppe to
open woodland. This, it is generally believed, led to the domestication of plants and
animals, probably because the warmer and wetter weather made farming possible. These
favourable conditions immediately followed upon the last great Ice Age and accelerated
the process of animal and plant selection. The process resulted in the cultivation of crop
plants such as rice, wheat and barley in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and potatoes

\(^3\) Papers in Economic Prehistory. ES Higgs, ed. Vol. 1; Barbara Bender. Farming in Prehistory: From
Hunter-gatherer to Food-producer. London: John Baker, 1975; Patricia Phillips. Early Farmers of West
Mediterranean Europe. London: Hutchinson, 1975; Colin Burgess and Roger Mikel, eds. Settlement and
University Press, 1976; IJS Megaw, eds. Hunters, Gatherers and First Farmers Beyond Europe.
Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977; T Douglas Price and James A. Brown. Prehistoric hunter-
gatherers: the emergence of cultural complexity. Douglas Price and James A. Brown, eds. Orlando:

\(^4\) M Zveibl. Hunter in transition - Mesolithic societies of temperate Eurasia and their transition to
Farming: Department of Archaeology & Prehistory, University of Sheffield, Cambridge University
Press, 1986; PJ Ucko, and PW Dimbleby, eds. The Domestication and Exploitation of Plants and
Animals, Research Seminar in Archaeology and related subjects. Chicago: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd.,
Aldine Publishing Co. Ltd., 1969; Carl Ortwin Sauer, Agricultural origins and dispersal; the

Institute, 1995, quoting Albert Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza, [1984]; The Neolithic Transition and the
and maize in the Americas. The practice of animal husbandry was also adapted to suit changing conditions. Throughout the European-Asian land mass the importance of reindeer husbandry gradually declined and was replaced by selective breeding of cattle from the huge wild ox (Bos Taurus) which stood around 1.8 metres (six feet) at the shoulders. Similarly, sheep were adapted from wild varieties, kept in herds and selected for wool and meat.

1.2 Regional development
Like many aspects of human growth and change in society, agriculture did not emerge from a single area but developed almost simultaneously across Asia, the Middle East and the Americas. From its origins on the delta of the Tigris/Euphrates and the Nile valley in Egypt agriculture spread northward to Europe, appearing in Greece about 6 000 BC, Hungary 5 000 BC, France 4 500 BC and Poland in around 4 250 BC. 7

Theories of religion and farming have often been closely related. Probably the first agricultural teachers were the priests, who were frequently leaders in early societies. Hesiod, Greek poet and philosopher, writing around 700 BC, gave instructions on seasonal farming operations and linked them with recurrent astronomical events, which were ruled by dangerous gods. In order to survive in those circumstances he thought it best for farmers always to be fair and just in dealing with others. 8 In an age without any other way of reckoning time, such megalithic structures as Stonehenge, and others to be found across northern Europe almost to the Arctic Circle, are thought to have provided a primitive means of determining the seasons with which to regulate the farming year. Whether this is true or not it is certain that farming operations upon which society depended for survival relied on tremendous organised community effort.

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With the development of agricultural diversification, humankind's ability to produce more food and textiles from a given area of land increased. In consequence, populations grew and societies were able to develop locally within a framework of greater stability and sophistication. Rapid evolution of techniques for irrigation, rotation and fertilisation of crops continued from around 7000 BC. The techniques required for maintaining soil fertility, for food storage and for the extraction of materials and textiles, were rapidly developed as societies became more structured and centralised. Sowing instructions had been written in Egypt at least as early as 2000 BC, and over the centuries many treatises on how to improve crops and yields appeared. Some of the skills and lore had magical and religious connotations, but all complex systems developed agricultural traditions. The advancement of knowledge in Sumer and Egypt depended upon the continued 'scientific' learning of leaders and harnessing of the community energy.  

The role that the state took in the planning and organisation of agriculture became dominant from an early stage. Without state planning no society would have been able to advance its agriculture much beyond the primitive. We owe much to their methods. There is an age-old continuity to the understanding that a successful and sustainable agricultural structure is reliant on both the state and generations of husbandmen. Dissemination has been facilitated, as the world has grown ever smaller. Modern scholarship has rediscovered the quantum of the immense contribution by these early societies to the science of agriculture. Many writers, most recently Jared Diamond, have argued that the continuum of agricultural technique and its dissemination was facilitated in the Eurasian land mass by an interconnected geography.

The earliest known agricultural societies arose in the basins of the Tigris, Euphrates and Nile rivers, and their counterparts in China developed in the semi-arid loess plains. It is from them that the basic techniques of a structured agriculture first evolved. The crops,
technologies and systems of ancient civilisations have become subsumed, adapted, altered and suffused within our own culture and throughout the world. The ability to make accommodations for local conditions is the critical factor and that in turn is always dependent on proper delegation of authority, regardless of the hierarchical nature of society.

The Sumerians developed their systems on the Euphrates somewhere around five thousand years ago. They cultivated crops of barley, wheat and flax, and grew dates, apples, plums and grapes. They are known as the first producers of sheep for wool, but also milked the ewes to make cheese and butter. The city of Ur of biblical fame slaughtered some 3,000 sheep per annum for meat from a flock of 10,000. It cultivated some 6,000 acres of land, of which half was in fallow at any one time. The agricultural labour force of 2,500 was organised, and included storehouse recorders, work foremen, overseers and harvest supervisors, as well as labourers. Oxen were used to plough the land. Onagers, an extinct species of donkey, were yoked four to a team and harnessed by collars and reins to pull wagons. Horses, individually named and recorded for breeding purposes, later replaced them. Archaeologists have subsequently discovered the written instructions for their proper upkeep and management. 11

Sumerian civilisation had developed along urban lines with the people living in large concentrations, leaving home daily to work in the fields, but on the flood plains of the Nile Valley in Egypt small farming villages served the surrounding country. Archaeological evidence suggests that the intensification of agriculture in Egypt did not develop fully until domestic animals from the Euphrates' civilisations were adopted around 3,600 BC. From that introduction an increasingly mature, integrated and wealthy agriculture evolved in the alluviums of the Nile valley where state agriculture was organised on almost modern lines.

In dynastic Egypt a competent bureaucracy administered agriculture and tenant farmers were provided with land within royal domains or temple estates. They were also supplied with seed and draft oxen by the state. The tenants paid a fair rent of three and a half bushels of grain to the acre in return for the benefit and use of these state capital assets. The harvest returned eleven times the sowing, and it has been estimated that two crops per annum may have been produced. Main crops were six-rowed barley, emmer wheat, flax, lentils, onions and beans. All excess produce was stored in huge silos provided by the state. Cattle were grazed on stubble, swamps and wastelands and were selectively bred for meat and milk. Sheep, goats and pigs were farmed as well as ducks and geese. The state authorities also directed irrigation and took effective measures to control the waters of the Nile. From extant records, at least one large masonry dam was under construction around 2925 BC and a diversion channel of 19 kilometres was constructed into Lake Moeris to carry excess flood waters for later irrigation release as required.\(^{12}\)

By 2000 BC agriculture was far enough developed to support large urban civilisations on the Indus on the Indian subcontinent. These farm lands appear to have been more extensive than those of either Egypt or Sumer. Archaeological investigation of Mohenjodaro and Harappa is limited, unfortunately, by an inability to decipher the scripts that have been discovered and so our understanding of their agrarian organisation is less complete. These societies, however, produced enough to support large and technically proficient urban populations. They wove and dyed cotton fabrics and used wheeled wagons. Their economy was sustained by efficient trading systems that involved a thriving river and sea traffic. The basic cropping pattern employed was similar to that of modern India. Sugarcane, legumes, mangoes and several other varieties of fruit were grown. Rice growing and irrigation were widespread. Livestock husbandry enabled crop rotations and utilized animal manure. Growing seasons were classified. Records of soil and rainfall were kept and charted to describe vast and diverse areas. These were used to provide information for a state authority to construct and maintain irrigation works,

allocate water supply and supervise use.\textsuperscript{13}

In China, it is supposed that the first attempts at farming also followed upon the retreat of the last Ice Age. It has been postulated that the mountainous regions and adjacent lowlands of western and central China were the earliest agricultural area and the largest ever to be established. Fortunately, the record from as early as three and a half thousand years ago has been preserved. In China wheat has been the staple in the north from early times while further south rice has predominated. Many fruits, vegetables and other crops such as sorghum, millet, tea, cotton, barley, soybean and peanuts, to name but a few, have been cultivated and improved upon, and have provided useful cash crops for the Chinese farmer over centuries.

Rice, the staple for perhaps half the world's population, was first cultivated in China by colonists from India around three thousand years ago. It was rapidly adopted, greatly improved and specifically bred to suit local climate variability and husbandry. Irrigation, practised for at least four thousand years, is thought to have been substantially influenced by Babylonian and Sumerian techniques. By the middle of the first millennium AD, Chinese agriculture had become the most intensive in the world. Field drainage, by open ditches and dyking, was common, crops were routinely fertilised with ash, night soil and oil cakes and a 'three fields in two years' rotation system regularly practised. Already by 200 BC the substantial Tu-kiang Dam supplied an irrigation area of some 500,000 acres. The Grand Canal was built and lengthened over many centuries to eventually extend over sixteen hundred kilometres. Chinese farmers, administered and organised by a professional bureaucracy, had brought into production ever more 'wasteland'. The distribution of grain and other produce was facilitated by co-ordinated systems of canal and river transport. Today, the agrarian principles, systems and crops developed by the Chinese over centuries continue largely unchanged throughout Chinese Turkistan, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia and the valleys of Tibet to Korea, Japan and Indo China — in


### 1.2.1 Development of European farming practice

By Roman times the farming of crops and animals was well established in Western Europe and the 'family farm' formed the basic unit. Later when large farming estates were established within the Roman Empire the family farm often remained with an established peasant tenantry. Available technology and the cyclical nature of the seasons dictated agricultural organisation. At planting and harvest the whole family would work in the fields. At other times the men did the outside work of cultivation while women's responsibility revolved around the home and the making of clothes. The necessary skills were acquired and skills passed on from generation to generation. Where slaves were used their work roles were similarly organised.

Most of the crops known today, grains and legumes as well as radishes and turnips, vines and fruits, were grown in a mixed farming system. Trade between regions existed both within and outside the Empire. For example, grain was exported from Britain to Gaul and cereals grown in Egypt, Sicily, Sardinia and Gaul were exported to Italy. Commerce extended throughout the known world of Europe and Asia, resulting in growing familiarity with the crops and technology of the Middle East, India and China.

By 200 AD the fundamental practices upon which modern agriculture is based were known. Most of the hand tools in use are similar to those of modern times. It was understood that some soils were better for specific crops than others, and that the successful practice of agriculture required steps to be taken to maintain and augment fertility. Basic soil fertility was evaluated then as now by colour, adhesion and general texture. It was maintained and enhanced with organic material from the farm midden, composed of animal and human excrement and household waste. Marling – the
application of earth containing lime, clay and sand - was employed to improve texture as well.

Field drainage, where required, used a combination of deep open ditches into which covered, lateral drains, formed by loose stones or bundles of twigs placed lengthwise, were led from the cropping areas. No crop was grown in the same area consecutively. The 'two-field' system was common in which a specific crop was sown only in alternate years, then a year's cultivated fallow followed cropping to kill weeds. The beneficial practice of growing legumes for 'ploughing-in' as a green manure to increase the yield of a following cereal crop was known. Similarly, the fundamentals of livestock husbandry were well established. Different breeds of cattle were particular to certain areas. Optimum breeding ratios of males to females were understood and the age of first breeding carefully controlled at two years for cattle, and somewhere between two and three years for sheep. Goats and pigs were also important. Young sows were bred from between 12 to 20 months of age and served so that they should farrow (give birth) in July or August to coincide with the harvest stubbles and the fall of nuts, such as acorns, in the forests. Animals were slaughtered ideally only when very fat. 15

The end of the Roman Empire and the next thousand years saw many changes to the agricultural and political map of Europe. It is convenient to consider the period as falling into two quite distinct periods. The first, commencing approximately from the sixth century, was characterised on the whole by continuous, albeit gradual, development. The second began with the catastrophe of the Black Death in the fourteenth century which decimated the population, but which ultimately proved to be the catalyst of more rapid progress over the next two centuries.

Following the end of empire, warfare and large migrations had brought about changes in population distribution and social structure. David Keyes in his recent book, *Catastrophe*, has postulated that dramatic short-term climatic change in the fifth century precipitated these disruptions - nevertheless a substantial growth in population did occur over the period, which prompted the use of more complex tools, forest clearing and reclamation of marsh and heath.

Gradually, the typical early mediaeval agricultural organization known as the 'open field' system began to emerge. This employed a simple two-course or three-course rotation with fallowing. Stock grazed the stubbles and waste crop residue after cropping. Village land was organised into two or three fields with every village peasant family allotted a number of individual strips, scattered indiscriminately. Theoretically, each family holding comprised some 30 acres with strips equally divided among the three arable fields but, in practice, there were wide variations in the size of holdings and some became very small.

The introduction of the wheeled plough with a mouldboard in around the tenth century was an important innovation, which enabled the furrow to be turned and its depth varied. In more prosperous regions the introduction of the horse collar, invented in China, enabled horses to put their full weight to the plough, although teams of oxen remained the cheaper option. The design of many hand tools improved and windmills for grinding grain came into general use.

Introduced crops from Asia and the Middle East, such as citrus, rice, sugarcane and cotton, were grown in favoured areas. Between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, German and Dutch peasants were given incentives to take up farming in Eastern Europe. In France, new land was cleared for farming and new villages constructed. In England, land under cultivation was greatly expanded. Throughout Europe the monastic orders often made it their practice to pioneer farming in remote places. Towards the end of the

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period written instruction in farm management began to appear for landowners, aristocracy and ecclesiastical magnates, and this was absorbed and passed on to the illiterate peasants who worked the land. 17

In the fourteenth century the climate seems to have changed yet again and this time in Europe for the worst. Harvests suffered through continued periods of bad weather. Land that had been reclaimed from marsh and sea was again flooded. This was followed by plague. The Black Death first broke out in 1347 and it is estimated that within a very few years it had reduced the population of Europe by as much as 33 per cent. Misfortune was exacerbated by war. Land lay untiled, villages were empty and there was starvation everywhere.

In a recent article in History Today, MS Bruce argues that a unique conjunction of human and environmental factors went into creating this crisis of the mid-fourteenth century that precipitated great social and demographic change. On the evidence of a recently published map he concludes that the subsequently sparsely populated region of the English Fens had been, prior to the Black Death, so intensively farmed that it had formed the 'demographic centre of gravity of England'. 18

Much of continental Europe recovered only slowly and poor 'peasant' farming often became dominant. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines peasant agriculture as being characterised by farm families whose production is often not much in excess of what they consume. Dependent entirely on what they themselves produce, they are bound by the imperative to minimise risk, reluctant to adopt new methods lest these result in crop failure and actual starvation. Under these circumstances productivity per unit of land remains low and general fertility tends to become depleted by continuous cropping. The peasant farmer suffers from a double jeopardy - lack of sufficient available manure and

an absolute inability to purchase any. Illiteracy and suspicion of outsiders often exacerbate his condition.\textsuperscript{19}

In England and the Netherlands, on the other hand, the disasters precipitated the rise of the relatively prosperous 'husbandman' whose wealth, health and security provided more certain reward for his own efforts. By the end of the sixteenth century the progress in the technology of agriculture associated with the 'Agricultural Revolution' was particularly well advanced in Holland and Britain. Within a hundred years of the first appearance of plague, the Netherlanders had not only repaired flood damage on earlier reclaimed land but also improved on old methods generally. As a result, rotation no longer required a fallow period. Nitrogen producing legumes became integral to a system utilising animal manure augmented by town waste. The Low Countries became legendary for powerful horses and the size and milk yield of dairy cattle.\textsuperscript{20}

Recovery in Britain was initially motivated by changes to land tenure and the organisation of land holdings. A decreased population meant that the open field system was no longer practical. Under the old system livestock grazed randomly and few fodder crops were harvested. Few animals were fed over the long winter months, the greater proportion being slaughtered for meat before starvation killed them anyway. Many of the more successful peasants joined with the landowners, by exchange and at times by purchase, to consolidate holdings, and fence or hedge soon enclosed large single blocks. With 'enclosure', the day of the peasant was over and that of the yeoman farmer in England began.

The enclosure movement proved more popular than is commonly supposed and often came about through mutual agreement between tenant and landlord, whereas, in continental Europe change was much slower and strip farming continues in certain areas even today. Over six million arable acres were enclosed in Britain, and the Norfolk four-


course system of cropping rotation, or local variants of it, became accepted practice. In Britain, individual yeoman farmers now cultivated roots, legumes and the better grasses and stored them as winter fodder to fatten stock. More and better livestock were bred with increased growth rates and better quality meat. Milk yield and the overall size of all animals improved. There was greater fleece weight in sheep, and pigs and poultry no longer survived only as useful scavengers but were bred for profit. Bigger and stronger horses resulted in improved transport and soon replaced the less manageable oxen as draught animals.

By the late eighteenth century long-term sustainable farming methods employing complex systems for the increase and improvement of soil fertility had become firmly established. A new understanding of the complementary nature of different crops and livestock, of the nutritional requirements of both plants and animals, resulted in an astonishing increase in agricultural productivity.

Stimulated by the improving landlord and the emerging class of commercial farmer, traditional agricultural systems were transformed. Farms became compact and economical, and the tenant was able to develop his own capital. Landlord and tenant were now business partners and the one became as avid as the other in investing in technical improvement. The new rotations, adapted and adopted on British farms, were to remain standard practice for the next one hundred and fifty years. It is argued that the 'Agricultural Revolution' underpinned the Industrial Revolution itself. In the English-speaking world, at least, a farming 'way of life' emerged that offered respectability and prosperity; and with Britain's imperial vision at its peak the British way of farming seemed the obvious formula for settlement of the 'new lands'.

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By the mid-nineteenth century the world had changed irrevocably and the foundations of modern society had been laid through the dramatic changes in the organisation and increased productivity of the agricultural industry. By the mid-nineteenth century British farming had become the world’s exemplar and its colonists carried its organisational method to North America and Australia and eventually to the greater part of the globe.

1.2.2 Agricultural research, education and economics
Treatises on the economics of farming were not unknown to the ancient world. For example Marcus Porcius Cato (234-149 BC) and Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC) catalogued the requirements of labour inputs, machinery and implements for particular sizes of Roman farms. Nevertheless, by the Middle Ages, agriculture was not deemed to be a subject for serious study. It was thought altogether too commonplace for its lore to be transmitted more than verbally from farmer to farmer and generation to generation. In the thirteenth century in the Western World only one writer on agriculture, Crescentius, is known. Conrad Heresbach wrote in sixteenth-century Germany on the practicalities of rotation, weed control, planting and harvesting but his instruction was still based on Roman methodology. Later, some works of instruction in farm management for the estate owners of Europe began to appear and in the eighteenth century a few states in Germany established schools for farmers. These, however, soon languished without apparent long-term success, probably because they were seen as being too academic.

In Britain, on the other hand, the practical farmer had a real interest and took seriously the study of the scientific application of rotations. Throughout the long history of agriculture wherever practised, crop rotation - as opposed to monoculture or arbitrary crop succession - has been practised. But the new British systems were unique in that

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25 Lord Ernle.

they were planned for high and enduring productivity at optimal levels and were established on sound scientific principles. The Norfolk four-course system, which takes its name from the county of Norfolk, England, had become standard practice even before the end of the seventeenth century. It was of prime importance as its innovations eradicated the need for the unproductive fallow, which was now replaced by fodder crops for livestock winter-feeding.

The basic rotation comprised wheat in the first year, followed by turnips, then barley undersown with clovers and ryegrass, cut as hay in the following year or grazed. The effects were cumulative and resulted in increased soil fertility and better fed animals. More and better animal manure was produced for direct application to the fields and the practice of winter folding sheep on turnips in the field not only improved the animals' nutrition, but had the complementary effect of improved plant nutrition in the following cereal crop.27

Rothamsted Experimental Station demonstrated the efficacy of selecting rotations in simple ratios from three basic crop classifications. These were - row crops (potatoes and other vegetable crops); cereals; sod forming (grass crops, or other 'rest' crops). Classified thus, flexible rotations could be planned and adapted specific to locality, topography, soil and climate. The value of the new rotations lay in their ability to effect optimal interaction of crops to each other, to soil condition, and at the same time to counterbalance the effects of pests, weeds and plant disease. Climate, soil and the relative economic importance of different crops might vary regionally but, irrespective of local conditions, the broad classifications of row, grain and sod-forming crops could now be incorporated into effective and sustainable systems. Sound rotational planning brought with it other advantages. Labour and equipment could be better organised and the ever-present risks of the effects of bad weather and market variability greatly reduced. Farming now became an efficient year-round business and the wealth of both individual tenant farmer and landlord enabled them to put their minds to further improvement -the

27 Lobban, pp.37-56.
invention of farm machines and implements and experimentation in related scientific and biological theory.

Landowners, who were often men of eminence such as Sir Joseph Banks, botanist and longtime president of the Royal Society, threw themselves enthusiastically into spreading the gospel. The first experiments in animal and plant nutrition by Sir John Bennet Lawes produced enormous advance. In partnership with Sir Henry Gilbert, he founded the modern fertilizer industry by patenting the process for the production of superphosphate in 1842. Later, he endowed his estate at Rothhamsted to the nation and, as a world-renowned experimental station, the work that he initiated continues to the present day.

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew were also an engine of empire which Richard Groves of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), amongst others, has explored. Kew Gardens engendered 'hundreds of botanic gardens cultivated around the globe' that were committed to experimentation with diverse 'economic' plants such as quinine, rubber, cotton, jute, tea and various timbers. The men trained and exported by Kew, described by the French as the 'brain of British Empire', founded similar establishments that were funded by both central and colonial governments. These gardens functioned severally as social attractions, institutions of empire and erstwhile market gardens as well as scientific institutions. They illustrated an ambience in which the practice of agricultural science, imperial nationalism and the pursuit of leisure were irretrievably mixed.

1.2.3 Textbooks, imperial institutions and improvement societies

The growing profitability of farming as a business spawned popular British agricultural textbooks. Arthur Young was, perhaps, the most influential amongst agricultural writers but there are many others of interest to the modern reader. Improving landlords took personal interest in the education of their tenant farmers in the new methods and societies

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for the improvement of agriculture started to flourish. A Board of Agriculture, financed largely from private capital, was established in 1793 which, amongst other things, published surveys of each county with the aim of disseminating best practice throughout the kingdom. The world's first universities to appoint professors of rural agriculture and economy were Oxford and Edinburgh in 1790 and 1797 respectively.

Landlords who developed the methodology of the Field Day and local Agricultural Show to instruct their tenants took the practical side of agricultural education in hand personally. Recent research has tarnished to some extent the reputation and role of the great estate owners and 'improvers', nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the success with which this agricultural revolution was greeted was due in large part to their individual efforts. Often they were men of real ability, many of whom set up model farms on their estates. This mutual interest in the land by landlord and tenant produced a different understanding of land ownership to complement and soften the context of Edmund Burke's rationalisation that 'a law against property is a law against industry'.

One of the most influential of these 'improvers' was Thomas Coke of Holkam in Norfolk. In 1776 his land at Holkam was described by contemporaries as '40 000 acres of open and barren estate - fit only to produce a few thin crops of rye and a few miserable ill bred sheep'. Taking the advice of practical farmers, in 1778 he invited a number of them from neighbouring districts to come and examine his property, and discuss its management with him and his tenants. This first get-together grew to become 'the most important

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30 Beckett, p. 51; Lobban, p. 45.
31 Beckett; Lobban.
34 Landes, p.23. Quoting Edmund Burke.
agricultural meetings in the Kingdom'. They were three-day events. Hundreds of 
enthusiasts, with Coke at their head, passed the mornings riding over and inspecting the 
property, its produce, its cattle, its sheep and new machinery. The afternoons were taken 
up with judging and awarding prizes to competitors. Over the years Coke improved the 
organic content and structure of his soils. He established complementary systems of 
grazing and cropping. He planted trees, which to this day are the great beauty of 
Holkam. The value of the annual fall of timber from these alone was greater than the 
total income of the estate when he took over. Annual income overall is estimated to have 
increased eightfold in his lifetime and, concurrent with improvement, wildlife increased 
in diversity and number. Holkam today is famous for its profusion of wildfowl - 
widegon, teal, mallard, greylag, pinkfoot and Canada geese, snipe, woodcock, partridge 
and pheasant. By the time Coke died forty years later he had transformed these barren 
acres 'from an open warren into one of the most beautifully wooded properties in 
England'. Whether Coke's fame is largely due to his own propaganda, as Parker has 
argued, is immaterial to the fact that from the eighteenth century onwards landowners 
sought better returns from their lands and the farming tenant sought more autonomy in 
the management of his holding.

1.2.4 The Enlightenment and Agriculture
Social change associated with 'agricultural revolution' and the underlying philosophies of 
the Enlightenment inspired some ethical motivation that is particularly well documented 
with regard to the more marginal areas of Scotland.

In Scotland, after some 300 years of war, social and climatic disruptions also, the path to 
recovery in its agriculture took its own route and had a later start than in England. In 
1661 a law was passed by the Scottish Parliament that:

1975.
Every heritor, life rentor or wad-settor worth £1000 of rent shall enclose for ten years at least 4 acres annually and plant this with trees and others, more or less as to rental value; these plots to be free of all burdens and quartering of horse for 19 years from the date of the Act ... Anyone cutting a planted tree to be fined £10 or to work for one year to the person injured for meat and drink only.  

After the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 there arose a strong political drive to indoctrinate 'a new generation of landowners with new ideas'. The Scottish Board of Agriculture was established with the specific intent of:

(promoting) the formation of a soil of perpetual or indefinite fertility, artificially, in imitation of some soils found in nature ... aimed at building up soil structure as a main plank of reformed lands.

The spirit of Scottish 'improvers' was expressed in a letter written in 1773 by Robert Ainslie to Thomas Graham of Balgowan. He advised him to:

improve the fields and cultivate the genius of the people for the happiness of both proprietor and tenant, [as] an increase of wealth to both and a beauty to the country.

Throughout eastern Scotland new well designed villages were built by the magnates to accommodate those displaced and they also saw to it that new cottage industries were developed to provide for their upkeep and occupation. From a contemporary we read:

Mr Drummond of Comrie has lately laid out the village of Dalginross and a market place on a completely barren moor covered with a thin moss and a bed of gravel. The new settlers are laying a new soil and improving the ground... [and]... George Denipster the local landowner near Forfar engaged a surveyor to lay out a new town at Letham, Angus

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38 Brien, p.46. Quoting from Rev. J Robertson, Callander, *A General View of Agriculture, etc.* 1799. This law was to remain in force for the next 100 years.
40 Brien, p.18. Quoting Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1784).
in 1788, 'Streets were laid out, the new houses built of stone and lime, two stories high and all slated.'

The socioeconomic theory informing these practices arose directly from the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, which contributed as much to social issues as it did to economic theory, and whose luminaries were involved either directly or by family association with agricultural reform. David Hume's Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals held that individual happiness depends on the degree to which one brings happiness to others. Adam Smith's great work An Inquiry into the nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations, published in 1776, was augmented in his lectures on moral philosophy and government and gave Hume's dictum comprehensive form. The result was a practical formulation of the essential reciprocity of obligation for successful land settlement. Self-interest demanded a nice mixture of altruism, rational benevolence and shrewd, unsentimental, businesslike response.

On the resettled farms landlords constructed substantial and functional farmhouses, cottages for farm workers and 'steadings' that even today adapt well to the requirements of modern farming. They sought responsibility from their tenants and actively encouraged the best and most skilful farmers to work in partnership with them in improving the land. To this end long-term leases were offered which subsequently resulted in some families retaining the same lease over generations. Huge sums were invested in improving land with the initial tenants acting as defacto contractors in drainage work and fencing.

On rent, Smith had made the point in Wealth of Nations that it should be the highest amount that a landlord was able to obtain for a lease under open market conditions. However, he was careful to qualify this by saying that rental of land was a variable, dependent on locality and the amount that a tenant could afford to pay. In asserting

43 David Hume (1711-1776). Philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, historian, economist and essayist.
this, Smith was following long-held exemplary custom. Based on the precedents in Roman property law, as Gibbon put it, 'no solid or costly improvements could be expected from a (tenant) farmer’ who only held the land under lease, and furthermore:

In this boundless subject, the historian will observe the location of land and money, the rent of the one and the interest of the other, as they materially affect the prosperity of agriculture and commerce. The landlord was often obliged to advance the stock and instruments of husbandry, and to content himself with a partition of the fruits. If the feeble tenant was oppressed by accident, contagion, or hostile violence, he claimed a proportionable relief from the equity of the laws.

John Rae wrote a definitive biography of Smith in 1896 and said that Smith defended the concept of mutual reciprocity inherent in rental agreements against proponents of Ricardo's less ethical dictum:

Dr John Anderson 'the first and true author of Ricardo’s theory of rent’ disputed some of Smith’s theories but Smith did not alter his opinions in subsequent editions but only strengthened his argument.

The understanding was that annual rent should be based on a reasonable return on landlord’s invested capital but that it should be limited to an annual figure that was sufficient to enable the tenant to live comfortably, maintain and improve his stock and equipment, and employ adequate labour. In practice it was understood that the landlord’s investment was responsible for capital inputs and their maintenance, while the tenant was expected to find the working capital for labour, stock and equipment. Rents were varied in times of bad harvest or poor market conditions. Because of the good relationships generally existing between landlord and tenant in this working partnership, in practice rents were varied after mutual discussion. Terms of lease always included stipulations as to the rotation generally accepted as being specific to soil and market conditions for the

46 Gibbon, p. 828.
particular district and which would render optimum benefit to soil improvement and return to the farmer. 48

1.3 Colonial dialogue
By 1800 Britain had a global empire extending from India to Australia, Canada and the Caribbean. All colonies developed their own distinct characteristics although relationships, both cultural and material, were closely interwoven with the centre at the same time. Estate owners and others involved with empire building through colonial or military service, by investments or other interests in colonial trade, had imbibed the new philosophies. In Australia, understandings were frequently at variance with colonial government, which was often more intent on raising revenue to cover the administrative costs of colonial establishment than in the efficiencies of the economic structure of farming. Nonetheless, with the exception of the Northern Territory, necessary accommodations between opposing interests were reached and Australia was successfully settled in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion
The science and practice of agriculture was well understood in the nineteenth century. It is often thought that one of the reasons for the failure to establish settlement in the Territory, under South Australia's aegis, was that the agricultural science and technology of the day was insufficient to the task. This was not the case and it may be assumed that it was certainly sufficient to permit settlement. Alternatively, it may be argued that, even though agriculture was well understood at the time and there were many skilled practitioners available, South Australia failed to understand the need to delegate its authority in the Northern Territory and thus that the possibility of proper decisions or policies based on local reality being allowed to evolve was perhaps circumscribed.

In considering the particular role that South Australia was to play in the settlement of the Northern Territory it is necessary to take into account the interaction of colonial politics, the underlying philosophies and the political nature of debate in early nineteenth century Australia as a whole. Questions relating to the very basis upon which Australian agriculture and land settlement would develop were substantive and will be considered in the next chapter.

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Chapter 2

Realities of colonization: socioeconomic context of settlement
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Summary
In practice, successful colonization required a great deal of individual initiative and freedom of action by communities separated by great distance from the mother country. Though informed by similar debate there were points of difference within the Australian and other English-speaking colonies in regard to land tenure and settlement. The socioeconomic context in which Australian settlement took place must be considered within the context of global British migration. The basis upon which adaptation necessarily evolved, during this period of great social change, must also be taken into account. Changing demographics influenced understandings of philosophical and economic theory and are of relevance to the politics of the South Australian colony as they impinge upon later Northern Territory settlement.

In a review of Settlers and the Agrarian Question: Foundations of Capitalism, JM Powell agrees with its author, McMichael, that the development of Australia should be placed 'within an appropriate international context', and that a proper emphasis on 'an international perspective' is absolutely necessary for any 'understanding of the development theme in Australia'. One might add that the realities of the colonial system, which of necessity permitted a required a degree of local autonomy, allowed the Australian and other colonies to develop their own distinct characteristics suited to particular local variants of soil, climate and migrant demographics.

2.1 The context of colonization
Mobility in many rural areas of Europe was frequent even prior to the industrial revolution, as the changes brought about by the agricultural revolution reached their peak. It was associated with particular occupations, largely of short-distance and active at

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particular stages in the life cycle. But movement was not limited only to short distance as recent research has demonstrated. The impact of 'foreign' colonists in eighteenth century Russia was considerable. Russian administration during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796) initiated the settlement of foreigners from all over Europe in the new frontiers of the south Ukraine and Volga regions.

As Western European powers established colonies 'across the seas', a flood of large-scale migration began leaving an indelible impress upon the modern world. Between 1850 and 1914 alone, over fifty million migrants left Great Britain and Europe to seek better opportunities. By far the greatest numbers during the nineteenth century found their way across the Atlantic to North America. In the first great wave the British, with a lesser admix of German, Spanish and Scandinavian migrants, predominated. After 1890 Italians, Jews from Eastern Europe and various groups of Slavs surpassed their numbers. Usually male and between the ages of eighteen and forty, many were displaced agricultural workers and craftsmen who regarded the transatlantic labour market merely as an extension of the intra-European seasonal work cycle, made possible by cheap and fast steamship service. The return ratio was often as high as 62 per cent.

As well as reflecting great demographic change, mass migration fostered major economic growth. Canada and the United States between them absorbed some 37 million people. The relatively short Atlantic crossing was a factor, but equally so was the policy of distributing public lands in an equitable manner to attract immigrants and to ensure their economic success. Migration was not confined to the poorer sections of society. Family wealth and connections often played a part. As Brian Birch has said, 'migrants from different European countries came with different social aspirations, pursued different

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economic objectives and followed different geographical paths. He argues that life in the colonies was often viewed by the more fortunate British migrant as 'the outer edge of a socioeconomic system centred in England', as does Charlotte Erickson who provides later examples. Birch demonstrated how middle class migrants were able to turn consistently to their home and families for support:

indicative of this strong and continuing link with home was the constant flow of family letters as well as the brothers' frequent visits to England. Between them they made eighteen Atlantic crossings in eighteen years.

Some more recent research would tend to refute this, nonetheless according to Birch this was often an important factor. In a case history, based on an unusually large collection of 280 letters written between 1882 and 1900, Birch focused on the movements of two brothers. They came to the United States in 1882 and engaged themselves in farming, ranching and other enterprises:

the brothers' connections with Britain, as a major facet of their prior experience, through their family contacts, upbringing, family capital, attitudes and business links remained strong and, if anything, grew stronger throughout their stay in the west.

It is reasonable to assume that the saga of financial gains and losses in the Middle West of the United States is not atypical of similar experiences in colonies such as in Australia. Fred Alexander has argued that, though there are some similarities to Turner's American 'frontier theme' and that it 'is not necessarily without valuable stimulus in its application to Australian history', nonetheless Australian and American history 'must each be studied

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7 But see also Walter Prescott Webb. The Great Frontier. Austin: University of Texas, 1952. Webb was much influenced by Turner and Turner's 'frontier thesis, which he applied on an international scale

in its own context. Alexander notes that the demographics were dissimilar and the
number of migrants to Australia was much lower. At Federation in 1901, Australia's
population, excluding its indigenous population, was something less than 4 million and
overwhelmingly of British extraction. Only 6 per cent originated in continental Europe
and 4 per cent were from China and other parts of Asia and the Pacific.

Asian migration to the Pacific coastal regions of America and also to Australia has not
yet been studied in any great detail, but the arrival of thousands of Chinese, Japanese,
Pacific Islander and other migrant workers in Australia ultimately gave rise to the 'White
Australia Policy'. In 1969 KW Robinson, Professor of Geography at the University of
Newcastle, NSW, said that the 'White Australia Policy' had been a very significant
element in the moulding of Australia's current cultural geography. He summarized its
effects as follows:

First, our numbers are undoubtedly fewer than they would have been
without the Policy. Second, the urban predominance is most likely more
pronounced and there would surely have been a greater concentration of
people in the tropics than at present. Third, certain developments in the
economy might not have occurred, for example the change from
plantation to farm production of sugar and the growing of rice in the
Murrumbidgee areas. Fourth, the ethnic composition of the total
population would have been different, with the possible associated
complications of a plural society and inequalities of living standards.
Fifth, the relationships of Australia with other countries, particularly in
Asia, would probably have been improved, with possible beneficial
results in trade.

Similarly, the unique experiences and the contribution of women migrants to permanent
agricultural settlement are not well documented. But women - or their absence - were a
matter of consequence. Inheritance patterns for New Zealand farms have shown that
their role could extend well beyond the domestic sphere. As McAloon shows, probate

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9 F Alexander and FJ Turner. *Moving frontiers; an American theme and its application to Australian
10 Brian Murphy. *The Other Australia: Experiences of Migration.* Cambridge: Cambridge University
11 KW Robinson, "Diversity, conflict and change: the meeting place of geography and politics." *Australian
Geographers at Adelaide.
inventories demonstrate that widows, as custodians of estates, contributed significantly to the business of farming. These documents provide a perspective of relevance to other regions of recent settlement. 12

'Group Settlement' was a method sometimes used to set up colonial communities, institutions and small towns. These planned groups often lacked farming experience, but where they survived it was more often through social cohesion and mutual support and the ability of individuals to gain ancillary employment. 13 Global connections which encouraged the evolution and decentralisation of large corporate institutions such as banks, railways and pastoral companies were essential elements in sustaining colonial development.

Colonial administrations both in Britain and in the colonies undertook land division to bring land into production and to attract settlers. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was axiomatic that settlement of 'new' countries be predicated upon the establishment of thriving agricultural communities to establish the firm foundation for colonial economy. 14 To the settlers these 'new lands' were empty and waiting to be divided. They were dismissive of the rights of any original inhabitants. In the American colonies it was taken as being understood that:

The American Indians' holding of tribal lands in common simply did not meet the English colonists' ideas of individual ownership and title. This judgment was based not so much on the technicalities of English law, which were complicated enough, but rather on the perception that the Indians did not treat the land as if they owned it: "As for the Natives in


New England, they inclose no Land, neither haue any setled habytation, nor any tame Cattle to improe the Land by." 15

This perception was a common one throughout the world wherever Europeans now settled.

2.2 Rationale of migration
The rate of nineteenth century migration was extremely rapid and, as expressed by AJ Christopher:

Many overseas settlements were established with the express aim of avoiding industrialization and recreating an agrarian society free from the perceived evils of urbanisation." 16

Christopher has shown that in South Africa the European population numbered 1 265 at the beginning of the eighteenth century and by 1806, under British control, it had grown to 26 568. The demand for land grew proportionately so that, whereas the area occupied in 1700 was only about 1 500 square miles (2 414 sq km), by the end of the century it had increased a hundred fold to around 150 000 square miles (241 350 sq km). Such was the continuing scale of migration from Britain that between 1836 and 1840 the earlier migrant Dutch farmers trekked northwards to retain their own independence. In both Dutch and British territories, large farms (of an average size of about ten square miles) became the rule and individual homesteads were separated from each other by great distances. This rapid migration was mirrored in the ever expanding frontiers of the United States, Canada and Australia. 17 Joe Powell in Australia Felix has noted a similar phenomenon of pastoral settlement 'leapfrogging' ever outwards, and Meinig has shown

17 AJ Christopher.
how wheat farmers were motivated to push on beyond the recognised frontier to ever more marginal land that was well beyond that which was agriculturally safe.\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout the English-speaking world the patterns of settlement, later regarded as integral to each distinct colony, in fact often took much from earlier American colonial models:

land was the bait to attract farmers into the colonies; it was used also to attract artisans and investors, develop industry, and settle frontier defenders. Tracts of public land were set aside for the support of schools, churches, and colonial governments. Land was given to officials, soldiers, and others in reward for their services. Less accountably, officials granted land to friends, relatives, people of influence, and, not least, to themselves ... Land division practices had a quality of ongoing experimentation that was separately worked out in the individual colonies for furthering settlement along the lines desired.\textsuperscript{19}

Powell would agree with this, but Christopher has stressed that Government was always more pervasive under the aegis of the British Empire. He argues that this government intervention led to more orderly processes in general than in the United States and resulted in a greater variation in settlement patterns\textsuperscript{20}. Herein lies the kernel of the debate that has subsequently stemmed from Turner's argument that nineteenth century settlement in the United States was expressed and defined by successive renewals on the 'frontier'. Hartz and others argued that the mother country always leaves its own distinctive mark while Guelke and Harris, writing on South Africa and Canada respectively, have attempted to develop a different view.

Nonetheless, whether the cultures of the various colonial regions might have reflected 'most complicated mixes', there remained an underlying current of experience between colonies and mother country and an interplay between the 'agencies of colony

\textsuperscript{19} Price, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{20} Christopher, pp.189-190.
sponsorship and planning, (and of) utopian responses to the opportunity of a new start. 21 Alexander has it that Australian expansion across the Blue Mountains was:

like the early American expansion westward, it was also revolutionary in its attitude to established authority, anti-social in the Frederick Turner sense. 22

In Alexander's view Australia's political evolution through representative institutions to responsible government is in the familiar British mould, but he finds that 'the Australian political system and balance of forces is Australian, not British'. 23

An article by Robert Mitchell and Warren Hofstra in the Journal of Historical Geography serves to demonstrate how the establishment of agrarian settlement might ideally evolve to produce the required growth of dispersed, yet self-sustaining, colonial communities. They show this by outlining the particulars of settlement as they evolved from dispersed farmsteads and small clusters of hamlets and villages into systems of ever-widening complexity in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia during the eighteenth century. In the regional context, the concept envisaged a settlement incorporating its own central urban system. 24 Their study illustrates the ideal intended growth pattern of neighbourhood settlement wherever successful agrarian settlement was established.

In Australia this was seldom achieved. The pattern here from its early beginnings in 1788 has shown distinct coastal capital city dominance, most notable perhaps in Victoria where all roads radiate outwards from Melbourne. South Australia, whose early control was influential in shaping the Northern Territory, had early aspirations of creating something different in its home state. 25 In 1877, prompted by the release of recent

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21 Price, p. 333.
23 Alexander, p. 27.
significant figures on land sales in the colony, one member of the South Australian Parliament stated that:

We had so improved our mode of selling the waste lands as to excite the admiration of our neighbours. We had succeeded in settling flourishing townships and large agricultural communities where a few years ago was a mere desert land or a few sheep runs. Our system of railway extension was based on our agricultural progress and prosperity, and churches and schools appeared where but a few years ago there was a comparative wilderness.\(^{26}\)

As Buxton has noted, this self-congratulatory comment was to prove somewhat premature but it serves to illustrate the common vision of the time.\(^{27}\)

2.3 A basis for successful adaptation in Australia
There is little doubt that nineteenth century Australian farmers were part of and excited by the inventive processes in crop and animal husbandry, and similarly were fashionably enthused by the exchange of ideas in innovation and scientific advance. The successful establishment of settlers owed more to their own intelligence, tenacity and ability in adaptation than to government directive. As Geoff Raby has said:

The rapid establishment in Australia of European farming systems in a completely different economic and environmental setting attests to the steepness of learning curves. Learning-by-doing was also aided by scientific inquiry, which at the time was skewed towards botany, soil analysis, minerals and climate. These activities were the 'natural history imperative' which was typical of early colonial science, and which reflected where a region of recent settlement's initial comparative advantage lay in the international division of scientific work.\(^{28}\)

The English-speaking world's global influence on patterns of Australian agricultural settlement is an argument that 'may not be widely accepted in Australia', as JM Powell has noted.\(^{29}\) Geoff Raby puts it rather differently by saying that many have often made

\(^{26}\) In *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 1877, p. 64. Quoted by Buxton.
\(^{27}\) Buxton, pp.52, 53.
\(^{29}\) Powell, p.110.
too much of the British influence and forgotten that 'adaptation is at the heart of the innovative process', and that:

Early Australia seems to have had enough creative and adaptive people to draw heavily on the world stock of knowledge. European Australia was also part of an international information network, through which technical knowledge was transmitted and exchanged.  

Bennett and Kohl make much the same point in their book, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915*. They devote a whole chapter to what they call an 'Interactive Adaptation'. The consensus appears to be that inherited skills and experience were the basis of successful adaptation. Paul Bonnifield, who has researched what he calls 'the classic confrontation between man and the environment', argues that the 'Dust Bowl' of the 1930s was caused more through the general collapse of an economy than by any particular insensitivity of the American farmer to his environment. He demonstrates convincingly that, with economic recovery, the ultimate reclamation of the soil and its return to productivity had everything to do with the tenacity and acumen of the long-established pioneering families themselves. It was they who tackled the problems of wind erosion by techniques such as that of chisel ploughing, which they invented, and by other systems which they developed themselves and have continued to develop intelligently.

The mix of sociopolitical and cultural change was the crucible, but philosophical underpinnings were often less evident and their influence must be considered in context. Australia was first colonised at the height of the agricultural and industrial revolutions and inherited all attendant socioeconomic theories, which had produced some concomitant dichotomies. In his 2001 Boyer lectures, Professor Geoffrey Blainey

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30 Raby, p.4.
31 Bennett and Kohl, Ch. 5.
discussed what he called 'the rift between regional and outback Australia on the one hand
and the big cities on the other'. He believes that this was apparent from an early period.

Politics have played an important role in fashioning the complexity of patterns of
settlement of Australia generally and have been of particular relevance to Northern
Territory settlement. Politics viewed as a dynamic have their own cultural context and,
according to Robinson, involve various causative factors and effects which can only be
examined by:

broadening of the conception of what is 'political' to include behaviour
which may not be governmental in any real sense, but is influential from
the point of view of making decisions or affecting policy. In this context,
the real task consists in the isolation of factors thought to be political in
any given situation, and the appraisal of the relative influence which such
factors have had in the creation of that situation.

2.3.1 Australian land settlement: colonial autonomy in practice

Britain established colonies in Australia for complex reasons. Alan Frost and others
argue that in strategic terms the age-old rivalry with France, which had culminated in the
titanic struggle of the Napoleonic wars, may have initially provided the most dominant
rationale. This, together with the fact that North America was no longer able to fulfill
any function in accommodating the excess from an overflowing prison system, provided
a convenience and a means to give substance to the British presence in a far-flung
outpost. Trading links with Asia (China and Indonesia) later became factors of
increasing importance.

Distance and slow communication with the metropole required that the home government

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34 KW Robinson, "Diversity, conflict and change: the meeting place of geography and politics." *Australian
35 Alan Frost. *Convicts and empire: a naval question, 1776-1811*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press,
1980; Alan Frost. *The Global reach of Empire: Britain's maritime expansion in the Indian and Pacific
Australis to Australia*. Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1989; Glyndwr Williams and
Alan Frost. *Terra Australis to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press in association with the
vested considerable authority in colonial governments. According to an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the fact that Australia's first colony was a military establishment using convict labour fundamentally affected the initial development of settlement. It is argued that this produced an authoritarian and hierarchical society in its early years and elements of both characteristics were to remain strong for some time.\(^{36}\) Australia had no representative institutions to alleviate military government until the British parliament passed the Judicature Acts of 1823 and 1828 to admit an equal number of private citizens to the cadre of appointed service officers and civil servants which had until then administered the colony. Trial by jury was not permitted until even later, and settlement itself was for a long time strictly limited to an area, known as the nineteen counties, immediately surrounding Sydney.

For these reasons, though many Australian historians may not agree, there are grounds to argue that the process within Australia's first colony through which family farming was to evolve was probably less spontaneous than in America. It is indicative, perhaps, that it was the later squatters who, directly or indirectly, were largely instrumental in the formation of agricultural societies and of a number of more permanent institutional agricultural innovations, especially agricultural colleges and publicly funded botanic gardens.\(^{37}\)

Each of these had been established for a number of reasons, but technical information for farmers was an important part of their activities. The institutional arrangements during the period had been transferred from Britain. The public funding of botanic gardens earlier in Australia than in Britain was a noteworthy adaptation. Together with a dense network of regional and local newspapers, to which these institutions supplied a large volume of material, disembodied technical information was spread swiftly and widely in Australia.\(^{38}\)

On the other hand, North America was first colonised by traders and farmers of an essentially rural background who were able to lay the foundation of civil society there.


These colonists were able almost immediately to determine some realistic form of long-term land tenure, to organise the marketing of the product of their rural economy and to generate capital. Additionally, they were able to recruit labour with sufficient farming and other skills and, as David Landes has noted, the United States soon established a 'system of land and concessionary sales designed to promote family farming'.

The economic theories of both Adam Smith and David Ricardo were influential in the politics of later land settlement. In general terms it can be said that the underlying principles of Smith and Hume were formed within an ambience of an agricultural economy. Their philosophy was particularly influential in shaping the role that the rising 'squatocracy' in Australia saw for themselves.

Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations' is often understood as presenting a justification for laissez faire capitalism. It is, in fact, more a treatise on the moral and social evolution of a just society and its hypotheses emphasise that the 'invisible hand' guiding the market economy can only work within parameters defined by moral principles both institutional and legal. It warns against 'the mean rapacity, the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers, who neither are, nor ought to be, the rulers of mankind' and it advocates instead the image and ideal of the 'husbandman', as illustrated by the farmer in the new and developing rural economy:

If we only behold ... the actions of the husbandman in the seed-time, when he casteth away much good corn into the ground, we shall account him rather a madman than a husbandman. But when we consider his labours in the harvest, which is the end of his endeavours, we shall find the worth and plentiful increase of his actions.

The term 'squatter' was first applied in Australia to men, of either convict or free background, who ran stock within or outside the delineated boundaries, and they spread

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38 Raby, p.18.
41 Smith, p.328.

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rapidly outwards. Motivated by the hope of accumulating wealth in the 'empty' lands of the new colonies, some, indeed, were Sydney merchants and demobilised officers, but many were the younger sons of landowners and prosperous tenant farmers, and all had their roots in Britain. By and large, the latter were to succeed best in their new surroundings. Kiddie notes that rate of build up of a rural population was necessarily led by men with some familiarity and knowledge of capital. They had an understanding of the desirability of some realistic form of long-term tenure. They knew how to market their product, and how to select labour with relevant farming skills. She argues that as practical men they were soon able to assume the role of natural leaders in a nascent society.\textsuperscript{42}

Today it is generally recognized that there is an element of truth in the proposition that social background, education and experience all have a part to play in how individual views evolve. Many of the 'squatters', who later opened up vast areas in the Australian hinterland, were products of the Scottish enlightenment's views on rural economy.

The Scots on the land in eastern Australia contributed in the peculiar ways they did, out of a background of Agrarian Revolution which evolved both modern agricultural and pastoral methods and a class of educated farming people imbued with not only the traditional Scottish virtues, but also those of economy. And, of course, it produced a surplus of such people who desperately wanted to get their hands on land once again.\textsuperscript{43}

Often they were the younger sons of the rising class of tenant farmer who had absorbed Smith's concepts and corresponding social philosophy. Their influence far outweighed their numbers in the new colonies.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Prentis p.107.
\textsuperscript{44} Prentis, pp. 82-108; Kiddle. She outlines how the rate of build up of population was led by farmers with capital and an ability to determine, at least in the ultimate, some realistic form of long term tenure and to market their product, as well as to obtain labour with sufficient farming skills; RJ Brien. \textit{The shaping of Scotland: 18th century patterns of land and settlement}. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989, p. 6. Brien notes that primogeniture was a concept alien to earlier Scot's culture but now it had become the rule. One of the groups which suffered from these new arrangements were the farmers' younger sons -
Gradually, as the squatters found ever more 'virgin' pasture and moved ever outwards beyond immediate government control, others followed and isolated settlements developed in the areas which they had pioneered. Despite government attempts to control them, the rate at which squatters explored, settled and established themselves was extraordinary:

Within six years three quarters of the district which afterwards became Victoria was occupied through and through with sheep runs, until 1839 on no legal basis whatsoever.  

2.3.2 New colonies and the politics of 19th century settlement

With the spread of settlement new colonies were declared each with its own administration and so able to focus and decide on its particular issues and realities. The following three decades from about 1830 produced rapid cultural, political and economic change. The 'selector' and the miner followed the squatter and the convict, and by 1861 the population was 1.4 million, having risen from around 50,000 in forty years and, between 1829 and 1859, five of Australia's six colonies had achieved their own governments (Table 1).

Roberts has argued that the squatters 'made Australia known' and that it was they who 'largely shaped the course of its history'. Today, most historians would agree that his was a partisan view that has distorted the true nature of Australia's rural development and tends to obscure the role of the miner and the farmer who followed in their wake. Both mining and wheat farming, which expanded rapidly from 1 million acres under cultivation to an estimated 5 million acres by 1901, contributed greatly to the early infrastructure and provided the foundations of Australian rural settlement.

Prompted by population increase, stemming from the gold rushes and a move towards closer settlement, a growing opposition soon challenged the assumptions of a landed

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46 Roberts, p. 173.
establishment and questioned its very basis. The consequential partisanship that
developed, albeit without the vehicle of institutionalized local parliaments and party
politics, contained all the ideological nuances of the British party factionalism between
Whig and Tory which was derived from different socioeconomic doctrines.

Table 1
**Australian Colonies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>Achieved Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Tasmania</td>
<td>*1825</td>
<td>1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Victoria</td>
<td>*1851</td>
<td>1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Queensland</td>
<td>*1859</td>
<td>1859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland were initially under the aegis of
NSW but later seceded to form separate colonies as shown above.
** Australia's colonial status was removed with federation of the seven
states under the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

From 1788 until 1820, the governors of the early colony of New South Wales had granted
small acreages of land freely to emancipated convicts and to the few other small free
settlers with little or no capital. For the more fortunate, mainly officers, civilian officials
and those reckoned to have sufficient capital to farm economically, larger land grants
were permitted. \(^{48}\) From 1821 until 1831, free grants of land continued to be made on the
basis of 640 acres (259 hectares) for every £500 invested up to a maximum of 2 560 acres
(1 036 hectares). If sufficient capital was available it was permissible for the large man
of substance to tender for the purchase of a further 9 900 acres (4 006 hectares).
Inevitably very few of the ‘small’ men lasted long, most suffered foreclosure and their

1947, p. 431.
land fell into the hands of the larger landowners, and soon it became virtually impossible for the small man to obtain land.

Emigration Commissioners were established in London with the aim of promoting emigration to the Australian Colonies in 1831. In the same year, the Ripon Regulations ended the land grant system in the three colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland and attempted to fix the price of land, broadly in accordance with the Wakefield design of a 'sufficient price'.

Earlier official proclamations in 1826 and again in 1829 that had attempted to restrict settlement within the 'Nineteen Counties' failed utterly to stem the flow of the illegal 'squatter' ever outwards into the interior. For the first thirty years of the Australian colony land had been granted free to selected settlers including emancipated convicts. On the lower end of the scale some forty acres or slightly more, dependent upon whether the freeholder had a family or not, was deemed sufficient for the small man to become self supporting. But men with capital or the ability to raise it, officers, civil officials or those recommended from England were offered large areas as free grants which often gave rise to controversy within the colony - one of the most controversial of these being the grant of a huge tract of the best land close to Sydney at the Cowpastures to John Macarthur.

The small grants of land were not a success because block sizes proved too small, or the smallholder lacked either requisite skills or capital. Often the reason could be some combination of all three. There were of course exceptions, but generally the acreages allocated would not have been big enough to permit any necessary or desired rotation nor to carry any stock, both of which, in lieu of fertilizer, would have helped to prevent an

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49 Prentis, p. 82.
52 Prentis, pp. 82- 84.
53 Scott, p. 431.
54 Prentis, p. 82.
inevitable deterioration in soil fertility. The inequities were apparent. Soon only marginal areas were left within the nineteen counties which were defined as the 'limits of location' in 1826 and redefined to cover a slightly larger area in 1829. In 1831, the Ripon Regulations ended the land grant system and attempted to fix the sale price of land, and in the same year a Board of Emigration Commissioners was established in London to promote emigration to the Australian colonies. By 1836, in order to limit 'illegal squatting' beyond the defined areas, grazing licences were issued. But at only £10 a year and a stock tax of £20 for carrying 10,000 sheep on the licensed area, and land prices ranging from 5s per acre at their lowest to £1 at their highest, licensing a run now became the grazier's most economic option and it became possible for skilled shepherds and managers to establish themselves as squatters along with the men of capital. The result was that within a very short period squatters controlled most of the known available land, with some individual runs extending to between 200,000 and 500,000 acres. The situation was exacerbated by the option to buy, of which many were taking advantage to the exclusion of all others.

In 1844 Governor Gipps attempted to limit the size of holdings by regulation and an increase in license fees. The reaction of the squatters was to lobby the imperial authorities for proper rights of tenure, and within three years, in 1847, Gipp's regulations were overthrown, following upon the imperial Waste Lands Occupation Act of 1846, by an Order-in-Council that made provision for the squatters to gain significantly greater security of tenure. The situation was somewhat ameliorated later in Victoria, where under Governor Latrobe no leases were permitted to be issued without proper survey.

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55 Clark, Vol.11, p. 69.
60 Shann, p. 193; Clark, p.93; Mitchell, p.68.
61 Shann, p. 194; DWA Baker, "The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts", Historical Studies: Australia & New Zealand, May (1958) p. 169 - relying on the Register of Leases issued under the Order-in-Council, 'A lease confers on the tenant an interest in the land and the right to exclude all persons from the land; a tenant may exclude even the landlord, subject only to any rights conferred on the landlord by the agreement or by law. By way of contrast, a licence is a mere right to occupy and, without more, confers no interest in the land and no right to exclude all persons from the land.'
However, as Baker has noted, the survey department was open to corruption and powerful squatters were again thus enabled to abuse the system. 62

2.3.3 The yeomanry myth and the economics of farming

The issue continued to develop with emotive political overtones. The less fortunate wanted land to be made available to all and their demands were voiced in 1855 in the popular ballad of the time, 'unlock the lands'. 63 No matter that, according to Patrick O'Farrell, 64 some refused to leave the cities, 65 the Utopian dream persisted. It found a rationale, espoused by many, in the wake of Rev JD Lang, staunch advocate of the growing political concept of creating a new 'yeomanry' class from Australia's urban populace. 66 There is little doubt that the understanding of the term 'yeomen' was coloured more by some romantic vision than harsh reality.

Many townspeople lacked farming skills and, even with these skills, few working men would ever be able to build the capital necessary to establish themselves on the land from the wages of the time. Even with the sharp rise during the Gold Rush days, wages were still insufficient to the purpose. In addition to this, many workers did not have regular work - it has been estimated that skilled workers' earnings could be as low as 4s to 5s per day rising to £1.5s and £1.10s per day at best. 67

In order to solve the long-standing grievance of both workers and ex-convicts, which had been building in intensity throughout the 1850s, 68 the comprehensive and complex legislation contained in 'Robertson's Land Acts' was enacted. The intention was, amongst other things, to provide the aspiring farmer with the right of free selection, on the expiry and resumption by the Crown of the huge grazing leases held by squatters. In many ways the expectation was immediately impractical and it was to take many years before matters were resolved with any degree of satisfaction. Robertson's views were

66 Clark, Vol. VI, p.335; Prentis, p.84.
67 Scott, p. 34; Shann p. 434.
realistic, however, for he believed that in order to survive and ultimately prosper the aspirant farmer would require sufficient capital to establish himself and to have some money left over after his initial outlays. In Robertson’s opinion the minimum capital necessary for survival would depend on the size of the holding, and he reckoned this at £4 per acre or £100 and £200 altogether. Others put it as high as £15 per acre and some even higher.69 This was of course well beyond the reach of the average working man of the period. Baker has argued that, 'in accordance with the liberal ideals of laissez faire and equality of opportunity', the manifest purpose of establishing a 'yeoman population' was not so much aimed at helping the working man establish himself on the land. It had more to do with an urban bourgeoisie attempting to curb the undue power of 'squatter' wealth.70

One of the first realizations by administrators was that in Australia, apart from a very few exceptional areas, 40 acres (17 hectares) or so was too small to form a viable economic unit. The upper limit of 320 acres (130 hectares) set in 1861 for selection 71 seemed nearer the mark, but this estimate in turn was soon raised to 640 acres (259 hectares).72 It is perhaps worth noting that all of these figures in acres - 320, 640, 1 280 and 2 560 - are multiples of each other and might seem to indicate little more than inspired guesswork, or perhaps some faith in the science of numerology. They reflected, however, some rationalisation of enlightenment principles, represented here by the application of navigation, in order to 'to impose order on uncharted land' to facilitate settlement. Thomas Jefferson was one of the strongest proponents of this, and the method was subsequently incorporated into United States land law by the Homestead Act of 1862. The Jeffersonian Grid, as it became known, established the system whereby land was surveyed in rectangular blocks of 640-acres that could be quartered into 160-acre sections

68 Sherington, p.67; Shann, p.196.
71 The Alienation Act 1861 (NSW), Section 13.
and quartered again into 40 acres, the minimum acreage required to sustain a 'yeoman' farmer.  

In Australia it took some time before legislators generally recognised that a certain degree of flexibility was required in establishing the optimal economic size of holding. Land Commissioners in New South Wales were later to advise (1883) that 1,280 acres (518 hectares) were required for an economic unit in coastal lands, and their recommendation for inland areas had to be twice as much. Such variables as location, climate and prevailing market conditions had to be considered. The application of rigid principle, which did not take into account either topography or the land's suitability for farming, was conducive to failure in many cases and often selectors lacked sufficient capital to engage in agriculture. Nevertheless, despite such actions as the fiat imposed by a Victorian government on any expansion of individual holdings on its best wheat fields, gradually farming expanded and prospered.

2.3.4 Squatter opposition to closer settlement

Much of the opposition to the squatters' position on land settlement throughout eastern Australia was to dominate Australian politics pretty well until, and even beyond, the Robertson Land Acts of 1861. Problems, potential or actual, posed by the squatter phenomenon were common to all the Australian colonies and legislation enacted to resolve the issues differed from colony to colony. Their influence on the politics of land tenure was greatest in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia but less so in South Australia.

Rights of tenure now formed the basis for heated discussion in the Australian colonies and throughout the Empire. Strong argument for or against the proposition that

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75 Shann, p. 195.

occupancy automatically conferred proprietorial rights emerged into acrimonious debate. At first the majority view was for 'the squatters and the people,' but as the European population grew rapidly from some 50,000 in 1825 to over a million by 1860, it became more urbanized and the cry was reversed to now become 'the squatters or the people'. Slightly different accommodations were reached in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria but the eventual outcome resulted in the demise of the squatter. 77 The squatter was also influential in Western Australia but never had a chance in South Australia.

The squatters, however, left an indelible mark on Australian agriculture and in particular on agricultural education, for many had been imbued with the same enthusiasm for improvement as their peers and contemporaries in Britain. Similarly, it was the wealthy agricultural entrepreneur, represented here by the squatter, who provided the initiative and the capital to lay the foundations and provide the backdrop for future Australian agricultural research and education. It was they who initiated and popularized the essential framework of agricultural shows and field days, societies and colleges. Many of them had attempted to establish tenants on the arable lands of their holdings, but they lost the political battle, and with it the conceptual understanding of symbiotic tenant/landlord relationship, which emphasised the sharing of capital with reciprocal responsibilities to the land and to each other. Adam Smith's tenet, that 'the interests of a landed estate (and) the interest of landlord and tenant are the same', 78 as had been understood in the parent country, slowly lapsed from consciousness.

2.4 The Wakefield doctrine and South Australia
The expectation of social justice implicit in the obligation, inherent in Smith's philosophy, to 'cultivate the genius of the people for the happiness of both proprietor and tenant, and an increase of wealth to both', 79 gradually lost immediate relevance. The 'Industrial Revolution' and a growing urban economy inspired the philosophies of Ricardo and the doctrines of Bentham and Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Their theories

77 Roberts, p. 188.

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were contemporaneous with urbanization. In an emergent industrial society, economics assumed a harsher note. There was more than a subtle change in emphasis, and its tenets informed much of the opposition to the squatters' position on land settlement throughout a great part of eastern Australia, from the Ripon Regulations of 1831 through to the 1850s and beyond.

Wakefield was influential and he is important in having developed theories and policies for the colonization of New Zealand, Canada and South Australia. His vision of social engineering was limited by a lack of familiarity with rural affairs and can be interpreted as being perhaps more influenced by Ricardo than Smith. Wakefield was essentially of the city, and had developed an interest in penal reform through first hand experience gained from three years imprisonment in Newgate for bigamy. He believed that the problems of the overflow of convicts from the British penal system to the Australian settlements could be pre-empted by a system of emigration. This envisaged the rescue of the 'deserving' poor from the squalid brutality of the slums and industrial ghettos of Britain to live in comfort and prosperity far from the temptations of crime in the new colonies.

Wakefield published his ideas on systematic colonisation in 1829 while in prison. Essentially, his proposition was to sell Crown Lands in small units at a 'sufficient price' to allow sufficient return to further subsidise the deserving. Wakefield's system needed capitalists, as investors in land whose purchases would subsidise the immigration of 'small men' - to be initially employed as immigrant labourers until they had saved enough to become self-employed as small holders owning their own land. Its aim was to establish a colonial society of equals and achieve a just ordering of society, based on the concept of a yeoman farming model instead of the two-layered one of opposing interests.
of the wealthy landed capitalist and an impoverished labouring class comprised of convicts and expirees.

His ideas fueled much of the debate on Australia's early settlement. His prose was pompous, his logic convoluted, but the 'establishment' of the day found in it an elegant and self-sustaining system. Regulations, embodying his concept of 'sufficient price', were applied in New South Wales and also in the Cape Colony of South Africa. His efforts to put his theories into practice in New Zealand failed, for many different reasons, and he himself had a breakdown in 1854, but his influence provided forceful argument throughout the British colonies and particularly in the settlement of South Australia where, in 1834, his ideas were incorporated in the South Australia Act that empowered the foundation of the colony. Wakefield's idealism had its downside, and the elaboration of his system was also potent in furthering the conceptual rift between rural and urban communities. 81

Conclusion
From the foregoing, it can be seen that agricultural settlement historically was developed along regional lines. Agricultural science and its technology were built up over centuries and the effect was cumulative. As communications improved, it was characterized by an ever-increasing interchange between regions on a worldwide scale. This interchange had reached a high point when Europeans first colonized Australia, and wherever a successful community emerged its authority not only recognized local skills but was able to organize them in a cohesive way for the betterment of the whole. Each colony thus shaped its own distinct pattern of development. South Australia had an easier path towards democracy. Nonetheless, its policy on land that depended largely on speculation could be described as something of 'a dog's breakfast'. Its adoption of the untried

Wakefield doctrine was premature and greatly circumscribed all debate. The complexity of this debate, however, to rationalize a clear strategy for land settlement directly affected, and were to complicate issues further, when it took on the additional burden of the Northern Territory.
Chapter 3

The relevance of South Australian politics in Northern Territory settlement
Chapter 3

The relevance of South Australian politics in Northern Territory settlement

Summary
In the nineteenth century South Australians rated their ability as colonists as second to none. They presented their credentials to the rest of the Empire at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition in London in 1886 thus:

[South Australia was] a colony which, fifty years ago, was a *terra incognita* - a land previously trodden only by the uncivilised and wandering savage, and consequently without a vestige of a prior history, save what may be found in geological researches, the impressions of nature on its rocks and stones - a land not obtained by exciting wars or conquests by battles, but a history of conquests of wild and uncultivated regions by indomitable British pluck - a simple, peaceful history of the steady progress of British settlement.¹

This was said despite the fact that the Northern Territory of South Australia was beginning to be seen as a disastrous failure and anything but an example of 'indomitable British pluck'. Many writers agree that South Australia must shoulder a great deal of responsibility for failure in the Territory.

Only six years after it achieved self-government, the Colony of South Australia had sought and gained the right to add the Northern Territory within its boundaries. Its attempt to settle the north was carried out within a regime of complex political struggle and constant amendments to its own land legislation in South Australia. Theories on land settlement were never clearly enunciated and were the subject of vehement debate and often rationalized to fit ever-changing circumstances. The formative years of the Northern Territory occurred when South Australia was immersed in finding solutions to its own particular problems. There can be no clear understanding of subsequent events without examining the intimate relationship between the two regions.

3.1 The confused politics of land distribution

South Australia was annexed in 1836 at the height of the squatting boom. The movement of the squatters was curtailed in the depression of 1841 before it had had time to spread very far within South Australia proper and 'squating' was only of marginal concern in that colony. The 1847 Order-in-Council had never really applied in South Australia, and the debate on 'unlocking the land' should not have been as great, for the underlying philosophies relevant to South Australia's foundation were quite different from those of the eastern colonies. Yet South Australia was no different from the other Australian colonies in forming a strong aversion to large landowning interests.

The Colony of South Australia was established specifically on the basis of the Wakefield doctrine; Wakefield himself said that in South Australia 'we resolved to try and establish a fresh Colony in which both our economic and political views would receive a fair trial'. Land was to be sold at a 'sufficient price' to enable subsidized family migration. It envisaged 'landowners' moulded as 'yeoman farmers', tilling the land and maximizing its value. By this means it was believed that farm labourers would be encouraged to work hard and save for the time when they could, by their own efforts, become landowners. This belief had no understanding of the practicalities of farm economics. A 'sufficient price' to cover the costs of migration was not likely to be sufficiently low to enable a farm labourer, no matter how deserving, to save enough not only to purchase land but also to develop it. There could be little betterment for a labourer with a family to support, unless provision was also made to augment his meagre savings. Nonetheless, the doctrine of 'sufficient price' appealed to dissenting groups and English liberal intelligentsia who backed the South Australian scheme.

According to Sir Stephen Roberts, however, the application of the 'Wakefield doctrine' in South Australia served only to encourage land speculation:

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\text{of Wakefield's elements, two - land and labour were greatly in excess, and the third - capital failed to combine them, for three fifths of the land was held by absentees 'who expend no capital and create no element for}
\]

lack of survey and speculation...[where]...speculators were able to cull the choicest lands and the best situations."

Roberts may not always be quite accurate in his particulars but there is no shortage of evidence to demonstrate that land speculation and political debate to 'unlock the lands' bedeviled the early South Australian colony. Buxton contends that any vision that there had been initially to maintain the 'balance of labour and land, revenue and immigration' was soon abandoned by the South Australian legislature. He cites evidence to prove that concessions on land purchase were always made for the 'moneyed class', and that, though the proceeds of land sales were supposed to be used to subsidise immigration, the regulations were not always kept.

Under South Australian regulations it had been decreed that, in order to preserve good agricultural land for farmers, pastoral leases could be held only for twelve months within an Agricultural Hundred that had been declared and surveyed with township and reserves. Often these 'surveyed Hundreds' were non-existent and had been corruptly declared to enable local pastoralists to purchase the land, and thus prevent any encroachment by the farmer on 'their land'.

Mutual misunderstandings and political expediency gave a distinctive flavour to political debate on the question of land settlement. This endured throughout South Australia's tenure of the Northern Territory and provided the backdrop against which events were played out in the north for many years to come. This underwrote a great deal of chicanery, on the one hand, which was more often than not opposed by a great deal of self-serving and hypocrisy on the other.

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3 Roberts, p.145.
5 Buxton pp.1, 2, citing W Oldham in *The Land Policy of S. A. from 1830-1842*, Chs. 11, IV, and Map.

55
By 1864, it was becoming quite apparent that many large pastoralist lessees had used every means possible to obtain ownership of their runs. Their justification was insecurity of tenure as leaseholders. Their increasing wealth was resented and, increasingly, there was concern at the strength of their representation in parliament. The Speaker of the House, himself, with the casting vote, was a wealthy pastoralist, and the newly appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands one also, and he was forced to resign only after strong opposition from the press.  

The public outcry reinforced Surveyor-General Goyder's advocacy of the need to increase the valuation of pastoral leases and support for the small man's attempts to acquire land grew apace for there was a belief that men returning from the Victorian goldfields would add to the demand. In South Australia, however, most of the ex-miners who wanted land on their return from the diggings seemed to have been able to purchase it from speculators or drought-affected pastoralists. Additionally, Goyder said that 'from 1853 when the gold diggers began to return, the demand for land was so great that every section was sold as fast as surveyed'. In his view, this tended to illustrate a natural evolutionary process in land ownership.

Those sufficiently wealthy were enabled to purchase more than 4 000 acres (1619 hectares) and to obtain the prior right of selection of up to 16 000 (6475 hectares) by 'special survey'. By this means:

G. F. Angas acquired the Barossa Valley; Morphett, Eyre, Gilles and Hall both banks of the Murray for some sixty miles, while the banks of the rivers Gawler, Light, Para and Wakefield, Torrens, Finnis and Hindmarsh suffered similar 'peacocking'.

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8 Register, 10 October 1864.
9 Buxton, p.8.
10 "Select Committee on Selling the Crown Lands" in South Australian Parliamentary Papers, no. 23, 1865, Question 2226. Hereinafter SAPP thus SAPP 23/1865, Question 2226.
11 SAPP 73/1865.
12 Buxton, p. 2.
The wealthy landowner was not above intimidation and bribery to further deter the small man, and government insistence on cash sale meant that it was virtually impossible for him to be able by direct cash purchase to buy sufficient land to make it viable. In 1867 it was found that half the farms in South Australia were less than 100 acres (40 hectares) and therefore impracticable as economic farming units.

Yet to say, as Buxton does, that the South Australian intention was to keep the lower classes in their place by 'simultaneously ensuring a supply of labour' in an endeavour 'to reproduce the English social class divisions' is perhaps too harsh a judgement. In Baker's understanding, the rising 'urban bourgeoisie' of South Australia, the bedrock of the liberal opposition to landed wealth, had little conception of what it meant to be a 'yeoman'. The term in Britain was now applicable to the tenant farmer who had become a man of some worth:

The Lothian [tenant] farmer was a very definite figure; canny and competent, a professional farmer, a keen businessman, a man of substance, influential in local society.

But it would appear that some of the wealthy landowners did have some understanding of the symbiosis possible, and often desirable, between landlord and viable tenant. They could understand that government insistence on cash sale was a great hindrance to the small man and were prepared to lease land at low rental, with the option to buy on reasonable terms. This was not altruism by the 'wealthy landowner'. Better to have contented neighbours who 'by their own industry created capital which enabled them to add other sections to it' and become substantial farmers in their own right. They inferred that the government alternative of 'cash down' payment produced only impoverished hardscrabble farmers. It was not the role of government, they believed, to interfere in the

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13 SAPP 73/1865. "Report and Minutes of Evidence of Select Committee on Selling the Crown Lands".
14 SAPD, 1868. p. 543.
15 Buxton, p.1
'private rights' of individuals but to arrive at arrangements conducive to the best advantage of both.\textsuperscript{18}

By Act of Parliament in 1862\textsuperscript{19} the government had appropriated sixty per cent of the income derived from land sales for Public Works and this greatly reduced the amount available for immigration. Between 1864 and 1873, due to drought and depression, only one immigrant ship arrived, and in 1866 the money then appropriated from income on land sales was used to help fund relief work for the unemployed.\textsuperscript{20}

By 1868, however, the public perception was that the Government, having stopped all immigration, at the same time was losing a great number of its farmers to Victoria, enticed by that colony's post-Gold Rush, liberal land settlement schemes. That this view was subsequently found to be untrue\textsuperscript{21} nevertheless became good fodder for the politicians in the current election.

In the same year a petition was presented to the newly elected Assembly, which forced the cessation of further land sales and obtained the pledge of immediate land reform by members of the parliament. This followed what appeared to be blatant fraud. It involved the Crown agents being in collusion with pastoralists over the purchase of some 15 000 acres (6 070 hectares) at Mt Gambier.\textsuperscript{22}

Debate on how to manage the disposal of 'Waste Lands' more equably began soon afterwards for the public had long been incensed by the practices of pastoralists at Waste Land Sales auctions. In 1865 a Select Committee had reported that corrupt practices were rife, and bribery of individuals to prevent intending purchasers from bidding against pastoral interests was common practice.\textsuperscript{23} Nothing much had been done to remedy matters at the time but now, following the elections, the 'Frauds at Waste Land Sales Act'

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item SAPD 1868. p. 543; SAPP, 73/1865. Questions 1754, 1767-1769.
\item "Act No. 17, (Sutherland's Act)"; Parliament of South Australia, 1862.
\item \textit{South Australian Register}, 7 July, 6 August, 10 August, 12 August 1866; \textit{Advertiser}, 5 August 1866; Advertiser 5 February 1870 - Report of meeting.
\item SAPP 1870 - Statistical Register; \textit{South Australian Register}, 5 April 1870.
\item \textit{South Australian Register}, 22 April, 2 May, 6 May, 24 June 1868.
\item SAPP 73/1865.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
was passed. This then comprehensively listed offences at auction and provided heavy penalties for future offenders.²⁴

3.2 Credit arrangements - Strangway's Act
It was apparent that South Australia's attempts to put the small man on the land could not succeed without government intervention to provide land purchase on credit. On 30 January 1869 the 'Strangway's Act' received the Governor's consent.²⁵ It upheld a modified auction system, and maintained an upset price of £1 per acre on land already surveyed. Credit terms over four years with a deposit of 20 per cent down were permitted for no more than 640 acres (259 hectares). The Act also proposed that 'Agricultural Areas', would be surveyed in lots of 320 acres (130 hectares), and that a 'Township Area', could be declared in Parliament on 14 days notice. Sales of the newly declared agricultural areas were intended to be 'the best procurable for agricultural purposes', and would be sold only on a credit basis under terms which stipulated that improvements be made. All applications for agricultural lots had to be in writing. The maximum area able to be held on credit was to be limited to 640 acres (130 hectares), but Township Lots were to be sold at auction with strict penalties for offenders. It contained a 'personal residence' clause and was an attempt to prevent the wealthy from acquiring agricultural land. Strangway's Act was a valiant attempt to remove the worst aspects of a system that had favoured the wealthy and move towards some semblance of a reasoned policy that might enable the small man to acquire land.²⁶ The intensity of the debate, however, continued and over the next twenty years resulted in no less than twenty-one amendments.²⁷

During the first few months of the first year after its enactment, the legislation seemed to be working as intended. Compensation was awarded to pastoralists for improvements, and land evacuated by stock surveyed to enable inspection by potential selectors. The Act, however, was not perfect and wealthy landowners soon found ways to circumvent the legislation. Even amongst those who might be expected to benefit from the change,

²⁴ Act No. 12, 1868-9.
²⁵ Act No. 14, 1868-69.
²⁶ Act No. 14, 1868-69; SAPD, 1868-69, pp. 461, 583, 611, 761-3, 767-768, 1012.
the reaction was mixed. The *Northern Argus* reported on 24 September 1869 that Strangway's Act was viewed as an 'insult to the farmers of South Australia', while only a few months later the *South Australian Register* heralded Strangway himself as a 'Saint George of land reformers'.

There were anomalies in the varied definitions of suitability for farming in the designated agricultural areas. But whether the twenty-one amendments the Act was to undergo during the next twenty years were fully justified or owed more to the adversarial nature of South Australia's politics is open to question. Relative to the area surveyed, the amount of land purchased under the new credit purchase arrangements was low (Table 2). One reason for this was that essential improvements - housing, fencing, pumps, sheds, etc - were costly and had to be paid in cash.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural Area</th>
<th>Sections surveyed</th>
<th>Surveyed acres</th>
<th>Total Sections sold</th>
<th>Acres sold</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warrow</td>
<td>Over 300</td>
<td>65 065</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1 534</td>
<td>£1.10s - £1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troubridge</td>
<td>Over 470</td>
<td>53 896</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3 934</td>
<td>£1.10s - £1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinare</td>
<td>Over 200</td>
<td>58 241</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2 026</td>
<td>£1.10s - £1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broughton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narracoorte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Troubridge and Guinare were permitted an additional three years extension before final payment.*

*Sourced and derived: South Australian Parliamentary Debates, 1869-70, p.1481 and South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 1870-71, No. 85.*

Other reasons soon became evident. Some of the designated Agricultural Areas were regarded as being quite unsuitable:

27 Buxton, Introduction.
29 *The South Australian Register*, 5 November 1869.
The new Land Act now in force is considered by some of our population to work admirably, but the majority of our farmers have quite a different opinion and they are undoubtedly right, when the Government pitch upon such worthless country as that of Warrow, in the Port Lincoln district, which is covered with limestone and consequently fit only for grazing purposes. The general opinion of the inhabitants of Port Lincoln is that the government is merely wasting the people's money. An opinion that was amply verified by the fact that not one acre of land was sold in Warrow in 1869 and only four sections in 1870.  

In the South-East Agricultural Area of Mount Muirhead government drainage works were not yet complete and were proving extremely expensive. Work, begun in mid1867, had already cost £14 652. 2s.10d. by July 1869,  and it was estimated in Parliament that before completion this figure would double and require an upset price of at least £6 per acre to enable the expenditure to be recouped. This, according to the *Northern Argus*, was a complete waste of money as 'there is plenty of good arable land in the northern districts which merely requires the expense of surveying'. In fact, so extensive and expensive were the south-east drainage works that Mount Muirhead was not opened until June 1871.  

But within a few months the *Northern Argus* was full of praise for the new legislation that, in their opinion, was free from 'any unnatural rush' such as had been witnessed in Victoria. The editor now envisaged that soon the land would be 'dotted' with 'hundreds of families' as 'land equal to any in the colony has been placed within the reach of the very best class of settlers, namely men with capital, energy and knowledge'.  All was not well, however, for due to poor harvests and unreliable rainfall particularly in more marginal areas, the terms of credit were extended and the stipulation on improvements made less onerous, in response to farmers' own representations. Also, many saw the need...
for some reappraisal of the Designated Areas and for improvements to roads and railways.36

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s the debate on land reform continued with every session of parliament. Never less than complex, the issues, such as 'dummying' and 'peacocking', continued to be raised. One faction sought to maintain farming within areas of reasonable rainfall as designated by the Surveyor General while others sought to disregard any limit. George W Goyder, the Surveyor-General, had recently reported on his study of Victorian land legislation, and had concluded that South Australia managed things much better. In Victoria free selection before survey had been permitted, with the result that the best land had been selected without any regard to the attendant needs of isolated communities. Goyder believed that the South Australian practice of surveying the land before selection had enabled the government to systematically establish the basic building blocks of infrastructure in step with settlement. Furthermore, he believed that South Australia enjoyed the unique advantage of a natural and distinct boundary between its pastoral and agricultural land.37 He therefore proposed that this natural boundary be incorporated into the Waste Land Laws so that all cultivation north of this, the 'Goyder line' as it became known, be prohibited in future. This latter point was sound and subsequently his judgement was vindicated, when farmers, gullied by the recent record rainfalls, optimistically demanded land north of the line:

Goyder may draw his imaginary line of rainfall, beyond which, in his opinion, it is unwise for the agriculturalist to go, but so long as experience shows that a profitable crop of wheat can be grown, the cultivator will not hesitate.38

The debate was conducted with a great deal of hypocrisy and grandstanding on both sides. Even the most respected of politicians were not beyond reproach – Playford,

36 SAPP 79/1869-70; SAPP 37/ 1871; SAPP 125/1871; SAPD 1869-70, pp. 152, 207-11, 1671.
37 SAPP 23/1870-71.
38 Northern Argus, 3 February 1871.
whose probity had earned him the name of 'Honest Tom', was on one occasion given the sobriquet of 'Mr Pliable'. In the same debate it was said that:

so long as private people with political influence had commercial relations with the government, so long would they have agitation for the alteration of their contract.

Mr Glyde, the champion of the South Australian small farmer in parliament, was stalwart in debate, declaring that:

the capitalist should have no advantage over the poor man, that we all had an equal right to the soil, that only fair to the poor man, who could not pay cash, to allow him credit and that he should be allowed sufficient land for himself and his family to cultivate.

On another occasion he 'pleaded for the rising generation of South Australia - for the poor against the rich - for the many against the few'. He waxed lyrical:

Man was not born to be his brother's slave
To groan and sweat his weary life away
To crouch along his passage to the grave
As though twere haunted by some beasts of prey.

Glyde's lofty rhetoric did not interfere with his association with those who would use 'political influence and commercial relations with the government' to procure large tracts of land on a purely speculative basis in the Northern Territory.
Newspapers sprang up in the new settlement areas and they were influential. They chronicled events on the ever-widening spread of the agricultural frontier and disseminated the news from the new agricultural areas. Between 1869 and 1884 no less than nine new newspapers were established, not only illustrating their wide geographical distribution but demonstrating the rapidity with which people were flocking to them to form communities. Publication followed publication in quick succession – the *Northern Argus* (1869), the *Yorkes Peninsula Advertiser* (1872), the *Naracoorte Herald* (1873), the *Port Pirie Gazette* (1876), the *Burra Record* (1876), the *Port Augusta Dispatch* (1877), *The Jamestown Review* (1878), *The Tatiara Mail* (1880) and the *Terowie Enterprise* (1884). They provided their readers with local news of land sales and births, deaths and marriages, and published reports of parliamentary debates and public meetings, which enabled comparison with distant events, particularly in regard to land reform in other states. Adverse comment on the large pastoralists was often voiced in their pages.\(^{45}\)

The Strangway Act had been passed to put the small man on the land. But, over time, even the ideology surrounding the dream of the small man on small acreage diminished, as the practicalities of survival led to a gradual increase in farm size, concurrent with a doubling in total area under cultivation (Tables 3 & 4). In 1871 there were almost 700 farms of less than 50 acres (20 hectares) and the average size was 225 acres (91 hectares), with an indicative percentage of some 55 per cent of these being below this size. In the intervening sixteen years to 1886, the area under cultivation almost doubled and average farm size had increased. Most significantly, some 70 per cent of holdings were above the average size, which by then was 309 acres (125 hectares) and the upper percentile of all farms was now somewhere between 500 and 2 000 acres (202 – 809 hectares).

By 1871 there was little doubt that the very small farm was not viable,\(^{46}\) and to enable the farmer on a small section to expand, the residence clause had to be amended. It was

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\(^{45}\) Buxton, p. 84.

\(^{46}\) SAPP 7/1871.
Table 3
Number of agricultural holdings by size (1871)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Size in Acres</th>
<th>Total Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,022</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>438,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,256</td>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>172,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,166</td>
<td>200-350</td>
<td>563,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>808</td>
<td>350-500</td>
<td>333,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>718</td>
<td>500-1,500</td>
<td>636,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>690</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>26,381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 9,660 2,171,189
Average size: 225

Sourced and derived: South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 1870-71, No. 8.

nonsense to believe that a man with one farm could not take up another because he could not sleep on both, said the *Northern Argus*. There were many both within and without parliament who agreed.\(^{47}\) Many experienced farmers also understood the need to diversify production, by carrying sheep as well as cultivating wheat, and therefore it was necessary to have access to a substantially greater acreage.\(^{48}\)

Table 4
Number of agricultural holdings by size (1886)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Size in Acres</th>
<th>Total Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>101-250</td>
<td>546,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,271</td>
<td>251-500</td>
<td>1,586,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,292</td>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>3,077,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>1,001-2,000</td>
<td>1,438,697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 12,758 3,949,211
Average size: 309

Sourced and derived: South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 1891, No. 8.

3.2.1 Crossing the Goyder Line
Two major arguments were used against altering existing legislation. In the first place it was argued that any relaxation of the residence clause would serve only to increase the

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\(^{47}\) SAPD 1872, p. 661.
\(^{48}\) SAPP 7/ 1871.
use of surrogates at auction where pastoralists used nominees fraudulently to purchase land (dummying) to preserve their holdings. Secondly, it was said that if the terms of credit for farmers were extended there would a substantial loss in government revenue amounting to around a quarter of a million pounds sterling. Nevertheless, both arguments were discounted, and a Bill was passed in 1872 that extended the necessary terms of credit to farmers to permit them to augment their holdings.\textsuperscript{49} First the government passed the necessary amendment to the Strangways Act. This was the 'Waste Lands Alienation Act' of 1872\textsuperscript{50} and it repealed most of the land legislation enacted since 1857 and applied to land not yet sold south of the 'Goyder line'. It also provided legal definition to what was meant by 'cultivation' under the Act, redefined the residence clauses to permit farmers to expand without the earlier constraints, and greatly extended the credit terms.\textsuperscript{50}

Under the new arrangements land sales boomed. Over a million acres (404 695 hectares) were bought, and prices went as high as £7.10s an acre in the first year following the enactment. It appeared as if God himself had approved, for the ideal weather that followed resulted in a record harvest and the price of wheat remained buoyant\textsuperscript{51} so that South Australia's farmers seemed assured of ever widening horizons. Soon there was a demand to remove restrictions imposed by the Goyder Line. Goyder's judgement was now questioned, and some went so far as to say that his 'line' was nonsense.\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Northern Argus} wanted it 'shifted out of the colony' entirely\textsuperscript{53} and, one might suppose, Goyder with it. The rains seemed to become particularly favourable for a number of years following the 1872 Act and many parliamentarians actually began to believe that 'the rain followed the plough'.\textsuperscript{54} Soon some two and a half million acres (1 011 736 hectares) had been alienated increasing the number of holdings by over seven thousand selections.\textsuperscript{55}

The acreage under wheat increased from 692 500 acres (280 251 hectares) in 1872 and to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[49] SAPD 1872, pp. 661, 658, 849-854, 1180.
\item[50] Buxton, pp. 37-38.
\item[51] SAPP 3/1882.
\item[52] SAPD 1874, p. 905; \textit{Northern Argus}, 22 May 1874.
\item[53] \textit{Northern Argus}, 29 March 1874.
\item[54] \textit{The Farmers Weekly Messenger}, 3 September 1875. See also SAPD 1883, p.1391; SAPD 1876, p. 1460.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
1,305,850 acres (528,470 hectares) in 1877-78\textsuperscript{56} (Table 5). The farmers' only complaint now was that compulsory survey work was unable to keep pace with the increasing demand for even more land.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Area cultivated (acres) & Under wheat \\
\hline
1868-69 & 808,234 & 533,035 \\
1872-73 & 1,164,846 & 759,811 \\
1877-78 & 1,828,115 & 1,163,646 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Increase in cultivated area in South Australia (1868-78)}
\end{table}

\textit{Sourced:} South Australian Parliamentary Papers, No. 3, 1882.

The pressure on parliament became insupportable and finally 'the line' was abolished everywhere 'south of the twenty sixth parallel of South latitude', \textsuperscript{58} and thus to the very border of the Northern Territory. No limit was placed on credit purchase for cultivation. This irresponsible de-restriction of any limit on cultivation, in turn, not only encouraged and increased speculation but placed intense pressure on the pastoralist's pasture so that his only resort was to increase 'dummying' to preserve it.

In 1876 Goyder himself had something to say on the matter of expansion to the north:

\begin{quote}
During the last twenty years I have crossed and recrossed the country in question during all seasons of the year, and have seen the surface in good seasons like a hayfield, teeming with rich, rank and luxuriant vegetation and during drought destitute of grass and herbage, the surface soil dried the intense heat, in places broken and pulverized by the passage of stock, and formed by the action of wind into miniature hummocks, surrounding the closely cropped stumps of salt bushes etc., and the soil blown away in places to a depth of several inches, the drift covering the fences of yards troughs etc., and so denuded of feed as to be altogether useless for
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{55} Buxton, p. 42, quoting from T Playford in \textit{Past and Present Land Systems}, 1881, p. 12, who noted that from the commencement of the colony until 1869 the total area of land sold was 379 million acres.

\textsuperscript{56} SAPP 3/1882.

\textsuperscript{57} Buxton, p. 41, quoting from \textit{Miners News}, 18 October, 1872 and 27 May, 1873.

\textsuperscript{58} "Act No. 22", 1874.
stock of any description. Had the soil been ploughed at that time the whole the depth of the furrow must inevitably have been blown away.  

Issues between farmer and pastoralist became confused. The pastoralist might say that the continued irresponsible invasion of grazing land was a threat to the very future of the pastoral industry itself. Those on the other side argued that farm production was valued at £1 680 996 whilst exports from pastoralism were only marginally higher at £1 883 519. Furthermore, there were only 240 pastoralists, employing 4 000 people, whereas farming employed somewhere between 20 000 and 30 000 people, a large proportion of whom were self-employed. The implication was that pastoralists were seen as being bent on retaining the wealth of the colony's natural resources to the detriment of the worker.

The opening up of the country beyond 'the line' for farming was welcomed, and at least one parliamentarian looked forward to the day when:

> the land would be held by a numerous population enjoying that state of existence described in the Scriptures as neither poverty nor riches, the soil being held and tilled by a yeomanry, who would be a moral, religious, upright community.

But, with some befuddled logic, he also warned that if the land was rapidly 'worked out' and abandoned by farmers then the best land might 'fall into the hands of a race of shepherd kings and the community be divided into the very rich and very poor'.

Many were concerned at the 'explosive expansion' of farmers north of the 'Goyder line', but others maintained, with the Minister of Agriculture, that results spoke for themselves. In the Northern districts cultivation had increased sevenfold, land sales had trebled and the population had doubled. Overall the South Australians remained confident and between 1876 and 1877 the construction of four new railways was approved for the

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59 SAPP 14/1876.
60 SAPD 1877, p. 636 - Cowan quoting *Harcus's Handbook*.
61 SAPP 145/1876.
62 SAPD 1877, p. 95.
63 SAPD 1877, p. 95.
64 Buxton, p.53.
Northern Areas to keep pace with the advance of the selectors.\textsuperscript{66} The abnormally high rainfall and buoyant market for wheat continued for a while so that the extraordinary expansion of cultivation northwards was actively encouraged. In 1877 over 500 000 acres (202 347 hectares) were selected and in the following year a million acres (404 694 hectares) were surveyed, of which a further half a million (202 347 hectares) were taken up by selectors.\textsuperscript{67} The rate of increase in wheat exported from the northern port of Port Augusta at the head of South Australia's Gulf of St Vincent between 1877 and 1880 are shown in Table 6 and seemed to justify the general optimism.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Wheat Exports from Port Augusta (1878-1880)}
\begin{tabular}{lrrr}
\hline
Exports & 1878 & 1879 & 1880 \\
\hline
Bushels of Wheat & 45 000 & 114 000 & 546 000 \\
Tons of Flour & 108 & 450 & 5 000 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Source: South Australian Parliamentary Papers No. 28, 1880, Appendix A.

The local newspaper, the \textit{Port Augusta Dispatch}, was wholly inspired with the growth in wheat exports and seemed to believe that there was virtually no limit to the expansion of wheat into the very desert:

\begin{quotation}
We are very far south of the utmost limit of wheat producing portion of this colony. Some of our young men may yet be speeding the plough on the banks of the River Finke, or on the plateaus of the Macdonnell Ranges in Central Australia.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quotation}

3.3 The reckoning
In 1882, when the reckoning came, 14 000 selections had been made, of these 5 000 were completely paid for and almost the same number were well on the way. But disturbing news began to percolate down from the north. In 1880 in the Hundred of Minburra, of some five hundred acres (202 hectares) sown, only 242 bushels (6 776 lbs or 3 080 kgs)

\textsuperscript{65} SAPD 1877, p. 202.
\textsuperscript{66} SAPP 244/1876.
\textsuperscript{67} SAPP 1881, Statistical Register.
\textsuperscript{68} Port Augusta Dispatch, 5 November 1880.
were harvested. Low yields such as this at first forced farmers to cultivate and sow more land in an effort to raise their production to viable levels. This only added to the disaster and in 1882 some 4 000 (1 619 hectares) yielded less than three pounds per acre (3.4 kg per hectare). 69 Farmers then had no alternative but to walk off their farms.

Parliament was informed that one farmer from Burra had said that 'the crops are nearly all withered away. I do not think there is a solvent farmer in the Hundred' and 'we should not feel it so much if we could get water'. Another declared that he would rather be in prison than continue farming. 70 A correspondent to the Northern Register now complained that:

> the sooner the Government stop selling land outside Goyder's rainfall line the better. I have seen five seasons north of it, and every year, about August, the wheat was in a dying condition... I was told that it would be so before I selected; but like so many others, I thought that rain follows the plough, and I paid dear for my folly. 71

Some in parliament expressed disbelief when legislation was introduced to provide a little relief. Inevitably, however, the unpalatable truth came to be more or less accepted. As one Member of Parliament put it - 'a man starting to graze sheep and cultivate land must have at the very least £1, 500 or £2, 000 before he could expect to be successful'. 72

The debate for and against ebbed and flowed 73 until a complex Bill was passed to give relief on a selective basis. Essentially, farmers who were considered 'deserving' were allowed to sell their land back to the government and re-purchase it, or another selection, at a much reduced rate. The price reduction was considerable and those not yet completely ruined jumped at the opportunity (Table 7). For those who could not afford to re-purchase, the result was often destitution, as can be readily seen from the Insolvency Returns (Table 8).

69 SAPP 76/1883-4. Map, Appendix F.
70 Buxton p. 66; SAPD, 1882, pp.1062,1063.
71 SAPD 1882, p.171.
72 SAPD 1882, p. 303.
Table 7

Prices of surrendered selections (1883-1884)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of selection</th>
<th>Original purchase price</th>
<th>Price re-appraised after surrender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>316 acres</td>
<td>£1 027</td>
<td>£323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>386 acres</td>
<td>£2 993</td>
<td>£395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>640 acres</td>
<td>£2 353</td>
<td>£656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>780 acres</td>
<td>£3 427</td>
<td>£799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced: South Australian Parliamentary Papers, No. 83, 1883-1884.

Table 8

Extracts from the Insolvency Returns (1882-1883)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liabilities</th>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Estate realised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel, Paul</td>
<td>Kulparra</td>
<td>£1 021. 9. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake, JR</td>
<td>Boolcunda</td>
<td>£3 164. 7. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd, C</td>
<td>Barunga</td>
<td>£242. 17. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radig, F</td>
<td>Wonna</td>
<td>£316. 10. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franke, CA</td>
<td>YanYarrie</td>
<td>£1 232. 17. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McNamara, JJ</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The sale of the horse did not realise enough to pay messenger's costs.

Sourced: Buxton, p.77. Extracts from South Australian Parliamentary Papers, No. 205, 1883-1884.

These disasters resulted in the serious loss to the colony of anticipated revenue from land sales, causing an income tax to be introduced, as well as taxes on beer and land, to reduce the shortfall.\(^{74}\) Even in the most favoured areas farmers were now struggling to survive, particularly affected were those who had ventured north of the 'Goyder line'. In 1888 a Commission was called to report on the best means of dealing with South Australia's Crown Lands. The Commissioners found that holdings were on average too small and the price put upon the land was in any case too high. They recommended, furthermore, that stipulations as to residency and cultivation should be abolished. Indeed, they went so far

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\(^{74}\) Buxton, p.73.
as to recommend that 'the present land laws' were too complex and 'should be repealed' and be replaced by 'land laws of greater simplicity and more general adaptability'.\textsuperscript{75}

Conclusion

Thus during the crucial years from 1863 to 1890 when South Australia seriously attempted to effect colonization of the Northern Territory, its own problems, directly associated with land settlement, were not yet worked out. During this period there were some twenty-one amendments to Strangway's Act alone. The settlement of South Australia had been anything but a straightforward process.

Many of its problems had been self-imposed, first under a governor, and then through the agency of its democratically elected government. In time it was able to find its own resolutions. This it was unable to do in the Northern Territory, and all its attempts to manage its greatly expanded northern domain were circumscribed by a preoccupation with affairs much closer to home. The effects of this were greatly exacerbated by its tendency to view the land within its extended boundary as a 'milk cow' secured by a tight leading rein.

\textsuperscript{75} SAPP 28/1888, Report p. VI.
Conclusion to Part 1
**Conclusion to Part 1**

Historically, permanent settlement came about with the systematic development of agriculture. Its evolution occurred within organisational systems, which combined individual skills and ability in community interchange in true symbiosis. The principle was common across all cultures and, in practice, colonial settlement depended upon it. Colonial settlements survived and prospered only by harnessing individual initiative, channeled and disciplined for the good of the community as a whole, as Australian colonization bears witness.

Successful colonization was dependent upon the progressive emergence of distinct patterns within community, reconfigured over time and dictated by local imperatives of climate, soil and demographics. No authority, however autocratic, was ever able to impose its detailed will on distant peoples, as exemplified by the loss to Empire of the American colonies, and, all other things being equal, the rapid development of appropriate local autonomy was, *a priori*, the key to viable settlement.
Part 11

Rethinking colonial endeavour in relation to agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory, 1863 to 1945: a critical perspective

The South Australian Years (1863 -1910)
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Conclusion to Part 11
Part 11

The South Australian years (1863 – 1910)

Summary
In Part Two the seminal years of the Territory's settlement are discussed. These were years during which a pattern for settlement was set which invariably denied any emergence of local autonomies. South Australia's false presumptions and resultant disillusion are examined. The evidence presented in the Royal Commission of 1895 is used to provide specific insights. The role of the different ethnic groups is explored, together with the contribution of individuals who accomplished much more than anything initiated by government. The relative success of those engaged in pastoral, mining and crop farming enterprise is examined in its relevance to the comparative success of Chinese miners and farmers. Some consequences of Aboriginal disenfranchisement are looked into and the failure of a 'brave effort' explored. The final chapter in this section concerns reports written just prior to, and in the first year following, Commonwealth takeover. These are considered relevant to subsequent events.

The argument
'Faith, hope and clarity' are the essential attributes, as Professor WK Ferguson said in an address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1961.¹ The first forty years of colonial settlement in the Territory was a period in which the South Australian Government demonstrated remarkable tenacity in embracing the first two virtues but ignored any recognition of 'clarity'.

In 1921 the economist Frank H Knight was the first to attempt to scientifically apply the consideration 'risk' to project planning and he stressed the importance of minimising all inherent uncertainty.² In the forty formative years following annexation successive administrations lacked the modern scientific tools necessary for systematic 'risk assessment'. Nonetheless, it seems evident that when the South Australian government


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annexed the Territory in 1863 it did not envisage the probability or even consider the consequences of failure.

In Colin White's view in *Mastering risk: environment, markets and politics in Australian economic history*, the success of British colonial settlement of Australia generally rests upon the fact that the separate colonies managed to find:

- a middle path between the imposed uniformity resulting from excessive control by a central authority and the disorganized anarchy resulting from excessive fragmentation and conflict. Even more significantly the relevant political and economic structures created a favourable context for efficient exploitation of resources and management of risk.\(^3\)

This cannot be said of the colonial development of the Northern Territory. In both concept and implementation, the policies seem too often to have been counter-productive. Bauer is of the opinion that:

South Australia has been almost universally condemned for the poor administration she gave to the Northern Territory, and for the most part this is a deserved condemnation. Her control was unimaginative inconsistent, and inept, and this pattern of poor administration laid down in the 1870's and 1880's has dogged the Territory ever since.\(^4\)

He notes that the rationale for the failure has been often debated heatedly but as far as he is concerned the specific causes can be grouped under three headings - abysmal ignorance of the physical nature of the country, political expediency, and the nature of the men making the settlement.\(^5\) It may be stated at the outset that the reasons for failure may not have been quite so simplistic.

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4 FH Bauer. *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region*, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey, Report No. 64. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p.135.

5 Bauer, p.135.
The assessment of 'risk' in economic terms is associated with information and uncertainty to do with decision making. There are a number of definitions of 'risk', which vary between normative and behavioural. In project management 'risk' is defined as a measure of the potential inability to achieve overall program objectives within defined cost, schedule and technical constraint. None of the many South Australian governments, which tried to settle the Territory from long distance, ever seems to have quantified these potent dynamics. As far as they were concerned, whatever course they embarked upon was inevitably wrapped in an aura of absolute certainty. South Australian politicians never seemed able to recognise 'risk' at all from the standpoint of the potential Territory farmer settler as they had, by trial and error, at home. There was in fact no real plan.

In the context of land settlement policy in Australia overall, Sir Stephen Roberts, in 1922, said that 'the future lies not, as in the past with the maker of Land laws, but with sympathetic administration and land laws.' Sympathy and empathy are not quite synonymous terms but his comment is applicable to early Northern Territory administration and to its land laws in particular. Empathy and understanding between government and settler was singularly lacking. Few Premiers held a majority in the South Australian Parliament for more than a few months at a time. In consequence there were many inconsistencies in policy and nothing planned for Territory development was ever carried through to a logical conclusion. Furthermore, to use Blainey's term, the 'tyranny of distance' affected the expense of settlement and no government ever seemed to have envisaged, let alone quantified, the cost involved. The dictum of Adam Smith was apposite in the context. In his opinion 'after government becomes expensive, it is the worst possible method to support it by a land rent.\footnote{Adam Smith, \textit{An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations} [Internet]. Library of Economics and Liberty: Adam Smith Fifth edition (1789), republished from: Edwin Cannan's annotated edition, 1904, Methuen & Co., Ltd. First edition of 1776 with an Introduction and Notes by Edwin Cannan, 1896, [cited November 19 2001]. Available from: http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN1.html. This quotation is from Smith's \textit{Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms}, (p.239) delivered in the University of Glasgow by Adam Smith, in 1763 and is mentioned in paragraph 1.29 of Edwin Cannan's Preface.}

An attempt was made by South Australia to base settlement in the Territory on the agricultural industry and today the question of whether the Territory can sustain any viable agricultural industry in the longer-term remains still open to debate. The record is confusing and mirrors events. Runaway costs without return and inadequate communications with, and within, the still virtually unknown region proved unworkable. The argument that South Australian Governments failed to efficiently utilize the resources available or to permit farmers to do so might seem self-evident to some, but there are many opinions and it is probable that plaudits and opprobrium are often misplaced. In the late eighteenth century a pamphleteer and political commentator observed that 'in power, as in most other things, the way for Princes to keep it, is not to grasp more than their arms can well hold'. That aphorism could well have been applied to the South Australian Government's naivety in taking over the Northern Territory and attempting to run it as an extension of itself, not recognising that a distant colony required a proper degree of autonomy in action, within the broad parameters of an overarching plan, which it had itself enjoyed.

Organisation
Salient points of the South Australian years (1863 - 1910) are examined in seven chapters. The first chapter in this section covers the period from annexation to 1890 when South Australia attempted to colonize its expanded northern territory, which it had acquired with such euphoria against better advice. The following four chapters deal thematically with aspects of South Australia's humiliating failures despite its best effort. These cover the Northern Territory Railway, orphan child of the dream for a transcontinental link; the findings of the Royal Commission of 1895, with the contra-indications of recorded evidence; the largely forgotten missionary attempt to include Aboriginals of the Daly River within the social fabric of settlement; and some pioneering

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8 Arthur Bryant. *Pepys and the Revolution*. London: Collins, 1979. p.76. A quotation by Viscount Halifax, an 18th century English statesman, known as 'the trimmer' by his contemporaries because of his practice of 'trimming' or balancing between factions during the highly confused political period when the Stuart King James II was ousted from the throne and replaced by William of Orange in 1688. He was a survivor and wrote a famous political pamphlet, *The Character of a Trimmer* (written 1684, published 1688), which describes the virtues of a middle course in politics.
success despite the dead hand of government. The interregnum between South Australia and Commonwealth is then examined. The section ends with a short conclusion.
Chapter 4

Speculation and first administrations (1864-1890)
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Summary
The Wakefield Doctrine, ostensibly the basis for South Australia's foundation, had little to do with its rapid establishment between 1836 and 1863. Because of its location, with the better agricultural lands close to Adelaide, its required infrastructure worked outwards from the city on interior lines. Likewise, with its later command of the lower reaches of the Murray River, the early colonists were able to open up river steamboat commerce, making access to the interior possible and thereby facilitating inter-colonial trade. In 1845, the discovery and exploitation of copper deposits further stimulated its early economic expansion. By 1854 the colony had begun railway construction. Export of wheat, wool and copper increased so that South Australian wheat soon dominated the Australian market. In addition, the world wool market was buoyant and earlier copper mining was augmented by further discoveries at Moonta and Wallaroo.

An adequate supply of labour became difficult when gold was discovered in the eastern colonies in the 1840s and 1850s. This, however, did not seriously affect the new City-State of Adelaide with its well-integrated urban and rural sectors and during its early years confidence remained high. So much so that it was prepared in 1863, against advice of wiser heads and from the Colonial Office itself, to expand its authority into the Northern Territory, at a time when many of the issues relating to its own problems in land settlement remained unresolved.

The early years of South Australian administration in the Territory were formative to subsequent emerging patterns of settlement. By basing their hopes on speculation in Territory land to raise capital sufficient to develop the north and by orchestrating everything from Adelaide, their distant capital in the south, they set themselves precepts and parameters that limited the very possibility of success and denied a proper degree of local authority. All South Australia's efforts came to naught and its failure became apparent within a very short space of time.
4.1 Annexation

In 1858 South Australia requested permission from the Colonial Office to expand its frontier to the north coast of Australia. The region was extremely difficult to reach and its interior virtually unknown. The sailor and oceanographer King in his reports advised caution, but the subsequent reports of later explorers were much more sanguine and were extremely encouraging:

I have accomplished the great object of the expedition, and taken the whole party through to witness the fact, and through one of the finest countries man would wish to pass, good to the coast, and with a stream of running water within half a mile of the sea. From Newcastle Waters to the sea beach the main body of the horses have been only one night without water, and then got it within the next day. If this country is settled it will be one of the finest under the Crown, suitable of any and everything.

This report by one of the heroes of the hour was reasonably interpreted in South Australia as describing a tropical Arcadia. The South Australians could not be dissuaded from pressing their suit ever more strongly upon the home government. The Colonial Office, however, was more realistic. It advised that the region was not yet ready for administration. It acknowledged that parts of it were said to be well grassed and fit for settlement but there was much of the region which ‘was at present barren and worthless’. There was no doubt they believed that the natural movement of people from the adjacent colonies would in time increase, but until that eventuated they believed that only some form of temporary government was justified.

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2 In *South Australia Parliamentary Papers*, no. 19, 1895. Hereinafter SAPP, thus SAPP 19/1895, p.32. Quoted from John McDouall Stuart’s report by Parsons in evidence to the Royal Commission.
3 SAPP 127/1863 - "Annexation of Northern Territory ... copy of Despatches addressed to His Grace the Secretary of State on the subject of the Annexation of the Northern Territory and the replies thereto, together with copies of applications ... for the occupation of land within such Territory". In these papers there is a long letter from Dominick Daly, describing McDouall Stuart’s success in reaching the North Coast and describing in glowing terms the benefits and the suitability of the South Australians if annexation is granted.
4 SAPP 37/1863 - "Colonization of North Australia".
5 FH Bauer. *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region*. CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey Report No 64. CSIRO, Canberra. 1964, p.46, quoting SAPP 37/1863 - colonial office comment re annexation.
Persuaded to examine the matter more fully, they formed the view that administration of the region should be divided between the colonies of South Australia and Queensland. When Queensland lost interest in the matter, the Colonial Office reluctantly agreed to the South Australian proposal, with the proviso that South Australia modify its existing land legislation and accept that annexation would only be granted as a temporary measure. This last was inserted as a *caveat* in the Letters Patent of Annexation,\(^6\) causing some concern in South Australia.

Many, however, recognised the difficulties inherent to the project, for not only was the region virtually unknown but South Australia was not well placed, in financial or geographical terms, to undertake settlement. Nonetheless, despite these considerations, the South Australian parliament rushed through enabling legislation regardless. Without further debate, in November 1863 the Northern Territory Act was passed and both Houses rose immediately.

It seemed to be the prevailing belief that the project would be financed from early land sales and terms of sale were incorporated into the Act, and advertised:

> On or before the first day of February, 1864, the officers appointed for the purpose in London and Adelaide shall announce, by public advertisement, that on the first day of March, 1864, they will be prepared to receive applications from any persons willing to purchase land offered for sale under the above-mentioned Act.\(^7\)

Investment in South Australian land had been buoyant during the decade prior to the annexation of the Territory and no one seemed to expect that the new enterprise would not similarly be of benefit to the South Australian Treasury. But without information and without planning this was, by any standards, to be a gamble whose outcome would depend entirely on luck.

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\(^6\) Mrs Dominic Daly. *Digging, Squatting, and the Pioneer Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia.* London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington., 1887. A copy of 'Her Majesty's Letters Patent', granting annexation of the Northern Territory to South Australia, is contained in an appendice to this publication.

\(^7\) SAPP 133/1863 -"Proposed Northern Territory Land Regulations. Proposed Regulations for the Sale of Land under the "Northern Territory Act".
Although it was not known at the time, land legislation for South Australia had still to undergo a further twenty years of heated debate before most of the associated problems were worked out. In the mid 1860s it was close to becoming a dog’s breakfast. Nonetheless, the three decades of legislative enactment already experienced in South Australia’s temperate arable south inevitably influence and help shape the initial land legislation governing the Territory’s land sales. The Act of 12 November 1863 guaranteed that all purchases would be surveyed within five years. Buyers would be able to purchase any number of 160-acre lots (65 hectares) and would have the added incentive of a free half-acre ‘town’ block for every ‘country’ block they purchased. Prices ranged from seven shillings and sixpence per acre for the first 250,000 acres (101,174 hectares) to twelve shillings per acre for a later issue of 250,000 acres. At first all went well, and within twelve months over 250,000 acres were taken up - location unknown, site unseen, unsurveyed - by avid speculators in both London and Adelaide. Lip-service was given to ‘modified’ legislation that was ostensibly still designed to provide ‘systematic’ land sales for honest hard working ‘yeoman farmers’. In the event, London and Adelaide speculators, and even South Australian politicians, immediately collared most of the offering. At least one potential but unsuccessful purchaser was more cautious. He had a more realistic view of the value of the offer:

I beg to apply for the land described below, or as much of it as it may be competent to the Government to grant me, at a peppercorn rent, and for a term of twenty-one years, as an encouragement to settle in so inhospitable a region as North Australia.8

The government was not responsive to such canny overtures for, like the imprudent landlord, they intended to:

8 SAPP 122/1863 - "Applications for Country on North Coast; Correspondence relative to the Settlement of the newly-discovered Northern Territory."
reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce. The wood of the forest, the grass of the field, and all the natural fruits of the earth. 9

Nonetheless, in the immediate aftermath of the 1863 Act few doubted the outcome, for the sale of Northern Territory land in the year 1864–65 quadrupled, reaching the highest level in the history of the South Australian colony.

4.2 The Finniss Expedition
Enthusiastic haste is not conducive to sound planning. The site of the first settlement was still undecided even as Territory land was being offered for sale in March 1864. 10 Land sales had been underway for a full month before the Chief Secretary appointed Boyce Travers Finniss as the first Government Resident of the Northern Territory, with instructions to lead a preliminary survey. And four months later, he had not even set up his base camp, let alone begun to explore the country. 11

Finniss, himself, had been a prominent citizen of the South Australian colony since its foundation. He was an army engineer and trained surveyor and appears to have been both professionally efficient and personally honest. From 1847 until 1862 he had been an active and respected member of the South Australian Legislative Council. In 1855 he was appointed Acting Governor, before becoming State Premier when self-government was reached in 1857. Coltheart argues strongly that he was 'One of the few South Australian politicians of this period who put the practice of politics before the pursuit of self-interest'. 12 She points out that in consequence his financial position had always been somewhat precarious. At the time of his hasty appointment Finniss was a widower of

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12 Coltheart, p. 102.
fifty-seven with three young adult daughters and a seventeen-year-old son to support. It appears that he needed the money and grasped the opportunity.\textsuperscript{13}

The Finniss expedition endured endless misery and some of the party mutinied. It failed, and Finniss, accused of execrable leadership and of selecting an impossibly flood-prone area on the lower reaches of the Adelaide River, was recalled to South Australia in disgrace. In his analysis, Bauer has it that Finniss had been given \textit{carte blanche} as to where he should establish the settlement, but Coltheart argues much more convincingly that his hands were tied from the first. She maintains that his fault lay only in accepting the appointment under the prevailing circumstances of precipitous haste and lack of government forethought.

\textbf{4.2.1 Royal Commission of 1866}

In 1866 a Royal Commission was convened to look, \textit{inter alia}, into the reasons for the expedition's failure. Its findings would seem to illustrate Roy Foster's belief that 'the most illuminating history is written to show how people acted in the expectation of a future that never happened'.\textsuperscript{14} With the benefit of hindsight, the Commission appears to have been influenced more by wishful thinking than by cold logic. Available evidence certainly justifies Coltheart's assertion, that Finniss was 'calumniated' by its conclusions.

The Commission placed responsibility for the failure on Finniss alone and effectively destroyed his reputation. He was condemned for poor judgement and was held solely responsible for a venture that had cost the South Australian Government £40 000 and had achieved nothing. He was also censured for having surveyed an insufficient area. Coltheart contends that this created him the convenient scapegoat for government


\textsuperscript{14} Daniel Snowman, "Roy Foster talks to Daniel Snowman." \textit{History Today} 51, no. 10 (2001): 30-32. Roy Foster is Carroll Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford.
ineptitude and the costly litigation that was to follow. Given the tenor of the times, there is certainly more than a taint of hypocrisy in the Commission's additional finding:

That in sending away an armed party for the express purpose of 'retaliating' upon the blacks on the 8th day of September, 1864, he caused the death of a defenceless prisoner, and violated the principles which have hitherto actuated this Government in their treatment of the natives, thereby bringing the Colony into disrepute.

Coltheart states, with some reason, that historians have dealt with Finniss even more harshly than the Royal Commission itself. She believes that his expedition was compromised from the start because he was directed to the Adelaide River by the government and had no other option. Her assertion gives some rationality to the fact that the perpetrators of the mutiny, who had absconded with the expedition's longboat and sailed with it to Western Australia, were not apprehended immediately on arrival in Adelaide. Instead, their actions were condoned and Finniss held accountable. Coltheart also contends that:

The party had been appointed by the government and it was subsequently asserted that the officers "were for the most part proteges of Ministers of the Crown and Members of Parliament". As the major land order holders were either Ministers, Members, or their business associates, some of the party were, as Finniss alleged, de facto agents of the land order holders.

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15 Coltheart, p.104, who quotes from an article from the South Australian House of Assembly, 23 February, 1866, col. 1118; Register, 23 May 1866, 15 June 1869 and also quoting from Parsons, "The Truth About the Northern Territory" (Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1907).
16 SAPP 17/1866 - "Report of Commission ... to inquire into the Management of the Northern Territory Expedition."
17 SAPP 134/1866 - "Finniss, Boyce Travers: Northern Territory Correspondence." This contains three letters written by Finniss at Escape Cliffs in late 1865: (a) 20/10/1865 his last surveying instructions to Manton before his recall; (b) 9/11/1865, advising staff that he had been recalled and appointing James Manton as his deputy; (c) 14/11/95 giving a summary of state of affairs at Escape Cliffs. See also SAPP 145/1866 - "Petition from Members of Northern Territory Expeditions."
18 Coltheart p.109, quoting PF Donovan, A Land Full of Possibilities: A History of South Australia's Northern Territory. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1945, p.49, and a letter from Finniss to Daly of 5 May 1868 where Donovan pointed out that JP Boucaut and Ebenezer Ward confirmed this view.
Having had no choice in the selection of his party, Finniss was therefore placed in an invidious position and soon found that he had to justify his every order to a disrespectful staff, appointed not by him, but directly through government nepotism. This might make anyone appear a fool. Others have recounted particulars of the fractious nature of the ill-fated expedition, but, neither before or after his recall, was he ever given the opportunity to vindicate himself. On available evidence it is clear that Finniss was specifically directed to establish his colony in a flood-prone area and given specific instruction to 'examine the Adelaide River and near-by coast and to select a capital site'. There are indications that in spite of this he did attempt to seek a better site, for it is known that he authorised and personally led some arduous exploratory trips to investigate alternate possibilities. Coltheart's general contention that Finniss was not irresponsible is tenable, but her argument that the Adelaide River region was suitable for initial agricultural settlement is not. What is certain is that the expedition failed with some ignominy, and the repercussions were serious.

### 4.2.2 Repercussions

By November 1865 the matters concerning South Australia's premature sale of land in the Northern Territory were coming to a head when news began to circulate of Finniss' recall. Those who learnt of it sold out at once and from that point it was all downhill. Speculators demanded the return of their purchase money. At first the government resisted but in 1868, by amending the Act of 1863 that had authorised sales, it now offered twice the acreage of the original purchase to those who were not yet bankrupted. This was of only marginal help and bankruptcies continued. In 1869 the Northern Territory Company of Adelaide failed to sell off its shareholders' holdings and went into

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19 SAPP 89/1865 - "Northern Territory Correspondence. Correspondence relative to the Settlement of the Northern Territory of South Australia." SAPP 15/1865 - "Northern Territory Correspondence" - Correspondence dated between 16/12/1864 and 21/9/1865, primarily on the subject of the site of the capital, arguments pro and con and Ayers letter dismissing Finniss.

20 SAPP 36/1864.

21 SAPP 84/1865. "Marine survey of Northern Territory; SAPP 83/1866 - "Despatches from Northern Territory. From Government Resident to Hon. Chief Secretary."
liquidation. Protracted and costly litigation followed, and five years later at least one London-based company was awarded £78 000 in costs and refunds.\(^{22}\)

Finniss had provided a dubious but convenient scapegoat, but the cost of failure was real. Instead of a potential money-spinner, the Northern Territory had overnight become a monstrous liability. Officially, the incumbency of Boyce Travers Finniss as Government Resident of the Northern Territory ended in 1870, and the decade following was marked by prolonged effort to attract agricultural settlement of any kind. It would appear that the disaffected mutineers, who had absconded in 1865 in an open boat, had had some prescience in naming their vessel the *Forlorn Hope*.

### 4.3 Goyder's Expedition

In 1869 confidence returned for a short time when George Goyder, the South Australian Surveyor-General, was himself sent north to undertake a new survey. Bauer relates that before Goyder took on the job he first 'demanded and got £25,000 for the survey costs, a £3,000 bonus for himself, £12,000 for his party, and the right to choose 120 men and his own stores'.\(^{23}\) No one could ever doubt that it was he who was to be in charge of these operations.

From the time that he first laid foot ashore he energetically threw himself into the task. His headquarters were soon established and in short order the new town of Palmerston (later named Darwin) was laid out on its present site. He also surveyed the site for another port, which he called Southport at the head of navigation on the Middle Arm of Darwin Harbour, and for two other towns as well to be named Daly and Elizabeth. The latter two were never subsequently developed and the utility of Southport has yet to be proved. According to his reports, his party completed the survey of altogether 665 000 acres (269 122 hectares) of town and country in the remarkably short time of six months\(^{24}\) and in his upbeat opinion the future was bright, for as he put it:

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\(^{23}\) Bauer, p.67.

\(^{24}\) SAPP 46/1870 - "Return of Northern Territory Surveys: showing the cost per acre of the surveys in the Northern Territory, the number of lineal miles actually marked on the ground during the said surveys, the
Sooner or later it (the Northern Territory) must turn out well. The country ... is first class ... the soil in the slopes, valley, and parts of the tableland is well suited for cultivation and mostly rich.\textsuperscript{25}

The government was now sufficiently reassured for it to budget for and to itemize a list of salaries for its Northern Territory employees in the separate categories of 'Europeans and Natives'.\textsuperscript{26} While the \textit{Adelaide Register} stated, with some elation but no intended irony, that 'the South Australian Government can now freely transfer the responsibility of the Northern Territory from its own shoulders to that of the land speculators'.\textsuperscript{27}

As can be seen in Map 1, Goyder was a strong advocate for the Jeffersonian Grid system, which he employed in his Territory surveys. This took regard of neither the land's physical characteristics nor its potential for settlement. His rigidity in holding to this system was seen with full effect later and can be demonstrated to have been detrimental to settlement.\textsuperscript{28}

The presentiment of failure was already present in influential circles while ill-considered proposals, including the site for a new settlement on the Liverpool River, were being called for and just as quickly rejected. The Government, however, persisted in publicly overstating the case for easy settlement.\textsuperscript{29} Various schemes to develop farming were broached, but none seriously considered. Some were bizarre and need not be detailed here.\textsuperscript{30} The proposal by the Reverend Laurentius Skrefsried to introduce some 'Santhals', whom he described as being 'a hardy, industrious and prolific race, inhabiting a forest

\textsuperscript{25} SAPP 31/1869-70, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{26} SAPP 54/1871- "Proposed Northern Territory Expenditure 1871: as amended after Receipt of Despatches from the Government Resident."
\textsuperscript{27} Bauer, p.68.
\textsuperscript{29} Donovan, pp.58-70.
\textsuperscript{30} Hillock, pp. 37-39; SAPP 91/1 871, SAPP 73/1875, SAPP 29/1876, SAPP 1601/876. See also Mrs Daly, p.123.
country about 140 miles NNW of Calcutta,\(^1\) was fairly typical of many impractical suggestions that were examined and subsequently rejected by the administration.

One scheme, which might have resulted in some success, is seldom mentioned in the literature. It prefigured later post-World War II Empire Schemes and required the potential settler to provide evidence of agricultural experience and sufficient basic seed capital. It specifically proposed the settlement of 500 'capitalist-bachelors' from Britain.

\(^{1}\) SAPP 73/1875 - "Santhal Emigration to Northern Territory: Correspondence relative to a Proposed Introduction of Santhal Immigrants into the Northern Territory."
on the Victoria River. This was discouraged by spurious ministerial warnings and did not eventuate. Ministerial advice might have been more credible had it pointed out that, by definition, bachelors alone could not long sustain settlement. But this does not seem to have entered the debate.

4.3.1 The Telegraph and speculation
Fortunately the initial euphoria engendered by Goyder's survey was soon augmented by the completion of the telegraph linking Darwin with Adelaide and the rest of the world through London in 1872. The South Australian Government had used all its persuasive powers to get the necessary backing for this venture against strong competition from Queensland. It was a tremendous coup and gave a much-needed psychological boost to South Australia's effort to open up the Northern Territory.

4.3.2 Pastoralism
This was the age during which great cattle empires began to spread over the pampas and prairies of South and North America. The Northern Territory, now globally in touch, benefited accordingly. Pastoralists, largely financed by British capital, now took up land, albeit again often site unseen, and within ten years of the telegraph's completion almost 500,000 square miles (320,000,000 acres/12,950,220 hectares) of Territory land had been applied for as pastoral holdings.

4.3.3 Gold
Land selectors for absentee landowners had not been slow in following Goyder's survey but, almost immediately on the completion of the telegraph, messages were relaying the news of various mineral 'finds'. Goyder and others had furnished reports of the 'colour' being found in the Finniss, the Mary and the Katherine rivers. However, it is said that the first gold from the Territory was in ship's ballast, loaded at Southport (Darwin) in 1870 to be discovered later in Adelaide. Of such things are legends made.

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32 SAPP 128/1879 -"Proposed Settlement on Victoria River."
33 Bauer, p. 100. Quoting South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 1374: A-900/1875; see also "Northern Territory Resident - Correspondence received, A1673." In South Australian Archives, 1876, hereinafter NTRS 790 thus NTRS 790: A1673/1876.
34 Bauer, p.78; Hillock pp.12, 13.
The 'Northern Territory Gold Prospecting Association' – the Territory's first gold company - was formed prior to completion of the telegraph in 1871, and within a year had organised the first prospecting party to reach Darwin. Promoters in mining shares now joined in and there was a further explosion in speculation, this time in mining ventures. The South Australian Government ably abetted this by increasing the already liberal twenty acres allowed for a claim under South Australian law to forty acres for a claim in the Territory. This was unprecedented at the time when a corresponding claim allowance in Victoria was only half an acre at most.35

All this soon brought shiploads of prospectors to precipitate a short-lived gold rush, marred by blatant speculation. Sowden, writing in 1882, recalled that:

In several cases [companies] were formed with fluctuating share-lists which did no work at all. Land was pegged out anywhere, leases were applied for and the ventures sold when not a single prospect had been taken. A well known and 'straight' mining manager in one of the principal centers here assures me that years ago he received no fewer than four telegrams in one day from brokers in Adelaide to this effect: 'Peg out claim anywhere. We'll float it'.36

A government mining warden telegraphed Adelaide that:

Machinery covers the ground ... much of it seems to have been landed and left ... there is far too much machinery. ... Machines have been sent for claims that have not an ounce of gold ... barefaced false reports telegraphed to Adelaide ... men ... have done little else than build huts and eat provisions ... the whole thing ... a failure.37

Territory Europeans were in no doubt as to where the blame lay, and in 1874 two hundred and thirty one 'residents', perhaps all that there were, petitioned parliament as follows:

That while engaged in a struggle of no ordinary magnitude, with the object of forming a colony in and developing the resources of this

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35 Hillock, p.13.
37 Bauer, p.82, quoting SAPP 79/1874.
portion of the Province, your petitioners have had and still have to
encounter, in addition to the natural obstacles arising from climate and
remoteness from civilization, the still greater obstacle occasioned by the
maladministration of the government of this portion of the Province.\textsuperscript{38}

In 1879 fifty-seven influential men, who described themselves as 'merchants, bankers,
and others interested in the settlement of the Northern Territory', echoed the
dissatisfaction when they in turn petitioned parliament about the inequity of leasing
regulations.\textsuperscript{39}

4.4 Plantations and more speculation
The dream for the development of plantations came next, concurrent with attempts to
obtain 'coolie' labour.\textsuperscript{40} For a short time there was the perception of a 'boom' but it was
never real and like earlier schemes it failed miserably. Notwithstanding this, it did
produce some short-term benefits. Darwin seemed to become once more a focus of world
attention and came to be seen as an avenue for profitable investment in large-scale
agriculture – at least according to a contemporary account by Sowden.\textsuperscript{41}

Attention given to the potential of plantations at the time was out of all proportion to
anything that actually was, or could have been, achieved. Its failure was accompanied by
implications of fraud, administrative mismanagement and deceit and it all proved too
much for the budding colony. Successive administrations were unable to sustain or foster
confidence, and the plantation years added to the legacy that could be said to have
persisted until the outbreak of the war in the Pacific in 1942.

Both contemporary and present-day literature have given every possible reason for the
failures - poor soil, adverse weather conditions, lack of expertise, Aboriginal unrest, lack
of capital and poor management. But, as I have previously argued in \textit{Broken Dreams},
\textit{Broken Promise}, whilst there are examples of all of these, the cause of the disaster is

\textsuperscript{38} SAPP 232/1874 - "Petition from Resident's Reportin Northern Territory."
\textsuperscript{39} SAPP 92/1879 - "Petition re Leases in Northern Territory."
\textsuperscript{40} SAPP 42/1882 - "JA Ferguson: Coolie Labour for Northern Territory, with Supplementary letters
relating to Coolies and also to Tropical Products"; \textit{Northern Territory Times and Gazette}. Hereinafter
NTTG, thus NTTG 10/12/1881, 17/12/1881, 24/12/1881, 31/12/1881, 16/12/1882; Hillock pp. 58, 59, 77.
\textsuperscript{41} Sowden, pp. 94-96.
much more complex. According to Sowden, everything seemed to be progressing 'nicely' when the Minister responsible for the Territory, John Langdon Parsons, visited the Darwin plantations in 1882. Sowden recorded the visit in his book, The Territory as it is, and has left a glowing account of the developments as he saw them at the time.

Owston's plantation, the Palmerston Plantation Company of Melbourne, had initiated the whole thing with 20 000 acres (8 094 hectares) on the Daly River. Additionally, 70 800 acres (28 652 hectares) had been applied for on the Adelaide River for sugar growing and similar products, and there was a further 21 000 acres (8 499 under application immediately to the north of Darwin. On the Cox Peninsula at Delissaville, 75 000 acres (30 352 hectares) were occupied under the Sugar Grant Act, with another 1 500 acres (607 hectares) there under application. At Rum Jungle, a coffee plantation was established, and adjacent to it 3 000 acres (1214 hectares) were reserved for other plantation purposes. 42

With plantation work alone it was believed that soon there would be employment for thousands of men. Applications for land were coming in so fast that the government had to defer further acceptance. At Delissaville, an untested sugar mill had been set up and other mills were expected to be in operation 'forthwith'. The atmosphere was electric, and Sowden records just how much overseas interest was being stimulated by this activity:

[The Territory's] fame [is now recognised] throughout the world, and consular authorities and Government officials at Palmerston [Darwin] are frequently addressed from America, China, Mauritius, and other distant parts by men of capital and practical experience in plantation work, and asked for precise details. The Northern Territory will not for long be the terra incognita it has been. The Newspapers are spreading information about a place they have seen referred to in papers in the various countries where they live. 43

The optimism engendered was not shared by all. One can learn much from the vehement argument of the time. In 1882 in the Melbourne Age, South Australian parliamentarians

42 Hillock, pp. 64-66.
43 Sowden, pp. 94-96.
were accused of 'swindling' the public by buying land 'at seven shillings and sixpence per acre and then raising the price to twelve shillings per acre'. Minister Parsons' rebuttal in the Northern Territory Times and Gazette could have done little to calm troubled waters:

The Honourable J.L. Parsons utterly denies the statements and says that he only holds two or three small blocks in the Territory and they are nowise connected or near any land required for railways or other public works. 44

A letter published in the Adelaide Register described the Sugar Land Grants as an 'infamous scandal'. Members of the House of Assembly were accused of passing the Sugar Act 'only to secure for themselves large grants of land at public expense'. LL Furner indignantly refuted this by saying that 'only four members then in Parliament had taken up land'. 45

There is sufficient evidence to confirm a great deal of ill-advised manipulation and there are indications of government subterfuge and cover-up. The South Australians overstepped the mark with exaggerated publicity. Total sugar produced was negligible. At the height of the speculative 'boom' in 1883, Mrs Daly said that only some four hundredweight (180 kg) had been exported from the Territory - there does not appear to have been any more exported in following years. 46

Ostensibly the area taken up for sugar production was more than 100 000 acres (40 469 hectares), but most of this was speculative investment. Its story from beginning to end took almost twenty years to unfold and became the prime preoccupation for seventeen separate governments, and involved some twenty-nine ministers over the period. 47 By 1890 all plantation projects had been abandoned. The Palmerston Plantation Company was the one company involving interests other than South Australian, and there is clear evidence to show that it was less than subtly squeezed out by government intransigence in 1883. It had been the one enterprise that had been able to demonstrate any expertise

45 NTTG 2/12/1882.
46 Hillock; See also NTTG, 19/7/82.
47 Donovan, p. 113, quoting from SAPP 10/8/1870.
and its premature departure ultimately proved fatal to all others. Concurrent with Owston's withdrawal, perhaps even because of it, the imperial government withdrew the right of permanent annexation (Figure 1). There were three main protagonists in the saga of sugar plantations - Melbourne business interests, South Australian investors and the administration itself.

4.4.1 Melbourne interests
William Owston, urged by the South Australian government, initiated this attempt to grow sugar in the Territory. Owston was the very epitome of the 'yeoman', had they understood the term, with whom the government wished to people the North. He came from a family of farmers whose long line can be traced back to the early 1600s. As the younger son of a prosperous farming family, he had a sound understanding of both the science and the practice of the agriculture of his time. He was an example of the breed of men who, as 'squatters' in the early colonies, had done so much to pioneer settlement. After coming to Australia in the 1850s, he had made his fortune as a merchant in South Australia, New South Wales and Melbourne. When the South Australian government opened up Territory land for settlement he had been among the first to invest, even purchasing land for his sister Eliza.

In 1878 he was directly approached to invest in sugar plantations by the influential Lavington Glyde, an ex-Minister for the Territory with whom he seems to have had a cordial relationship. After his earlier experience with South Australian Government administration, he had had good reason to distrust its integrity. Chary of further

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48 Hillock, pp. 63-111.
49 Hillock, pp. 34-38. See also "Correspondence received: Minister for the Northern Territory, No 652"..." In South Australian Archives, 1878. Hereinafter GRS 1 thus GRS 1: 652/1878. See also GRS 1: 6/1879, GRS 1: 71/1879, GRS 1: 80/1879.
50 Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Victoria; Civil Registration Birth, Marriage and Death Records from the Civil Registration records in St Catherine's House. (Now moved to the Family Records Centre). Baptism, Marriage and Burial information from Registers at the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research in York, or the North Humberside Record Office at Beverley. Wills before 1858 from the Borthwick Institute, York. Legal document from the East Yorkshire Record Office, Beverley. Legal document from the North Yorkshire Record Office, Northallerton; Owston Family [Internet]. Timothy J. Owston, BA(Hons), MSc TECH)IT, PGCE(FE), [cited 19 November 2001]. Available from http://freespace.virgin.net/owston/ti/owstonIn.htm. See also NTTG, 29/3/1879 and 17/5/1879.
involvement, he nonetheless replied from Melbourne with an expression of interest,\(^{51}\) and journeyed to Adelaide to 'define most concisely my wishes and intentions' should he be persuaded to pursue the matter. Initial negotiations appear to have been successful. The government accepted all his 'stipulations' with alacrity, including his absolute condition of 'selection before survey' and Cabinet determined that they would 'favourably recommend Parliament to pass a Bill authorising the grant of land upon consideration of cultivation to be agreed upon'.\(^ {52}\) As far as Owston was concerned his 'stipulations' were non-negotiable. He understood the risks involved and required assurance of government cooperation. The site was to be selected by Owston himself and to be surveyed afterwards by government survey to his specific instruction. Contingent upon that understanding, he and his partners were prepared to invest the sum of £30 000 on the purchase and development of 20 000 acres (8 094 hectares) of freehold for the production of sugar and 'other tropical product'.\(^ {53}\) These proposals were accepted and rushed through channels. Owston then left for the Territory to a hero's welcome, where his movements and doings were eagerly reported in the local press.\(^ {54}\) After completing his preliminary explorations he returned to Melbourne to report and discuss the next steps with his partners.\(^ {55}\)

As the result of the publication of Owston's interest, the government began discussions with entrepreneurs in its home city of Adelaide, and by December 1880 it was trying to accommodate applications for 235 000 acres in an authorized allocation, which was limited by the Act to only 100 000 acres.\(^ {56}\) This government 'success' soon caused Owston's 'Victorian' venture to become regarded in South Australia with less enthusiasm. The South Australian Government had a change of heart and, after increasingly frustrating correspondence on the matter of the agreed 'selection of site before survey',

\(^{51}\) GRS 1: 652/1878.
\(^{52}\) GRS 1: 6/1879; see also Hillock pp. 34-37.
\(^{53}\) GRS 1: 6/1879; Hillock p. 36.
\(^{54}\) GRS 1: 71/1879; GRS 1: 80/1879; NTTG, 8/3/1878, 29/3/1879, 17/5/1879, 21/6/1879.
\(^{55}\) NTRS 790: A3578/1879; GRS 1:435/1879. See also Hillock, pp. 40-46.
\(^{56}\) GRS 1: 40/1881.
Owston threatened to quit but, on the receipt of some government reassurance, he persevered and at length advised government of the parameters of his selected plantation.\(^{58}\)

Government recalcitrance towards Owston's Melbourne company escalated, and the proliferating South Australian sugar companies became increasingly favoured. Indicative of this, Minister Parsons, despite extremely favourable reports of the Palmerston Plantation Company's progress, inexplicably failed to visit the site during his visit to the Territory in 1882.\(^{59}\) Finally, Surveyor-General Goyder, refused to survey the selection as had been agreed. The Palmerston Plantation Company then withdrew its investment and left the Territory.\(^{60}\) McMinn as Acting Government Resident recorded his 'regret to have to report complete abandonment of Owston's Plantation... despite cane... growing most luxuriantly'.\(^{61}\)

**4.4.2 Entrepreneurs from South Australia**

It is easy to contrast the treatment of Owston, the outsider, with that generously offered to representatives of the Adelaide establishment, represented principally by the Delissa Plantation Company, the later Daly River Company. This South Australian Company was given every encouragement by government. Delissa had selected his plantation area on unsuitable land, perhaps site unseen but certainly with the endorsement of the survey department and other government 'expert' opinion.\(^{62}\) The company directors discovered Delissa's deficits too late to avert the collapse of their Delissaville enterprise and he was dismissed in 1882.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{57}\) GRS 1:90/1889 includes records of related correspondence - GRS 1: 450/1879, GRS532/1879, GRS 1: 76/1880, GRS 1: 96/1880.

\(^{58}\) NTRS 790: A4070/1880.

\(^{59}\) Sowden, pp.82-83. See also Hillock p. 69.

\(^{60}\) NTTG, 19/5/1883. See also Hillock pp. 81- 85.


\(^{62}\) NTTG, 31/7/80.

\(^{63}\) NTTG, 30/12/1882, NTTG, 6/1/1883.;Hillock, pp. 71-75.

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Owston had first been offered this site and had rejected it as totally unsuitable.\textsuperscript{64} When, however, Delissa took it up he furnished his directors and the public with glowing reports of its potential. No one in government voiced any doubts as to its suitability until later. Even after Delissa was sacked for not growing any sugar, Price, the Government Resident, continued to follow the government line and quoted Holtze of the government gardens as agreeing that the Cox Peninsula was 'most suitable for sugar' - the clear inference being that under new management all would be well.\textsuperscript{65}

When at last the Delissaville directors on the Cox Peninsula recognised its Cox Peninsula site as worthless,\textsuperscript{66} they petitioned the government to take over Owston's abandoned plantation. Holtze was now quoted as saying that the land that they held on the Cox Peninsula was 'altogether unfit' and recommending that the Company 'transfer (its) operations to more suitable land on the Daly River'.\textsuperscript{67} The issue was further complicated for the government by Glyde, Owston's erstwhile friend and solicitor, who now claimed a right by association to assume ownership of the same favoured area.\textsuperscript{68}

Permission for the transfers was eventually given but no one would admit to knowing the boundaries of Owston's abandoned plantation, and the 'more suitable land' that had been surveyed by the survey department, comprising 50% swamp and 50% impenetrable jungle, the cause of Owston's withdrawal, was allocated between them. Glyde was fortunate enough to have Owston's nursery and headquarters on part of his portion, but he never did anything with it other than a fruitless effort to subdivide it in an attempt to sell it off in small blocks.\textsuperscript{69} Within a very few years both of these areas had to be abandoned and, with the exception of Owston's nursery, they have broken the hearts of those who have ever attempted to farm it since.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{64} Sowden, pp. 94-96.
\textsuperscript{65} NTGRR 53 A/1883 (August), McMinn (Acting).
\textsuperscript{66} NTTG 24/1/1885, NTTG 31/1/1885, NTTG 28/3/1885. Hillock, pp. 91-96.
\textsuperscript{67} GRS 1: 918/1884.
\textsuperscript{69} NTTG 21/2/1885, 6/6/1885, 27/6/1885.
\textsuperscript{70} Hillock, pp. 101-104.
4.4.3 Administrative orchestration

The accompanying publicity did nothing to dissuade many observers that such chauvinism, if continued, painted a bleak future for the Territory. The Royal Commission of Inquiry of 1895, which was later convened to look into the matter, ignored this but preferred to believe that the loss of confidence had been caused by the earlier shortcomings of the Finniss expedition. It found that 'badly disciplined survey parties' were responsible to some extent for the earlier failure which immediately followed the annexation of 1863.\(^{71}\)

Public servants were at best inept but there were many at ministerial level who demonstrated a total misunderstanding of basic fundamentals. Parsons had been Minister for the Territory before taking up the position of Government Resident and was arguably a man committed to the ideal of Territory development. Nonetheless, he had been less than honest with Owston and with others as well. At the time of the Delissaville transfer to the Daly, the steadfast Brandt, who had struggled with insufficiently fertile land at Shoal Bay, had also applied for land on the Daly. While openly professing sympathy and support to Brandt, Parsons wrote advising government in a memorandum as follows:

> with the exception of the Delissaville Company who might be allowed a block [on the Daly]... Brandt's plantation forms no ground for asking any concessions ... the land on the Daly is too valuable ... to be given away and should be offered in blocks of hundreds not thousands of acres.\(^{72}\)

Owston's complaint was not unique. Many in the Territory echoed the belief expressed in the Northern Territory Times and Gazette that public servants were permitting the purchase of good land for the sole purpose of speculation, whilst preventing honest contenders from being able to purchase at all.\(^{73}\)

Others have argued that market conditions would have impaired successful Territory plantation agriculture without the aid of inept administrative intervention. The decade 1885-1895 witnessed a protracted world-wide financial crisis which particularly affected

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\(^{71}\) SAPP 19/1895 - "Report of the Northern Territory Commission, Minutes of proceedings, evidence and appendices." p. xix.

\(^{72}\) NTRS 790: 679/1884.
the colony of South Australia and caused a downturn in the market for sugar. But, as Thomas Carlyle has said, 'no great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men'. Bauer has characterised Parsons as being capable and having a 'grasp of the problems equaled by none of his predecessors'. It is conceivable that Bauer may have been mistaken.

Prior to his appointment as Government Resident in 1884, John Langdon Parsons had been Minister responsible for the Northern Territory. As Government Resident during the plantation years, he was better placed than any other to influence events for the better. As Minister, he had the power and at best he did not use it. As Resident, his reports espoused enthusiasm only, often expressing misplaced optimism and sometimes downright untruth. For example, McMinn as Acting Government Resident during Parsons' absence reported that there were now 61,000 cattle, 2,918 horses and 3,000 sheep in the Territory, that additionally Newcastle Waters Station had been established and that there was further evidence of pastoral activity on the Victoria River. Parsons translated this into:

the tens of thousands of cattle coming for our Territory and for Western Australia will force on settlement on this river [the Victoria], and will give it a considerable trade importance.

Continuing to expound on the Victoria River's prospects as a port, he vilified the Royal Navy's report on the river's potential for navigation, and expressed 'surprise at the somewhat depreciating remarks about the Victoria River made by my friend Staff Commander J. E. Coghlan, R.N.'

This professional naval report gave him, he said, no reason to alter his opinion, which was 'strongly in favor of the Victoria' as the site for a major port, on the grounds that he

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73 NTTG 26/11/1881.
74 Bauer, p.137.
75 NTGRR 53 A/1883, (August) McMinn (Acting), and NTGRR 54A/1884, McMinn (Acting).
76 NTGRR 55/1885, Parsons.
77 NTGRR 55/1885, Parsons.
had been told by the South Australian riverboat captain, Carrington, that the Victoria River was:

navigable for vessels of the largest class for a distance of fifty miles from the sea, and further for a distance of sixty miles for a suitable river craft, drawing not more than 3ft. ... [and that] the Victoria River as a commercial highway is superior to the Thames, the Mersey, or the Hooghly. 78

By way of providing further incontrovertible evidence, he added:

the further fact that Mr. Stevens is able to get his stores to Fisherton 79, and from the landing-place has a dray road to the back country-makes a sufficiently satisfactory round of confidence in the future fortunes of the Victoria River. 80

Kirkland, editor of the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, was never backward in expressing local opinion. When echoing the calls, now current, for 'separation' from South Australia, he accused Parsons of giving no encouragement to furthering trade, improving the mail or improving police services. 81 Kirkland used colourful language and he was a master of the mixed metaphor. Under Parsons' administration, the Territory, he said, had somehow metamorphosed from a 'White Elephant' into an 'Ugly Duckling'. His diatribe continued in several issues directed at the government in general, and Parsons in particular. There was a need, he wrote, for 'new land laws'. He fulminated against the illogical imposition of even higher customs duties on imported goods. 82 According to Kirkland, everything that was wrong with the Territory could be laid to Parsons' account. Mixing innuendo and direct reproach, he accused Parsons in 1889 of occupying a sinecure at a higher salary than anything he had been hitherto able to earn as either a Minister of Religion or a Minister of the Crown. It would also be better if there was 'a good deal less of the useless and stupid telegraphing and writing to Adelaide for

78 NTGRR 55/ 1885, Parsons.
79 Fisherton is no longer on any maps of the region and I have been unable to trace its position precisely but assume that it was somewhere in the region of Timber Creek.
80 NTGRR 55/ 1885, Parsons.
81 NTTG 18/6/1887.
82 NTTG 2/7/1887, 10/9/1887, 26/11/1887.
permission to act'. Kirkland finally implied that Parsons had so reduced the status of Government Resident that others had rejected approaches to take up the position despite the attendant 'good salary'.

Figure 1
Cartoon of 1883

On any argument Parsons chose always to run with the fox and chase with the hounds. Four years after his involvement in the forced withdrawal of Owston, on the principle of 'selection before survey', he advised that 'selection before survey' was 'the best policy to secure settlement and cultivation of these lands'. Always a political animal his recorded opinion often reflected a prejudice against 'orientals' and 'coloured' immigration, yet, as the newly elected representative for the Northern Territory, he returned to parliament and

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83 NTTG 13/12/1889, 27/12/1889.
became a strong advocate for 'Indian Emigration'.\footnote{NTGRR 53/1888, Parsons.} It appears that Parsons was ever consistent only in maintaining that the failure of agricultural settlement was due solely to residual effects from the initial Finniss expedition.\footnote{NTTG 1/4/1892.}

**Conclusions**

There is little doubt that unfettered speculation had been as much to blame as government ineptitude in the scandal associated with the plantation 'boom'. Certainly it was a period for speculation generally, but its persistence in the Territory is unusual. Blainey talks of the 'tyranny of distance' but here the tyrant is ignorance, although it cannot be denied that distance features.

Hitherto, the target group exploited had been from overseas (UK), but the Finniss debacle and speculation in land as well as in minerals which had been encouraged since had, perhaps, made the London investor now less gullible. Thus South Australia's next 'offering' was largely fueled by South Australian investors who, ably encouraged by their own politicians, proved themselves equally ignorant and singularly chauvinistic in retaining this 'fount of riches' for themselves against investors from the neighbouring Colony of Victoria.

South Australia's hope had been based on false assumptions and the resultant disillusion was inevitable. If nothing else, the speculative interest that government had encouraged had at first provided stimulating discussions for a north-south transcontinental railway, financed by overseas capital. However, all opportunity had been lost in subsequent doubt and mistrust. The assessment of risk is intuitive to the professional entrepreneur. Men like Owston, able to estimate the probabilities, who planned and prepared, who did not believe in throwing everything at a venture, found themselves outside the coterie of South Australian vested interest and were no longer prepared to invest in the Territory. Something more than words was required.

\footnote{SAPP 19/1895, pp. 62, 30; See also Coltheart, p.104. (SAPDHA, 23 February, 1866, col. 1118); See Register, 23 May 1866, 15 June 1869; Parsons, "The Truth About the Northern Territory" (Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1907).}
Chapter 5

The reckoning (1890-1895)
Chapter 5
The reckoning (1890-1895)

Summary
By 1890 the South Australian was forced to understand that it could not long sustain its efforts in the Northern Territory. The truth hidden behind early bombast was most evident to those unfortunates, not in government employ, who tried to survive as things began to fall apart. To these people the reasons for failure were self-evident and obtained frequent expression in the local press. Despite the fact that hopes were boosted by the first railway construction which had been planned in the euphoria engendered by the 'plantation boom', fear of imminent collapse continued as concern began to be openly expressed in Imperial circles as well as by the emergent Australian polity at large. General public concern eventually forced the government to give lip service to providing local autonomy to Territorians but this could have no effect while South Australia was now seriously considering the need to divest itself absolutely of the troublesome Territory. In 1892 a new Government Resident assessed the situation with a degree of objective honesty that had hitherto been notably absent within local administrations.

5.1 Plantations: the last act
On the evidence, it is difficult to refute the judgement on the South Australian establishment, which was given in an article penned by the editor of the Northern Territory Times and Gazette in 1885. He was commenting upon the voluntary liquidation of the Delissaville Plantation by its South Australian directors:

Capitalists of the city of cant and churches, because the only loss has fallen on the business people of Palmerston and the employees, who have, we say it advisedly, been systematically and designedly swindled by men who, if report is correct, are rolling in wealth, who are shining lights of the churches, pillars of respectability, and amongst the most honoured of men in South Australia. These models of every virtue have gone out and studied 'a new way to pay old debts'... [by] ...robbing the bone and sinew of the country they profess to wish to advance; men who spend every shilling made in the Territory where it is made, and without whom the place would soon perish, or at most exist merely as a government station ... the small shareholders ... have been ignored and the creditors ... have not been paid. The wire-pullers have as usual skinned the lamb ... a new syndicate is formed, and apparently without
let or hindrance ... take over the concession, buy the old company plant for a song... and leave the creditor ... to whistle for claims.¹

This was written as the original Delissaville Company was metamorphosed into the Daly River Company almost by sleight of hand. Delissaville had failed due to the directors' inability to recognise the difference between good land and bad and the machinations of the Survey Department.²

It is easy to contrast the inadequacy demonstrated at Delissaville with the professional competence displayed by those Melbourne interests who had been so badly treated by the South Australian government. These, the 'shining lights of the churches, pillars of respectability', had not played fair. Owston, of the Palmerston Plantation Company on the Daly River, had succeeded against all odds, despite the connivings of 'the most honoured of men in South Australia'. Virtually unassisted, he had discovered and selected one of the very few areas suited to the purpose in an unexplored region.³

Owston had planned to set up the plantation in an area that, even today, is recognised as the best land in the Northern Territory.⁴ Soils capable of growing commercial sugar cane are quite rare - on the Daly River they are limited to those soils known as 'levee soils'. Indicative of Owston's ability, 50% of the soils in his selection are of this type, and most of the remainder can be classified as having good general agricultural potential.⁵

Furthermore, as has subsequently been proved, his site overall was capable of subdivision with many agriculturally useful farming blocks of similar potential. In negotiations with government he had insisted on producing crops other than sugar.⁶ His contemporaries

¹ Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 6/6/1885. Hereinafter NTTG, thus NTTG 6/6/1885.
³ "Northern Territory Resident - Correspondence received." In Northern Territory Archives, NTRS 790: A4070/1880. Hereinafter NTRS 790, thus NTRS 790: A4070/1880; NTRS 790: A4128/1880.
⁴ Hillock, pp. 49-51.
⁵ Hillock, pp. 150-155 and appendices iv,v,vi,vii.
⁶ "Correspondence Received: Minister for the Northern Territory." In South Australian Archives, GRS 1:435/1879. Hereinafter GRS 1:435, thus GRS 1:435/1879; GRS 1: 450/1879, GRS 1: 90/1889; records of related correspondence here include (GRS 1: 450/1879), a letter written by Owston to the Minister on 3/11/1879 in relation to terminology to be used relating to other plantation products, and that the term for the allowance of the bonus be extended to 1885; GRS 1: 532/1879, GRS 1: 76/1880, NTTG, 1/5/1880.
attested to his success and crops that he pioneered are still recommended as suitable for the Daly River Region and were informed by farming methods known to maintain and improve inherent fertility, with the capacity to spread risk and mitigate the effect of soil and plant pests. This was recognized at the time to be best practice - Thomas Jefferson used an eight course rotation on his plantation in Virginia. - quite clearly Owston knew what he was about and was a competent farmer and manager.

There were few if any draught horses of quality available in the Territory so Owston selected them himself and imported them from the south, with all associated equipment and the skilled men to handle them. His choice of site recognized the need to transport large quantities of bulky product outwards and to carry other supplies inwards as well as equally bulky guano as fertilizer. Without either road or rail this needed transport by water. Owston had made sure that he obtained a chart of the river before finalising his selection and in due course he personally navigated his company's vessels to and from the Port of Darwin. He was also a good citizen supplying seed maize to the few small, but able, farmers trying to establish themselves on the periphery of the big companies. His actions and example did much to enable them to survive for at least a few years after he left.

The Palmerston Plantation Company owned by Melbourne interests were denied tenure on lands which, by agreement, they had selected before survey, and this was the chief reason for their withdrawal. Had they been treated fairly they would probably have survived. Owston their chief executive had proven expertise in the requisites of business and agricultural management. As a merchant of long standing he could have developed suitable markets for the wide range of products that he pioneered. He might well have established tenants on the principle of partnership, as was already being attempted with

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9 Hillock, pp. 54-55, 57.
10 GRS 1: 111/1880.
11 NTTG 26/7/1881, 17/9/1881, 2/2/1882. See also Hillock, p.57.
12 NTTG 23/8/1882. See also Hillock, p.76.
some success in Queensland. Furthermore, he had access to sufficient capital for initial establishment, to endure a protracted period of market development and to conduct experimental research. However it was not to be and there was no one able to replace them. Albeit with growing disquiet, the euphoria engendered by the plantation era was therefore short-lived. Nonetheless, if only for a few more years, the dream of plantations persisted and had one other important effect.

5.2 Railway construction
The boost given to expectations by the short-lived 'plantation boom' also advanced and gave renewed energy to railway construction. The line from Darwin to Pine Creek was the most costly enterprise yet undertaken by the South Australians and for a while it was its only success. It was built entirely by Chinese labour and completed in two years well within budget and without mishap. The line cost £1 180 584, and ran through 146 miles of virtually unknown country where engineering data on the flood-prone rivers and over three hundred creeks did not exist. It was completed in 1888 and after one year of operation by the construction engineers it was handed over as a going concern to South Australian Railways (SAR). Immediately it became an essential addition to communications and infrastructure. These successful construction engineers also came from another 'foreign' colony - this time West Australia. If there was any irony in that, it certainly would not have been recognised at the time.

Every passing year had demonstrated that there was little hope of covering debt. Territory 'settlers' in particular and Empire builders at large could see for themselves the hollowness of past political rhetoric for they were witnesses to the immensity of the failure. Official financial figures spoke for themselves (Table 9).
Table 9
Northern Territory 1864 - 1889
South Australian Government Payments and Receipts

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Land Sales</th>
<th>Customs</th>
<th>All Other</th>
<th>Maintenance</th>
<th>Retirement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>30/6/1864</td>
<td>*£91 918 + £1 076</td>
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<td><strong>£3 912</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/7/1865 to</td>
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<td><strong>£250 760</strong></td>
<td><strong>£307 363</strong></td>
<td><strong>£812 518</strong></td>
<td><strong>£12 577</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

less repayment on land orders in 1874

-£73 396

Total thus adjusted

£210 681 + £250 760 + £307 363 + £812 518 = £12 577

Operating Deficit
[Land Sales + Customs + All Other] - [Settlement Maintenance + Retirement Allowances]
[£210 681 + £250 760 + £307 363] - (£12 577) = £643 824 - £831 095 = (£287 271)

* Interest on Balance of Land Sales
** Costs incurred on Land Sales (includes £3 422 repayment of Commission after refunding Land Holder Orders)
*** Costs incurred on customs or other revenue

Derived and sourced: Northern Territory Government Residents' Reports, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 21/1909, and Donovan (Appendices).
5.3 Public comment

Only two decades after annexation, the records of the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* are redolent of dissatisfaction. Early in 1887 the editor wrote an article with the heading 'WHAT THE SETTLERS WANT', reminiscent of Luther's 'Ninety-five Theses', but only listing seventeen definitive points. None of them were excessively immoderate, but they serve to illustrate some major deficiencies, not only in Territory infrastructure but also in Territory administration.

After twenty-four years the Port of Darwin had no properly marked shipping approach. The jetty itself was inadequate without loading or unloading facilities. Freight charges on goods delivered at the port were understandably high but the impost of government import duties virtually doubled them. There was no quarantine station. Health regulations had been drawn up but were unenforceable. Hospital facilities and medical staff were inadequate. Darwin residents paid rates but there was no town council to represent their needs or to ensure that their money was put to proper use. Mail deliveries to the interior were unworkable. There were very few roads and those that had been constructed were inadequate and constantly in poor condition. According to the *Territory Times and Gazette*, if bridges existed at all they seemed to have been constructed by 'ignorant amateurs'. There were no government veterinary regulations and no stock inspectors able to 'investigate the disease in cattle coming overland - now termed 'Redwater'. Furthermore ran the tirade, the Territory was saddled with Land and Mining Acts which were distinguished only by 'humbug, delay, and obstruction'.

This clarion call for redress concluded by reminding the South Australian Government of its promise to Territorians - 'three years ago' - to create 'two members to Parliament' able 'to look after the interests of the Territory, and see our account against South Australia fairly adjusted'; finally:

> in the event of the above requirements not receiving more attention than they have commanded in the past, the only one thing wanted is SEPARATION from South Australia.\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) NTTG 5/2/1887.
A reader's letter expressed overwhelming frustration with an administration that seemed often in duplicitous association and focussed solely on raising revenue. This letter was headed 'HOW SETTLEMENT IS PREVENTED IN THE TERRITORY'. It began with a direct assault on the Government Resident:

It is a well-known fact that the Government Resident, Mr Parsons, has expended a good deal of eloquence trying to establish agriculture in the Northern Territory, without the ghost of a result. Witness Delissaville and the Daly.\(^\text{17}\)

He then aimed a well-directed dig at VL Solomon, the well-known Territory entrepreneur, who had often been seen to have worked hand in hand with a duplicitous government. He did not mince words:

I consider they have gone the wrong way about the matter from the first, and are going to make another gross mistake with their land sale on the Daly River in May. They have reserved all the good land there (and God knows there is not much of that in the Territory) and are kindly going to allow the public a chance to secure a lot of useless swampy blocks. That don't look like encouraging settlement!\(^\text{18}\)

The 'swampy blocks' here referred to were those that had been foisted in 1884 upon unwitting shareholders of the Daly River Company, which the directors were now trying off-load. One of those directors was Solomon, who had been also associated with Delissaville,\(^\text{19}\) and who was now possibly the major remaining shareholder. The letter continued:

If the Government think settlers are mad enough to buy any swamp that they think proper to advertise, they are labouring under a mistake, and the sooner they cure themselves of that delusion it will be the better for the Territory. They may get an Adelaide syndicate to deal with them, but some of these gentry have burned their fingers pretty well in Territory land already. But by the land transactions in the past and present, these

\(^{17}\) NTTG 16/4/1887.  
^{18}\) NTTG 16/4/1887.  
^{19}\) Hillock, pp.124-129, 150, 153-155, and also Appendix iii.
are the men and the only men that are wanted. May they do the country as much good in the future, as they have accomplished already.20

Finally, the irate writer turned on the much vaunted Government Garden:

The Government Garden I consider a useless toy. Why don't the Government have an experimental farm on the Daly or Adelaide Rivers, and experiment there with products suitable for the soil and climate; people then could see what the land would really grow, and if the country is good for anything it might be made to pay for itself. That is the way they go about the things in the other Colonies and I don't see why it can't be done here too. A Botanical Garden is all very good as an ornament and pleasure ground in a large town, but we want something more profitable here. We have enough of beautiful natural scenery without resorting to expensive artificial. 21

In the same year the editor noted that it was impossible for 'able white men' to obtain even a small farming acreage. He compared this with Queensland where 'small men' were being encouraged to take up land by a government that created regulations specific to the purpose, and in November 1887 the call for 'separation' was taken up once more by the editor.22

In 1888 the newspaper again contrasted Queensland's progressive policies with those of South Australia23, and when Poett's Plantation at Rum Jungle failed in March, the newspaper also led with the adverse news that all settler activity was now at a standstill on the Daly.24

In April, a reader's letter suggested growing fresh vegetables for sale to the community in the Government Experimental Gardens as a means of defraying expense. To this the government replied inconsequentially that the proper purpose of the Gardens was to
'experiment', and discounted this suggestion out of hand.25 By the end of 1888 the local paper recorded that agriculture was now absolutely 'in abeyance'.26

Ever increasing economic adversity at this time was accompanied by evident decline in race relations. As the editor put it, only the Chinese were now able to grow vegetables for the benefit of residents' health. Then, damning with faint praise and rising irrationality, he added that the Chinese were farming without any 'right or license', and blamed them for the slow progress of railway construction, suggesting that a recent derailment was the result of their poor work.27

There was now an enduring tenor of despair and disillusion with persistent censure falling on the administration for its 'penny wise' incompetence. South Australia was compared to a 'mercenary moneylender', taking from its citizens:

an extravagant QUID PRO QUO for everything she does for us. The spirit of enterprise is a thing unknown. All uncommon calls upon the Treasury funds are resisted with a bitterness and determination that are never warranted.28

When the Minister visited the Territory in 1889, he was sourly greeted only with the comment that 'we have not received much benefit from the visit'.29 In 'disheartening review' - his own words - of 1889, Editor Kirkland put all the Territory's ills at government's door. In his depression, he saw that even what was desirable was inevitably doomed. As he saw it, when the railway was completed it would serve only to bring about a 'great decrease in European population' which would see 'all business enterprises suffering in consequence'. Even now, he said:

26 NTTG 31/8/1889.
27 NTTG 31/8/1889.
28 NTTG 31/8/1889.
29 NTTG 5/1/1889.
outgoing steamers for the last few months [were] packed with Europeans leaving the place, who could find no inducement for them to become permanent settlers.\textsuperscript{30}

The remaining residents continued to offer gratuitous advice, for there was no mystery to them as to 'why capital and investment had eluded the Territory'. Darwin should be a free port. It should be open to goods and people from all over the world. Land tenure should be appropriate to settlement. And, of course, the railway should be improved and incorporated into a proper transport system.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Figure 2}

Additional funds for the 'white elephant'

![Image](image_url)


Grave misgivings had been evident for many years in South Australia, as the cartoon, published in 1872 (Figure 2), graphically illustrates. What was now different was that while Territorians themselves were calling for 'separation' there were also disquieting

\textsuperscript{30} NTTG 3/1/1890.
\textsuperscript{31} NTTG 12/1/1889.
rumours that the South Australian Government itself was actively seeking to divest its 'great white elephant'. ³² In a March edition in 1890, the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* reported that the government hoped to offer the Northern Territory in a job lot for £23 million 'to pay off South Australia's national debt'. This, if the sale went through, would provide South Australia with a £10 million surplus. ³³ The editor was silent as to where this it might leave Territorians.

By 1891 criticism of government was the order of the day. Railway freights not only cost twice as much as those in the other colonies but the service was inefficient as well. ³⁴ The train from Darwin to Pine Creek was said to stop anywhere on impulse at any time but would not stop for the convenience of passengers, many of whom were prospective settlers, and who else but government was to blame:

> Is it likely that people will come here when they see and learn the kind of encouragement they are likely to receive at the hands of the government?
> Is it not more likely that such cases as I have described have already done much to discourage settlers coming here? ³⁵

Owston had left the Territory in 1883 on the specific grounds that he would not be permitted 'selection before survey'. When the principle of 'selection before survey' was at last conceded by the Land Act of 1890, it was by then far too late and now no one seemed interested. ³⁶ Kirkland despairingly summed up the year 1891 by saying:

> Instead of South Australia's management being productive of benefits it is gradually sapping the foundations of the settlement by its rigid adherence to a policy which can have no better effect than to diminish its population and cut down its revenue to a mere cipher. ³⁷

Now, it appeared, only the Chinese were interested in taking up agricultural land, and their 'unofficial' farming ventures were very successful. The Chinese had been in the

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³² NTTG 31/8/1889.
³³ NTTG 11/3/90.
³⁴ NTTG 2/3/1889.
³⁵ NTTG 1/5/1891.
³⁶ SAPP 19/1895.
³⁷ NTTG 9/1/1891.
Territory for many years, attracted first by gold, and then had been actively recruited for the railway's construction. Reporting on a visit to abandoned plantation areas on the Daly River, the newspaper recorded that 'it has remained for a party of Chinese to persevere and show the possibilities of the soil for the support of a competent farming class'.

These 'industrious pagans', said the writer, grew the best sugar cane that he had ever seen and they cultivated:

- Beds of vegetables of all kinds - English cabbage, lettuce, onions, beans, sweet potatoes &c are planted out and showing very choice growth.
- Maize, cane, ginger, delicious melons of ponderous size, bananas, pineapples and a variety of other things were to be seen ... the Chinamans' only regret was that there was no one in the district to consume the produce.

On 18 September 1891 the paper announced that Brandt, the last and most stalwart of the decade's pioneer planters, had finally wound up his business and left the Territory for good. Brandt had persisted in plantation agriculture, first at Shoal Bay and latterly at Rum Jungle. Initial capital invested on his infrastructure, plant and machinery had been well in excess of £25,000, and his outlay annually in working capital over the years can only be guessed at. It would have certainly amounted to a substantial sum, but the gross realised from his winding-up sale came only to something less than £400.

5.4 Imperial concern
With this demise, failure was now obvious to all, not least to the Colonial Office who had advised against South Australia's undertaking from the start. It must have been particularly galling to the nabobs of Whitehall to contrast the South Australian experience with that of Canada. There, legislation in 1873 had created the North-West Mounted Police to meet the immediate needs of the Canadian North-West Territories, which were vastly larger in area than the Northern Territory. The force of 300 'Mounties' had effectively done what the Colonial Office had advised the South Australians to do in

38 NTTG, 27/6/1890.
39 NTTG 27/6/1890.
40 NTTG 18/9/91.
41 SAPP 19/1895, p.19, Questions 411, 412.
1863, by providing 'temporary government of the Territory until the increase in population shall make a more permanent arrangement desirable'.

The 'Mounties' worked in pairs and were given legal, as well as penal, powers. They also acted as magistrates. In 1884 their numbers were increased to a thousand, who were fully employed providing advice and assistance. They carried the mail, collected customs, recorded mining claims and generally performed whatever government services seemed necessary:

The police strategy of carefully explaining the new legal system to the indigenous population worked extraordinarily well. A recent study has shown that the crime rate for natives in the period before 1885 was only twenty per cent of that for the white population. The police were key players in the successful negotiations leading to the signing of treaties with the Cree and Blackfoot Indian peoples.

At the time the efficacy of such a force in the initial stages of settlement was contrasted with the concurrent mayhem of the American 'Wild West'. In 1869 alone the cost of the American frontier had set back the 'U.S. government about $20 million, one million more than Canada's total budget for that year. The Klondike Gold Rush of 1896-97, with miners flocking to the diggings that were situated adjacently but on either side of the border, was further evidence of the value of the North-West Mounted Police:

Observers marvelled at the contrast between wide-open Skagway, Alaska [in the USA], run by a gang of extortionists led by the notorious Soapy Smith, and Dawson City [in Canada] where the bars and dance halls obediently closed down on Sundays.

The North-West Mounted Police Force as an international model was the ideal and it would be quite invidious to compare it with the Territory Police of that era. As Bill

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42 SAPP 37/1863, "Colonial office comment re annexation."
44 Macleod.
Wilson makes clear, the Territory Police were only an ancillary to the Northern Territory administration. They were few in number and, in the early days at least, lacked the exceptional leadership which was so evident in the Canadian model. The 'Mounties', as a national force, were also significantly numerically larger and better equipped.  

5.4.1 The Kintore Report  
In 1891 a concerned home government despatched the Governor of South Australia, Lord Kintore, with instructions 'to see the Territory and report to the Imperial authorities his deductions'. His report, as printed in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, was highly condemnatory of the situation. On reading it one can almost feel with him his shock and amazement at what he saw and found. This urbane and much-travelled man, familiar with the rapid rate of development around the globe and confirmed in his certainties of the British Empire's pre-eminent role in carrying the 'white man's burden' of 'civilization' to the furthest ends of the earth, obviously found it all difficult to understand.

He considered that the costs incurred to date by the South Australian government, and its inability to sustain them, were affecting not only the Territory but also South Australia itself. He took note of the fact that, despite many advantages, 'there is much poor country in the Northern Territory,' and recommended that 'only the best be utilised to promote agriculture'. But he continued:

> I regret to report ... evidence of decline in Darwin only too plain ... since completion of railway construction each successive steamer carries away its complement of passengers and few arrive. Empty tenements in many streets witness to its depletion, trade is stagnant, further decadence must render it moribund.  

The situation as Kintore found it obviously left him puzzled and apparently he was left with no other option than to conclude that the 'principal reason' was that 'European labour is unsuited to the climate'. Accordingly, he now asked 'their lordships' to look

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47 NTTG 10/4/1891.
favourably on 'the recent passage through South Australian Parliament of the Indian Coolie Amendment Act', for he believed that procurement of Asiatic labour was 'essential to the development of the country'. He had seen for himself the relative success of the Chinese, and recommended there was sufficient 'cause shown' for the power of the Governor in Council to be used to lift constraints placed on them and for 'Clause 3 of the Chinese Restriction Act of 1888' to be suspended.

He further advised that it seemed to him essential that the Territory be administered as a separate entity. It was, he believed, in the 'interest of both provinces' that South Australia should now be relieved of its responsibility and the border fixed at the Macdonell Ranges (Alice Springs). Although Kintore did not care to advise further, it was presumed by some that he had recommended that the Territory was to be administered as a Crown Colony.49

5.5 Political considerations
In both Britain and Australia disillusion mounted and matters moved towards larger questions of nationality and an Australian Federation.50 At the Federal Conference in Melbourne on 6 February 1890, Alfred Deakin had envisaged an Australia as a 'Sovereign State' that might itself now govern 'the colonies, which may yet be carved out of the unoccupied territory in Australia'. The Queensland Colonial Secretary, JM Macrossan, went even further by specifically calling for a Federal Government that would administer the 'waste lands' of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.51

Though talk of an Australian Federation was widespread, its implementation could not be achieved overnight and in the interim, whether it liked it or not, South Australia was left to administer its 'wasteland' as best it could. Dominion status for Australia was

48 NTTG 10/4/1891.
49 NTTG 7/8/1891.
50 NTTG 7/8/1891, 4/9/1891.
anticipated with enthusiasm by the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*. The editor 'confidently expected' that the Australian Dominion when established would take on the building of 'the transcontinental railway' as 'one of its earliest enterprises'. His authority for this came from no less an institution than the *Melbourne Evening Standard*, which had discussed the construction by the 'Dominion' of a transcontinental railway linking the eastern colonies with Darwin.\(^52\)

By 1890 the importance of railways in supporting further Territory settlement was now an active consideration. In that year Acting Government Resident Knight reported that a transcontinental railway was the essential component for further development in the Territory. He concluded his first report by stressing that it was imperative that it should be completed on the 'land grant system', which had proved of such signal success in the United States. He proffered advice at length as to how this might be accomplished but qualified it with the rider that looking at the matter realistically there were far greater problems to be overcome in Australia than had ever been encountered in the United States. His observation that the central deserts of Australia were not attractive agricultural prospects was an obvious one but, notwithstanding this, he was still convinced that further agricultural development should and could be accomplished.\(^53\)

### 5.6 Parliamentary representation

South Australia itself was, however, beset with financial problems closer to home, with 'defalcations, insolvencies, poverty and distress ... frightful depression on every hand' \(^54\) and was quite impotent to effect anything further, let alone give any consideration to extending its railways. The government agreed, however, to permit ratepayers to be represented on the District Council of Palmerston, and in 1890 elections were held in the Territory which for the first time enabled two representatives from the Northern Territory to become members of the South Australian House of Assembly.


\(^53\) "Northern Territory Government Resident's Report, No. 28, Knight (Acting)." In Northern Territory Archives, 1890. Hereinafter NTGRR, thus NTTGR 28/1890 - Knight (Acting).

\(^54\) NTTG 6/3/1886, 1/5/1886.
### Table 10
NT Election results of 1890

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<td><strong>451</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>142</strong></td>
<td><strong>236</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sourced and derived: The Northern Australian 25 April 1890.*

Meanwhile pertinent advice by Territorians continued to be offered and continued to be ignored. The *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* thought that the Resident had had 'a rattling good idea', when he suggested that 'working men, Europeans, who were settled in the country seven years should be entitled to select a block of 100 acres of land and hold it for a lease of 99 years'.\(^{55}\) This was to the point, but the Minister for the Northern Territory ignored it, proposing instead that bonuses could be given for small quantities of produce 'to farmers' who in his words were 'in a moderate way'.\(^{56}\) He was on safe ground here for there were no small farmers left in a 'moderate' or any other way.

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\(^{55}\) NTTG 24/7/91.
\(^{56}\) NTTG 11/12/91.
The results of the Territory's first election for the South Australian Parliament are shown in Table 10, and are of interest only insofar as they illustrate the paucity of the settler population and give some indication as to its distribution. Despite known facts and the government's inability, or unwillingness, to provide further funds for settlement, its most trusted advisors continued to promote the Territory as an agricultural paradise.

5.7 A plethora of opinion

Holtze, Curator of the Government Experimental Gardens, returning from a tour of Far Eastern agricultural areas, confidently, if inaccurately, reported the 'soil and whole aspect of the country on Territory Rivers as good or better than of the Saigon River'. It was expected, on what reasonable grounds are unknown, that trade on the Territory's eastern border with Queensland would develop when lines of communication by rail were improved. Complementary to this line of thought, it was now felt that government energy should be directed only towards improving access to the Territory's agricultural areas and that then, so long as farmers were given their head, settlement might still be encouraged without any other government intervention being required.

In South Australia debate in parliament might centre on the argument that rent and covenants, stipulating the rate of farm infrastructure, only served to waste the settler's scarce capital before he became properly established. But those of the old school, which represented the Territory, continued to mouth the hackneyed phrases and push the idea of plantations worked by temporary immigrant labour from India. This was a policy favoured by Premier Playford, and Parsons, once again in Parliament, supported it with a view to solving an agricultural labour problem that was non-existent.

Playford had recently returned from a conducted tour of the Daly River agricultural region where he had been shown Owston's selected area of ten years before. The

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57 NTTG 25/12/91.  
58 NTTG 12/2/1892, 5/2/1892.  
59 NTTG 25/3/1892.  
60 NTTG 1/4/92, NTTG 15/4/1892.  
61 Playford's account provides some further indication that the Survey Department knew the precise details of the area selected by Owston for his plantation, which had been denied for political purposes of the
Premier described it in glowing terms and clearly hoped to revive lost opportunities. But his was a forlorn hope. The essential element of investor confidence had been squandered and it was now beyond hope of resurrection.  

Gradually, faith was displaced by uncertainty and, in fact, government was unwilling to commit itself in any direction whatsoever. In 1892 it was proposed in Parliament to 'cast the Territory off from South Australia', but the debate on the matter was adjourned indefinitely. Resultant uncertainties served only to further discourage investment.

Now the administration thought only of cutting expenditure. By some inspired accounting it continued to charge the Territory £1 000 to £2 000 per annum in management fees over and above the real costs of its administration. Salaries and living allowances were cut - the incoming Government Resident lost 30% from his pay and received no allowances. For some people at least, in the words of Dr Johnson, circumstances were such as to 'concentrate the mind wonderfully'. The editor of the local newspaper suggested that agricultural businesses should only be given bonuses if they were 'under the management of women'.

5.7.1 Some objective observation from a new Government Resident
Dashwood's tenure as Government Resident ran from 1892 to 1905. He began his tour of duty with a comprehensive reconnaissance of the Territory. His advice, although characterised by an honesty and professionalism that had hitherto been entirely missing from Territory affairs emanating from this, was largely ignored.

His analyses, furnished in a series of reports, were never of the inordinately optimistic kind. His opinions were honest ones and his advice practical. He noted that the huge Territory deficit would continue to mount at the rate of some £50 000 per annum if
nothing were done, and he called for 'the adoption of a bold line of policy'. He argued that if the natural resources of the region were properly utilized it was capable of securing 'very different results to those obtained in the past'.

He believed that, over time, crop farming would prosper even though that time was not yet. Hitherto, government had given no 'convincing assurance' that Territory agricultural products could compete successfully on world markets.

Pastoralism had more immediate prospects, but here it was still necessary for government to take the long-term view. It could not, for the time being, be considered as an immediate source of revenue, at least and until adequate water supplies were proven. Then, he said, there would be sufficient convincing evidence that pastoralism was capable of great expansion. Meanwhile the industry should be prudently fostered for there was little doubt in his mind that eventually a substantial market in Asia would be secured:

I do not think it unreasonable to expect that an outlet for these [cattle] will be afforded in the markets of the East, and I see no reason to alter the opinion expressed in my earlier report that this trade is capable of great expansion.

In regard to the mining industry, he was strongly of the opinion that now was the time to give much-needed encouragement by further government expenditure:

I firmly believe that if the Territory is to be lifted out of its financial difficulties it will be by means of the development of its undoubted mineral resources. Irrespective of the question whether payable gold can be obtained in the lower levels, I believe it will be found that there are many mining properties which, assuming that sufficient capital be available to work them in a proper and systematic manner and on a large scale, will prove highly remunerative to the investor. ... I would therefore strongly urge upon the Government the advisability of according liberal assistance under proper supervision to legitimate mining ... Looking at the present indebtedness of the Territory the

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67 NTGRR 158/1892 - Dashwood.
68 NTGRR 158/1892 - Dashwood.
69 NTGRR 158/1892 - Dashwood.
70 Mining, according to Bauer, was oriented almost exclusively to gold. Gold production reached a peak of some 30,000 oz. between 1892 and 1895. Bauer p.165.
expenditure of £20,000, £30,000, or even £50,000 additional should, I venture to suggest, be considered in order. 71

The government may not always have appreciated his candour. Following the enabling legislation to allow 'selection before survey', 72 which was now too late to attract investment, Dashwood's dry but telling comments were that 'nothing' had resulted 'worthy of being recorded here', but that the Chinese, despite all discouragement, continued to cultivate successfully. The clear inference was that the Chinese could without imposed constraints enlarge their operations to enable commercial agriculture, and that this might be no bad thing. 73

Notwithstanding Dashwood's long term faith in the pastoral industry, in 1894 he regretfully concluded that 'this important industry continues to retrograde'. Even though rents had been reduced many pastoralists were losing hope and the area held under lease by them was now reduced by 31 000 square miles. There just was no market for stock and Dashwood now suggested that it might help if a freezing works could be set up on the Roper or McArthur rivers. 74

Hindsight is able to inform us now that his notion here was wrong, for a Territory freezing works at that time would probably have been unsustainable. From figures available in government reports, the total number of cattle on the whole of the Tablelands was insufficient to provide enough 'fats' from annual turn-off to make the proposition viable. Cattle numbers were slow in building up, and it was more a matter of chance and circumstance than anything else when there was even a small surplus of imports over exports. Figures for the years 1880 to 1894 show that £2 084 557 worth of cattle were imported to the Territory while total exports, both interstate and overseas, reached only £1 377 821. 75

71 NTGRR 158/1892 - Dashwood.
72 The Land Act of 1890.
73 NTGRR 1893 - Dashwood.
74 NTGRR 1894 - Dashwood.
75 NTGRR 1894.

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Conclusion
The zenith had been reached at the time of the ministerial visit of 1882 but by 1887 even hope was beginning to fade. In his report for that year, Maurice Holtze, Curator of the Government Experimental Gardens, wrote:

I really do not know whether another appeal to the Government and the honourable Members of Parliament will have more success than my previous attempts to rouse sympathy with the efforts I have till now made, to prove the suitability of the Northern Territory for tropical agriculture, or shall my report have again the fate of its precursors. I can assure you I would not trouble the Government again and again with my complaints if I did not consider it my duty to point out that it is impossible to go on in this way. Either the Government must take it for granted that the Territory is unfit for agriculture and this I maintain means that it is unfit for permanent settlement, or the means must be afforded to prove the suitability of the soil and climate.  

Holtze's words were prophetic and by 1890 all was over. Colonial Office earlier advice to delay full governmental administration until the natural movement of people brought about 'critical mass' had been disregarded. The realists in South Australia were now more ready to accept this and many saw that positive incentives were required to speed along the much-needed immigrants. But there were the others who, if they understood any issue at all, still looked to sell off the Territory as so much 'real estate' to solve all problems. They believed that so long as land sales were organised in an orderly fashion, of itself this would be sufficient. The required labour force could and should be supplied by importing 'coloured' labour.

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76 NTGRR 45/1887, Parsons. See Maurice Holtze's report, Curator of the Government Garden, Palmerston (Darwin), included in the Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory for the year 1887.

77 L Coltheart, "Australia Misere: The Northern Territory in the Nineteenth Century," PhD, Griffith University, 1982, p. 108. Quoting "GF Angas Papers", published in the Register, 5 November 1863; and also Edwin Hodder, George Fife Angas, quoted in Donovan, p.34. Angas argued that without a population policy, and sufficient funds, South Australian aspirations would not be realised in the Northern Territory, and that effective plans for labour to work the land were crucial.

78 Coltheart, p.108-109, quoting Hart to Walters, 25 November, 1864, printed in SAPP 89/1865, p. 68. Hart was citing an article in the Australia and New Zealand Gazette in refutation of an article in the London Examiner, which questioned the value of investment in the Northern Territory; and also Edward Oppen. A Description a/the Northern Territory a/South Australia. Hertsford: Stephen Austin for author, 1864, p.6. The official publication prepared to inform potential English investors interested in the acquisition of Northern Territory land dismisses the question of labour with the statement, "a casual glance at the map will however suffice to find at once a source of labour".
Both sides were indulging in wishful thinking to some extent. The 'Finniss Fiasco', \(^79\) and subsequent events had put paid to the immediate prospect of selling the Territory as so much real estate, or of enticing any more long term settlers. Besides, pressure exerted by the movement towards the 'White Australia Policy', though not yet fully formulated, negated the many attempts to import 'coloured' labour. Success had proved ephemeral and events failed to overcome earlier stigma. The Northern Territory had been acquired explicitly to exploit its riches and there had been, initially at least, an expectation that by sale of its 'bountiful' land the costs of development would be covered.

This was in direct contrast to what had actually happened. Since the Annexation of 1863, land sales had only brought £210,681 and the vaunted riches had yielded nothing. Instead between 1864 and 1889 total cost to the South Australian Treasury had been £831,095 and only £543,824 had been raised from all sources. Revenue from customs duties on imports had delivered half of this sum and exceeded that from land sales by some 22 per cent, and though at the time it was fully recognised as being counter-productive, it had to be kept. Customs duty had after all raised £250,760 and was needed to provide a semblance of credibility to the Territory account. In the twenty years between 1870 and 1889 over half a million pounds sterling in Treasury Bills and Bonds had already been issued. \(^80\) If Duties were not preserved, there was no alternative to borrowing; otherwise the deficit would become unsustainable.

Speculation had proved a poor substitute for sound planning and, though much 'sound and fury' might emanate from men such as Parsons, there were now clear indications of the moribund state of things. The population was not increasing. Out of an estimated population of 4,176 (Aborigines were not counted), there were 1,330 Europeans, of whom 483 were miners. Of the rest, 2,760 were Chinese and there was a mixed bag of

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\(^79\) Coltheart, p. 105, citing Bauer and also Ross Duncan, *The Northern Territory Pastoral Industry* (Melbourne University Press, 1963) pp. 15, 27. Coltheart maintains that the first application of the word "fiasco" was in relation to the searches by Francis Cadell in 1866 for a survey site after the decision to abandon the Adelaide River surveys, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*; and that this reference was accurately cited by A Grenfell-Price, *The History and Problems of the Northern Territory*. Adelaide: A Scott, 1930, p.14, and used in relation to the Finniss expedition by Bauer in 1964.

\(^80\) Donovan, in Appendices.
86, variously described as Japanese, Malays, Cingalese and Indian. This compared unfavourably with what was happening in the other colonies. To an embattled South Australia the problems in the Northern Territory seemed imponderable.

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81 NTGRR 1894 - Population. As there was virtually no other occupation but mining for Europeans, and few women and few, if any, farmers left, a very high proportion of the remaining 847 may be presumed to have been public servants.
Chapter 6

The Northern Territory Railway
Chapter 6

The Northern Territory Railway

Summary
The Northern Territory Railway was initially intended as the northern link of a transcontinental railway. It was begun during euphoria engendered by high expectations for plantation development in 1883. By the time the Darwin to Pine Creek Railway was completed in 1889, the dream had been shattered. It proved, however, to be the one worthy legacy left to the Territory by South Australia and was successfully completed on time and within budget. Though of relatively short length, it provided the only all weather line of communication and became recognised as an enduring lifeline to the interior, helping to maintain morale and some semblance of progress.

This chapter examines why the railway was considered as the essential element for successful development. It outlines the various proposals for its construction that were mooted and in turn rejected throughout most of the 1870s and how, when the final legislation was passed by South Australia in 1879, the matter remained in abeyance. At last a start was made that seemed destined to remain stillborn, until matters were finally taken in hand in 1886 by a private contractor with the confidence and ability to overcome all obstacles.

6.1 The 'tyranny of distance'
Mrs Daly was the daughter of the first Government Resident and later married the nephew of a former Governor of South Australia, Sir Dominic Daly. As a well-connected and longtime resident of the Territory, she told her readers just how difficult it was to get there from South Australia or anywhere else. This was how she described the most direct route from England when Darwin (Palmerston) was first established:

The simplest route is to go to Hong Kong by any of the lines touching at that port, taking a fresh steamer thence to Port Darwin. The British India steamers book passengers to the Northern Territory, but land them at Thursday Island, where they await the arrival of the steamer from
Sydney to take them to their destination. And I believe there is another way of going, via Singapore and Batavia.¹

By the 1880s ships from overseas and from other Australian ports reached Darwin fairly often, but did not add much to the general activity. In 1881 Sowden wrote:

There called at the Port of Darwin 56 vessels, representing 504 804 tons, and 2 544 men in crews, and that very near the same number left. The Immigration was 336 males and 18 females, and the emigration, 1105 males and 30 females - a considerable loss it may be observed.²

6.1.1 Internal communications
To either reach or leave the Territory was a struggle, and the problem was eclipsed by the difficulty of movement within its boundaries. There were no roads and there were few good horses. Sowden writes of one party taking forty days to travel the sixty miles between Southport and Howley during the wet season. This parliamentary party took three days to reach Pine Creek, some 146 miles (235 km) from Darwin in 1882 even though they had good horses and were well equipped for the journey. Within two weeks the party returned:

with horses even more jaded than they looked before, which is almost like saying that a skeleton looks less like a skeleton at times ... [They had crossed] bog after bog, so deep that the riders had to continually jump off their horses and help pull them through and the consequent real hardship ... [it] made all the party look lugubrious, as though they repented their exercise ... morass, swamp bog - horses led a third of the way; constant dismounting and walking sometimes knee deep in slush.³

Even so, on this occasion it would appear that the minister and his entourage were lucky, for if the weather had broken they would have found themselves in real trouble. Police Corporal Montague described travelling over the same route only two days after the return of the ministerial party:

³ Sowden, pp.159-160.
The Stapleton had swollen considerably, and the Adelaide was rising high. The whole of the Adelaide Plains were under water. At Burrel Creek the overflow formed a rapid stream down the road and very deep. The road was washed full of holes, into one of which one of us fell, horse and all. The packhorse got bogged up to the girths twice in a quarter of a mile, and had to be unloaded and dragged out on to firm ground. Bamboo Creek at the crossing was nearly six feet deep and running very swiftly. With the assistance of two chinamen and a long rope we hauled our six horses over, and then got our things to the other side, where we had to dress standing up to our knees in water. We had no sooner crossed than a heavy downpour of rain set in. The road along the flat near Mount Darwent was all under water, and very rotten and boggy. Near Bridge Creek the whole flat was covered about a mile nearly up to my knees in the saddle. The creek itself was overflowing its banks. The Howley was level with the bridge, and running over the confines of the bank a sheet of water. In a flat to the north side of the bridge the deepest part of the floodwaters was about six feet. At the foot of the rise there was over three feet of water on the road. Yam Creek at the old bridge, has been about twelve feet deep, and Brocks Creek from fifty to sixty yards wide. Old trees weighing half a ton are washed right across the road on which they now lie and large holes have been made in it in places. Crossing one creek alone took us two hours.

During the nineteenth century the favoured method of communication was often by water. The Territory was no different in that respect. Roads were either non-existent or often impassable, leaving no other alternative. But travel by water was often problematic, for in the Top End variable winds and high tidal flows made coastal and river navigation on Rivers such as the Daly and Roper quite difficult.

Today small vessels are able to cope adequately under these conditions, but in the 1880s it was otherwise. Powered coastal vessels, when available, were only capable of speeds of between four to five knots and could make little headway against the strong tidal flows, while the variable winds common to the region posed problems for the coastal skipper under sail.

The Maggie, a twenty-nine ton auxiliary steamer, plied its trade round the coast for many years, and Sowden described it as being 'about as suitable for [the] 300 mile sea-trip' to the plantation on the Daly River 'as a popgun would be for shooting an alligator'. In 1882 he was one of a party attempting to reach the Palmerston Plantation Company's

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4 Sowden, pp. 159-160.
operations on the little steamer. In the first four hours they made only 12 miles (19 km) and after struggling on for another two hours, in which only another two miles (3.22 km) were made good, the vessel turned back for Darwin and the voyage was abandoned. Sowden and his friends reached Darwin in darkness, cold, wet and miserable after a desperate voyage lasting of some ten hours.  

6.1.2 Consequential cost
According to evidence to the Royal Commission in 1895, freight costs in the Territory were well over 200% above those then current in South Australia. Wherever possible, therefore, those who could preferred to rely on coastal shipping. No matter how problematical this might be at times, it could land goods safely at river jetties. Those who were sufficiently well capitalised, such as Fisher and Lyons or the Palmerston Plantation Company, operated their own vessels.

| Fresh herrings | 2 shillings and sixpence a tin |
| Beef | 1 shilling per pound |
| Sugar | 10 pence per pound |
| Bar soap | 2 shillings and sixpence |
| One singlet | 9 shillings |
| 50 lb bag of flour | 27 shillings and sixpence |
| Jam | 2 shillings and sixpence per tin |
| Salt | 10 pence per pound |
| Preserved milk | 2 shillings per tin |
| Currants | 1 shilling and 3 pence per pound |
| Dripping | 3 shillings, and sixpence per pound |
| Steel | 2 shillings per pound |
| Hammer | 14 shillings |
| Handles | 2 shillings and sixpence each |
| Pick | 10 shillings and sixpence |
| Notepaper | 5 shillings a packet (price in Adelaide was 1 shilling) |
| Twenty-five envelopes | 1 shilling (price in Adelaide was 5 shillings per thousand) |


5 Sowden, pp. 82-83.
7 Northern Territory Times and Gazette 4/2/1882, 2/2/1900. Hereinafter NTTG, thus NTTG 4/2/1882, 2/2/1900.
In consequence, outlays were concomitantly high. In the harbour itself, cargoes had to be
offloaded and carried by lighter 300 metres to shore at a further impost of fifteen shillings
a ton. Once on shore, wagons were often scarce and, if cargoes had been landed short of
high water mark, a considerable loss was frequently experienced.\(^8\) Haulage, when
available, for up-country delivery could add another forty or fifty pounds a ton.\(^9\) The
problems associated with lack of transport facilities were felt acutely in Darwin and were
multiplied as much again with every mile one travelled inland. Anyone unable to fend for
himself could be in trouble due to the high cost of living. In these circumstances,
businesses were often compelled to provide rations for their workforce. Sowden lists the
cost of basic commodities in Darwin (Table 11), taken directly from an invoice:

A good living wage in Adelaide at the time was probably around thirty shillings per
week. Wages, whether high enough to cover the cost of living in the Territory or not,
were quoted by Sowden at £1 per week for a Chinaman and £3 per week for a European,
with keep if he was lucky.\(^10\) Comparing buying power of wages then with now is difficult
but not impossible (Table 12).\(^11\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wages and currency</th>
<th>1882</th>
<th>1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average wage</td>
<td>£1. 10s</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£1 = 20 shillings</td>
<td>$333.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 shilling = 12 pence</td>
<td>$16.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 penny</td>
<td>$1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(6.1.3\) Roadworks
The administration did as much as it could to improve road communication. It contracted
out work to maintain existing roads and attempted to extend them, but without permanent
success. By 1880 the principal road southwards from Darwin stretched for only 135 miles
(217 kms) and by 1885 the 'main road' from Katherine to the Ord was little more than a

\(^8\) Sowden, pp.154-155.
\(^9\) Sowden, p.154.
\(^10\) Sowden, p 79.
track formed by constant use. Six years later, in 1891, the *Northern Territory News and Gazette*, commenting on a petition from Borroloola residents demanding that conditions be improved, singled out the road to the Macarthur River homestead for special mention:

Owing to the washouts in the soft sandy banks, the approach is well-nigh impracticable, and the road then descending almost perpendicularly for about 50 feet. It is generally the rule for teams to adopt a novel but by no means safe descent by capsizing and rolling down the banks.

Freight charges to the pastoral districts were prohibitive. It cost £135 per ton to convey goods from Pine Creek onwards over the 220 miles (354 km) to Newcastle Waters. Teamsters charged the equivalent of 20 weeks' wages for a stockman, between £40 and £45 per ton, to make the 280-mile (450 km) haul from Burketown to Austral Downs.

### 6.2 Proposals for a railway

Those far from the coast or from any navigable rivers were especially penalised. The mining industry in particular required an efficient heavy-duty transport system. The construction of a railway had been mooted for quite some time and its relevance to the issue was obvious. Nonetheless, it was an extremely costly solution, no matter how essential it was to the people on the spot.

The chronology of events related to the construction of the Territory railway is a long one and it appears that the delay in its development had nothing to with any lack of appreciation of the need for its development. Even before negotiations for annexation were complete, a Bill was passed to enable a line to link South Australia to the North to be constructed by land grant. This was 'The Port Augusta and Overland Railway Act' of 1862. It was premature and attracted no tenders. The oft-preferred way of financing railway construction during the nineteenth century in newly settled areas was by a land

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12 NTTG 30/1/1886. Glen McLaren and William Cooper. *Distance, Drought and Depression: A History of the Northern Territory Pastoral Industry*. Darwin: NTU Press, 2001. They note that seventy years later these thoroughfares were still unformed, being levelled annually with a fireplough.

13 NTTG 28/10/1891.

14 McLaren, p. 22.
grant. By this means railway promoters were encouraged by government to construct railways by grants of land adjacent to the line in lieu of cash payment. This was the method used to finance the transcontinental railroads in the United States and in Canada. In Australia, however, land grant systems for railway construction were often unpopular. In West Australia, the Great Southern and Midland railways were authorised on a land-grant basis, but ultimately they needed additional government finance before completion. Queensland also passed necessary legislation to enable land-grant construction but, though railways were built to open up the country for settlement, none was financed by this method.

No proposal for either a North-South railway or an East-West line in the Territory could have succeeded on a land-grant basis, for the practicality was that there was little good land adjacent to the most feasible route. The first two rail routes surveyed between Darwin and Pine Creek wound their way over the Adelaide and Mary River flood plains (Map 3), rather than following the more practicable route eventually laid (Map 2). It is probable that this was with the hope of obtaining private finance for the project.

A petition in 1872 to the South Australian Parliament from a substantial number of citizens in both the Territory and South Australia caused enabling legislation for the construction of a land-grant line from Darwin to Adelaide to be introduced. This offered British entrepreneurs freehold title on 50 000 acres (20 235 hectares) per track-mile. The proposed legislation was rejected because, it is said, it had offered too much land to foreign interests. Mrs Daly sheds some more light on other such tentative proposals in the 1870s. As she relates the story:

an offer made to the Government by some English Capitalists to develop the country by way of making a railway, opening plantations, and thoroughly testing the gold bearing district with suitable and efficient machinery. The proposed scheme was as follows. The Capital of the Company was to be £100, 000 or double that amount if suitable

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15 McLaren, p. 23; FH Bauer. *Historical Geography of White Settlement in Part of Northern Australia. Part 2 - The Katherine-Darwin Region*, CSIRO, Canberra, 1964, pp. 119-121 provides a brief summary of the railway construction debate from 1863 to 1883.

16 McLaren, p. 23; SAPP 19/1895, p. 119 details a similar proposal involving the handover of a maximum area of 125 000 acres.
inducement was offered. A deposit of £10,000 was to be made at the Agent-Generals office in London, which was to be returned to the company when they had spent £200,000 upon the development of the Territory. The company proposed that square mile blocks on alternate sides of the railway should be given them as far as Pine Creek, also fifty acres of land at Palmerston, for station and building purposes, as well as fifteen square miles near the reefs, and 200 square miles for plantations, including miners right over the entire area of land allotted to them. This was a very ambitious scheme, and for some reason not mentioned by the Government at the time, and it, like many another idea for developing South Australia's 'white elephant' has passed into oblivion. 17

Queenslanders also showed some interest in proposing an East-West line on a land-grant basis. In 1878 Ernest Favenc had been commissioned by Queensland pastoralists to survey a route from Blackall in Queensland to Darwin. His survey for this finished early the following year and jubilant Darwin citizens honoured him at a farewell 'banquet' for himself and which at the same time welcomed William Owston, who with some serendipity had just arrived on the SS General Pel to look for 'suitable land to found a sugar plantation'. Both were perceived as heroes of the hour. The local press recorded the 'do' with all excitement, and recorded the night's celebrations of 8 March 1879, when all those present drank a toast to a Territory now seen to be on the verge of prosperity. 18

Holmes has argued that Favenc's explorations heralded the movement of cattlemen from Queensland to the Barkly Tablelands soon afterwards which, if not initiating the Northern Territory cattle industry, certainly contributed greatly to its expansion. 19 Nonetheless, despite the anticipatory enthusiasm kindling renewed hope, or perhaps because of it, the South Australian Government turned down the Queenslanders' proposal for an East-West line. 20

17 Mrs Daly, p. 123.
18 NTTG 8/3/1879.
19 J Macdonald Holmes. *Australia's Open North: A study of northern Australia bearing on the urgency of the times*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966. Part III, Chapter 10, p. 81. Favenc, a Queenslander, exploring for Queensland pastoralists, carefully examined the north-eastern part of the Northern Territory between 1879 and 1883. The significance of his exploration as the vanguard of the expansion movement from Queensland is evident from the rapidity with which the Barkly Tableland was stocked after his explorations. In 1882 Favenc set up Creswell Downs station, and in 1883 and 1884 Queensland pastoralists stocked the tableland west of Creswell.
20 NTTG 2/11/1878, 28/6/1879.
6.2.1 A Transcontinental Railway

It was Melbourne and London interests, according to JY Harvey, who first raised a proposal to construct a transcontinental line from Port Augusta in South Australia to the northern coast of Australia in 1858. This prefigured 'The Port Augusta and Overland Railway Act' of 1862, and therefore their vision had been inspired before the first railway had even crossed the North American continent, which would have been before Stuart or anyone else could have proven that a feasible route was possible. 21

Throughout the intervening years the 'dream' of the North-South Railway, as Harvey calls it, was to inspire many others. Harvey lists no less than nine proposals by both London and Australian interests. 22 Following the 1862 attempt, a second Bill was introduced in the South Australian Parliament in 1872. This was followed by a similar Bill in the following year, and that was lost in the subsequent political 'confusion and maneuvering'. It did not even get as far as the second reading. Many viewed a north-south transcontinental railway as nonsensical.

Anthony Trollope, when visiting Adelaide in 1873, succinctly summed up the matter by observing that without a town at both ends and no people in between, 'Who would travel by it and what would it carry?' 23 But the idea would not die, and three years later the Mining Warden for the Northern Territory lobbied for a scheme that would offer investors a share in railway profits, but no action was taken on this variation of raising finance for construction. 24

The transcontinental line was never completed, though it cannot be said that South Australia did not try. Alcorta believes argument to persuade the Commonwealth to complete the construction of this railway link between Adelaide and Port Darwin was the principal reason for the protracted delays of almost ten years before the final transfer of

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22 Harvey, pp. 5-7. See also SAPP I 1A/1869-70 "Report of Select Committee on Port Augusta Railway 1869" and also SAPP 138/1873 "Correspondence re Transcontinental Railway".
23 Harvey, p. 7.
24 Bauer, p. 120.
the Territory to the Commonwealth was made.\textsuperscript{25} This is perhaps to simplify matters, for the issues involved were of great moment for both governments, and there were many other pertinent questions before matters could be finally settled.\textsuperscript{26}

6.2.2 Construction begins in the south
At length, the idea crystallised around a process of a government-financed construction by stages from both ends, following the path that had already been pioneered by the telegraph line. The South Australian dream of linking the North and South by a transcontinental railway had certain logic. It was believed that, if completed, it must inevitably provide a direct means of support for settlement. The major problem for parliamentarians in favour was that they were generally against handing free grants of land to entrepreneurs, whether of the home bred or foreign variety. In 1876 legislation was finally passed, giving approval for laying two hundred miles of 3 ft 6 in gauge railway at the South Australian end, the line to run from Port Augusta at the head of Spencer Gulf to a bend in the Leigh Creek. Now that farmers were freely taking up land beyond the 'Goyder line', the interim terminus was renamed Farina in expectation of the vast wheat fields that were envisaged soon for its vicinity. The cost was estimated at £578 944 and this was to be raised from loans.\textsuperscript{27}

In January 1878 Governor Sir William Jervois turned the first sod and took the opportunity to round on Anthony Trollope's pessimism. In the Governor's view the railway was not destined to 'merely pass through a desert' but would link South Australia not only with the world but would also prove of vast importance for Queensland and New

\textsuperscript{25} Frank X Alcorta. \textit{Darwin Rebellion 1911-1919}, Darwin: History Unit, Northern Territory University Planning Authority, 1984, p. xiii.


\textsuperscript{27} Harvey, p. 8.
South Wales. Ultimately, he said, it would lead to the Federation of Australia. In short order a goods service was soon operational as far as Beltana, seven months ahead of schedule. By May 1882 the beginning of 'South Australia's Great Northern Railway' stretched northwards from Adelaide for 409 miles (658 kms) becoming now the longest railway in Australia. Progress then became more difficult, but the line pushed steadily onwards. Oodnadatta was reached at last in February 1889 but another twelve months were to pass before the major bridge over the Neale River was completed in 1890, and

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*Adelaide Observer* 19/1/1878.
the line was finally opened for traffic in 1891. Its total length stretched now for 688 miles (1,107 km). In step with this great effort, 146 miles (235 km) of track at the northern end from Darwin to Pine Creek had been laid by September 1889. This now left 1500 miles (2,414 km) to be completed29 (Map 2).

6.2.3 The Northern Territory line
Since annexation, nothing of a lasting nature had eventuated in the Territory. In the 1870s there had been a short-lived 'boom' in mining, which had collapsed amidst wild speculation. European miners had been recruited from the south on one-year contracts, but by 1874 very few of these men had stayed on, and from this it was assumed that white men were unable to endure manual labour in the tropics. Over time, the idea of a northern construction by land grant was excised from the debate, and proposals to build a line in the North with coloured labour became more acceptable. In 1879 the 'Northern Territory Indian Immigration Act' was passed and confirmed by further amendment in 1882, and the first move towards construction came the following year.30

There were purely local reasons for a Northern Territory line. According to Harvey, these were first voiced in 1873 by the Adelaide merchant, WH Bean, who suggested a line from Darwin to Pine Creek. Though the gold-mining boom had been short lived, it had given impetus to the idea. Ebenezer Ward, minister in charge of the Northern Territory, subsequently followed this up and requested a feasibility report. McMinn of the Territory's Survey Department submitted his survey report in 1877 and it then became a subject of serious consideration. McMinn's route though impractical because it proposed traversing the flood plains of the Mary and Adelaide rivers, however at least gained a mention at the opening of Parliament in the Governor's speech for that year.31

Direct financing of the project was a serious problem for the overstretched South Australian economy. Favenc's survey, commissioned in 1878 and completed in 1879, proposed a route further to the south of McMinn's route (Map 3), but again this was

29 Harvey, p. 8.
30 Bauer, pp. 120-121. See also the South Australian Register 1872-73, meetings, letters to editor, comment on parliamentary debate; SAPP 225/1877; SAPP 122/1883-84.
31 Harvey, p. 22.

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subject to serious annual flooding. Neither of these men can be taken as being devoid of reason and it may be assumed that both were instructed to incorporate areas in their surveys that just might lend themselves to a land-grant system. Estimates for £1 million were also given for a route that included £219,421 for bridges. Parliament was informed that construction was not recommended at this time, but was told that railway promoters would be prepared to put up the money on certain conditions. They wanted - a grant of fifty acres (20 hectares) at Darwin for a station, fifteen square miles (24 square km)
abutting the railway in alternate blocks, and five thousand square miles (8 045 square km) for plantations and pastoral properties. No debate was held on this offer.32

John Langdon Parsons was Minister for the Northern Territory when finally the 'Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway Bill' was introduced in Parliament in 1882. It was intended that it was to be eventually incorporated into the transcontinental line. It would be built on the standard South Australian gauge of 3ft 6 in and owned by the state. Its route would follow the telegraph line through the heart of the mineral country and be above the level of annual inundation. Moreover, this route was one approved by the local residents. Estimated cost of construction of the 146 miles (235 km) would amount to £959 300, and there would be an additional cost of £51 600 for the construction of a jetty at its terminus at the Port of Darwin.

The cost was virtually the same as before but Parsons was a salesman of pre-eminent ability and the Bill was now passed. Describing the little frontier township of Darwin as a 'great city' he said it was destined to be the greatest entrepot in Australia and its railway would derive traffic from the Territory's huge pastoral, mining and agricultural industries. The Territory would soon be able to satisfy all the continuing and increasing needs of the army in India for horses. He declared that sheep and wool production had recently proved itself a 'practical exercise'. The Northern Territory's future agricultural industry was now assured, for on that very day, he said, 200 bags of sugar had arrived in Adelaide from Palmerston, and this would soon be followed by cargoes of cotton, rice, indigo, peanuts, cassava, chicona, coffee, india-rubber and tobacco from vast plantations. The mining industry too had huge potential. There was gold and there was copper, and the tin mine at Mount Wells, in close proximity to the track, was one of the richest in the world.33

After his eloquent presentation there was little further debate. There was some discussion as to the relative merits of the various types of coolie labour for the work. Some were in favour of Chinese, others Indian and some wanted to import Kanakas from the New

32 South Australian Parliamentary Debates, SAPD 10 October 1879. Hereinafter SAPD, thus SAPD 10/10/1879, p.1384.
33 SAPD 16/8/1883, p. 815.
Hebrides. The only complaint heard was voiced by Ebenezer Ward who thought that this railway should have been built years ago. On 26 October 1883, the 'Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway Bill' received Royal Assent.\textsuperscript{34} WB Rounsvell became quite poetic when expressing the views of the House:

\begin{quote}
Lay down your rails Australians near and far,
Yoke your full trains to steam's triumphant car,
Link town to town, unite in iron bands
The wide expanse of undeveloped lands.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Darwin people expressed enthusiasms more prosaically. One letter to the editor of the \textit{Northern Territory Times and Gazette} urged everybody to drink the health of the premier and government of South Australia and get 'pleasantly intoxicated' for three days.\textsuperscript{36}

\subsection{6.2.4 Prelude to construction}

Preliminary surveys had been completed even prior the Act and the estimates included a projected income of £13 000 during the first year of operation.\textsuperscript{37} Money was borrowed for the project immediately, and tenders were called for in 1885 but none were immediately accepted. Consequential delays cost government monetary loss, but the loss of people 'in disgust and disappointment', in what Bauer describes as a 'general boggling',\textsuperscript{38} was perhaps more serious. This is to over-simplify matters for the Bill had been passed in the general euphoria that had been engendered by the 'Plantation Boom', which was then at its height. The coincidental withdrawal of the Victorian plantation venture on the Daly must have had a steadying influence on expectation, but there were other practicalities involved.

Even before the Royal Assent was received, a team had been sent to Darwin to make a full survey and with relevant engineering data to hand the rails were ordered from Krupps of Essen and the steel sleepers, specially designed for use in the tropics, were ordered.

\textsuperscript{34} Pine Creek Railway Bill Act No. 284 on 26 October 1883.
\textsuperscript{35} SAPD 21/8/1883, p. 850.
\textsuperscript{36} NTTG 25/8/1883.
\textsuperscript{37} SAPP 122/1883-4.
\textsuperscript{38} Bauer, p. 121.
from Britain.\(^{39}\) A contract for the jetty was let in June 1885 and in December 1886 Parsons, now the Government Resident in Darwin, assured the government that the jetty was ready for cargo.\(^{40}\) According to Harvey, this was probably an indulgence for later the local press reported that a cargo of sleepers had to be lightered ashore in February 1887 at a cost of 7s 6d per ton.\(^{41}\) If true, this was a minor matter, however, for by June 1885 all the necessary engineering drawings were complete, and by December bids were formally invited for construction of the railway itself. Nine bids in all were received. Most were rejected as exceeding official cost estimates, except for the Melbourne company, Millars, whose figures were approved. The contract was offered to them on 11 May 1886. The government stipulated that coolie labour was to be employed, and the contractors were to be responsible for paying an entry tax on each imported coolie. Supplies had to be purchased in South Australia, there was a penalty clause of £30 per day for every day over contract, and work was to commence within six weeks of receipt of a notice of intention.\(^{42}\)

According to Harvey, the contractors, Charles and Edward Millar, had constructed railways in every Australian colony except Queensland and were reputed to be the most successful railway builders in Australia of their times. In Western Australia they operated saw mills, railway networks and sales outlets supplying jarrah and karri sleepers. In the Philippines they owned at least one timber mill and a steam tramway. Whenever possible the company employed subcontractors, and Charles Millar, the dominant partner, used a two-masted schooner of 74 tons, *Red Gauntlet*, when supervising its extensive contracts.

He also relates that at the time there were hordes of unemployed men thronging the streets of Darwin, survivors of ordeals they had undergone in the Kimberley gold rush. These unsuccessful gold seekers had been evacuated from Wyndham in Western Australia and unceremoniously dumped at the nearest port of administration, which just

\(^{39}\) Harvey, p. 27.

\(^{40}\) "Northern Territory Government Resident's Report, half-yearly report", in National Archives of Australia. Darwin, 1886. Hereinafter NGRR, thus NTGRR 31/12/1886.

\(^{41}\) Harvey, pp. 27-28.

\(^{42}\) Harvey, p. 29 - Specifications for the Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway, 1 August 1895.
happened to be Darwin. They were impoverished, sick and hungry and Darwin found itself quite unable to cope with hundreds of men who demanded both food and work. Locally, it was expected that the railway constructors would be able to employ these destitutes. Once more this was to indulge in wishful thinking for the contract had stipulated 'coolie labour' and this had been the basis on which contract price had been calculated. While being sympathetic to the plight of the 'rushers', the Millars were thus unable to employ them. Nonetheless, an agreement was reached with government that some of them could be employed as unloaders on the wharf. The contractors paid government directly for this service, and government, after deducting the cost of rations, used the remaining cash to ship them off to Queensland. The 'out of sight, out of mind' policy did not please observers.

The *North Australian* expressed the general feeling. Its comment was that 'these be strange proceedings in a British Colony' where, as they saw it, Europeans were being deported 'so that foreign heathen coolies could be employed'. The government said that these 'distressed nationals' were not strong enough to work and most of them were not seasoned to hard manual labour, being displaced 'clerks, chemists, knockabout hands'.43 According to a report in the *South Australian Register*, this was possibly true, for one of the Millars' contractors had employed seventeen of them - half fell out in the first day, only three turned up on the second, and by end of contract he was left with only one.44

Perhaps it was true that both the government and the contractors were correct in saying that most of the available men of European extraction were unfit and in any case, as Harvey says:

> In 1886 there were seven thousand Chinese living in the Northern Territory and they were still arriving. In 1875 Palmerston had been declared a free port allowing unrestricted immigration. At the time there were only one hundred and twenty Chinese in the area but five years later, when levies were again imposed, two thousand, nine hundred Orientals had entered the country through Port Darwin. During the next six years a further four thousand had joined their compatriots. The official figures for 1887 show a net increase in the number of 'Asiatics' of

43 *North Australian* 7/1/1887.
44 *South Australian Register* 19/1/1888.
two thousand, one hundred and twenty-four. The vast majority of these were Chinese.45

Seven thousand Chinese were more than enough for the construction. The record has emotional overtones and Chinese immigration was vigorously opposed in the press. Derogatory comment about them was normal for the times, and editorial comment never conducive to good race relations. Such terms as 'chinkees, pigtailed pagans or sallow-faced mongol smallpox breeders' were standard fare.46 Local dissatisfaction was soon expressed, and was compounded by racial slurs throughout the period of construction, finding frequent expression in the Northern Territory Times and Gazette.

6.2.5 Construction begins in the North
The contract had been signed on 11 May 1886 but for some time afterwards public perception was that it was followed immediately by little activity, however as soon as the ensuing wet season ended Charles Millar himself took charge of operations. In April 1887 he sailed into Darwin harbour aboard Red Gauntlet. His family came with him and stayed in the house he had had specially built.

Supervision now began. First he dispatched a vessel to Montevideo to procure mules and sent his yacht for suitable supplies of timber. He, in the meanwhile, saw to delivery of the Territory's first locomotives. By July plate-laying had commenced and by the end of the month rails were being laid at the rate of one mile a day. By the end of October the jetty was connected by rail and the track had reached Rum Jungle. By the next rains the crews were a full month ahead of schedule with the line just six miles short of the Adelaide River. He had created an efficient polyglot team - 369 Europeans, 2 970 Chinese and Indian coolies, to work 165 donkeys and mules, 137 horses, seventy-two bullocks, four locomotives and four stationary steam engines.

In the following year work continued efficiently despite many problems, not the least of which was experienced when two hundred valuable horses arrived by ship in Darwin, with fifty of them dying within an hour of landing. The press reporting the matter said

45 Harvey, p. 32. Quoting from SAPP 53/1887, p. 8.
46 North Australian 7/1/1887.
that they had been 'seized with apoplexy', but whatever the cause the incident is illustrative of primitive conditions endured in transit, for eighty bullocks out of the one hundred and fifty in the consignment died also.

By July 1888 the line was open as far as Adelaide River and the North Australian reported the event, by recording that 'ladies and gentlemen of the upper circle' had availed themselves of the opportunity to make the return trip. On 30 September 1889 the completed line to Pine Creek itself was handed over to South Australian Railways (SAR), a full eight months ahead of schedule and without ceremony, as the North Australian duly noted:

The railway was duly taken over by the Government on Monday without fuss or flow of champagne and there was not even a free excursion to mark the unusual event.

Afterwards the line remained in operation for more than eighty years with its original bridges intact, which were so well designed and built that they were able to bear traffic that was often well in excess of the load-limits stipulated in the original contract.

6.3 The operations of the Darwin to Pine Creek line
In the nineteenth century railway construction was the epitome of development and in 'new' countries was its very catalyst. Railway networks had been as central to the spread of settlement in South Australia as they had been in Queensland and elsewhere. The need for a railway in the Territory to improve internal communications and to provide the intercontinental link was accepted almost as a fact of life, but its practicality was circumscribed by financial constraint.

There is some irony in the fact that when completed at last it was to remain as the only venture in Territory which ever showed any real utility or viability. A happy combination of 'make do' and 'can do' underwrote this success in its early years, perhaps because by default it operated with a high degree of local autonomy. Classed as a light

47 South Australian Register 19/1/1888.
48 North Australian 25/1/1888.
railway, it did not haul large volumes of freight, averaging only 15 tons per train, yet for much of its short life revenues exceeded expenses. The losses, which it experienced later, were largely due to the cost of repairing the devastation caused by three cyclones in close succession in the years 1895/98 (Table 13).

Even as the South Australian administration began to unwind in the Territory immediately prior to the Commonwealth takeover, the Palmerston Division of the SAR still managed to undertake essential and regular maintenance of its track, buildings and antiquated rolling stock, and even improve on some of its facilities.  

**Figure 3**

Locomotive shed at Parap 1897

Writing in 1896, JC Mackay analysed and compared the economics of several colonial light railways. He found that on most measurable criteria the Palmerston to Pine Creek line was by far the most efficient of all those run by SAR.  

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50 Harvey, pp. 74-75.
was maintained by commonsense, by the ability of its Officers-in-Charge to use their initiative in working around some of the more pettifogging restrictions emanating from Adelaide, and by a close liaison with the local Northern Territory administration.

Table 13

Indicative operating margins for NT Railway (1890 – 1910)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Operating costs</th>
<th>Surplus/deficit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>£14 881</td>
<td>£12 937</td>
<td>£1 944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>£15 310</td>
<td>£13 910</td>
<td>£1 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>£15 221</td>
<td>£11 665</td>
<td>£3 556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>£15 668</td>
<td>£11 704</td>
<td>£3 964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>£16 193</td>
<td>£11 403</td>
<td>£4 790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>£14 722</td>
<td>£11 477</td>
<td>£3 295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>£15 105</td>
<td>£15 289</td>
<td>(£184)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>£17 908</td>
<td>*£18 966</td>
<td>(£1 058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>£14 124</td>
<td>*£20 268</td>
<td>(£6 144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>£14 958</td>
<td>*£17 375</td>
<td>(£2 417)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>£14 799</td>
<td>*£24 340</td>
<td>(£9 541)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>£13 845</td>
<td>*£25 280</td>
<td>(£11 435)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>£12 522</td>
<td>*£34 649</td>
<td>(£22 127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>£12 812</td>
<td>£11 298</td>
<td>£1 514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>£17 006</td>
<td>£13 219</td>
<td>£3 787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>£15 429</td>
<td>£13 069</td>
<td>£2 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>£14 897</td>
<td>£13 854</td>
<td>£1 043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>£14 018</td>
<td>£13 280</td>
<td>£738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>£14 462</td>
<td>£14 060</td>
<td>£402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>£12 784</td>
<td>£12 723</td>
<td>£61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>£12 254</td>
<td>£12 442</td>
<td>(£188)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes costs and losses incurred for repairs to line, buildings, jetty etc following cyclone damage.

Sourced and derived: from figures compiled by Bauer, Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, from Reports of Commissioner of Railway and from Harvey.

As a general rule, the South Australian administrative system indulged to an unnecessary degree in overlapping, and its railway department was no exception. In the Territory the pattern was repeated. Some stationmasters in South Australia were on the staff of the postal department and not under the control of SAR at all. Engineers, works and track gangs reported directly to the Engineer-in-Chief for South Australia and not to the Railways Commissioner. Luckily, however, the Officer in charge of the Palmerston Division was able to wear different hats. He was the Resident Engineer, the Locomotive Superintendent and the Traffic Officer and, as such, reported to himself and severally, on
a monthly basis, as Engineer-in-Chief, lesser Maintenance Engineer, Locomotive Engineer to the Comptroller of Accounts and the Commissioner of Railways in Adelaide.  

The ability of O/ic Andrews was severely tested in 1897, when litigation threatened over the death of a goose in transit and a railway employee was implicated. Andrews inquired into the matter and found that an 'experimental' project by the said employee and his travelling companion, a policeman, had gone seriously wrong. The object of the pair's research had been to discover the goose's reaction to different quantities of alcohol. The intrepid Andrews settled the matter by admonishing the erstwhile researchers. He made sure that they paid full value to the satisfaction of the owner, but it is not known what happened to the goose.

Even after the prohibitions on Chinese, later imposed by parliament, the O/ic in the Territory was still able to work the system and retain a high proportion on staff. In 1889 there were 154 employees of whom some 60% were Chinese. This number was later steadily reduced to seventy-five, with Chinese representation remaining at a relatively high 30%. After promulgation of the White Australia Policy in 1901 the Chinese on staff were immediately reduced to four only, but by 1909/10 the record shows that their numbers had returned to the earlier proportions on the railway.

The Palmerston Division existed for twenty-one years, an integral part of life, providing some credibility to the Territory as an economic entity. The number of passengers conveyed and tonnage of goods carried (Table 14) remained fairly stable throughout. The Palmerston Division of SAR carried three times as many tons of goods inland as for export. A considerable amount of both freight and passenger traffic was 'on service' from government departments for which no income was derived, yet it remained viable until the very last years.

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53 Harvey, p.68. Quoting from - Letter book of Resident Engineer of SAR in Northern Territory.
54 Harvey, p. 74.
55 Harvey, pp. 66-70.
### Table 14

**Indicative figures for traffic on NT Railway 1890-1910**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Passengers</th>
<th>Freight in tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>4,567</td>
<td>2,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>4,515</td>
<td>2,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>4,541</td>
<td>2,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>6,169</td>
<td>2,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>2,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>2,950</td>
<td>2,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>2,901</td>
<td>2,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>3,080</td>
<td>3,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>3,126</td>
<td>2,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>3,191</td>
<td>3,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3,374</td>
<td>3,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>4,097</td>
<td>2,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>2,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>3,631</td>
<td>2,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>3,653</td>
<td>6,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>3,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>2,852</td>
<td>4,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>3,205</td>
<td>3,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>3,663</td>
<td>3,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>2,121</td>
<td>2,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>3,693</td>
<td>2,148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sourced and derived: from figures compiled by Bauer, *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia*, from Reports of Commissioner of Railway and from Harvey.

The statistics may only be taken as being indicative but they show that the Territory produced very little in return for the volume of goods it received. Very often the tonnage conveyed was inward from the port of Darwin. Over the years, the annual average tonnage received at Palmerston from up country was less than 700 tons, virtually all of which came from the various mines along its route. A small trade in live cattle of two hundred per shipment through Darwin began in 1892, but there were only two specialised cattle wagons available with a capacity for each of only seven beasts. As SAR headquarters in Adelaide were loath to supply more, the Palmerston Division, on its own initiative, modified some seventeen wagons locally during 1892-93. These makeshift
cattle trucks continued successfully to carry all the cattle transported by rail to Darwin until 1916, when at last the Commonwealth acquired some larger wagons.  

**Conclusion**

A lack of internal communication dogged Territory development. It is a thread that runs through the history of its settlement. The railway was very much a lifeline, but it should be noted that government ineptitude stultified the first attempt at construction. Private enterprise succeeded where government had failed despite all obstacles. Fortunately for Territory residents the railway was it was permitted to continue for a time, with some success, under local management. The first terminus at Pine Creek served a mining area, but was also the railhead for the developing pastoral properties further inland, and the volume of goods received was indicative and increased steadily over the years to average well over 500 tons annually. Consignment ex-Pine Creek to Darwin remained very low until 1908 when over 3000 tons were sent from the newly established Cosmopolitan Gold Mine.  

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56 Harvey, pp. 69-70.
57 Harvey, p. 70.
Chapter 7

The Northern Territory Commission of 1895
Chapter 7
The Northern Territory Commission of 1895

Summary
Federation was in the wind and something had to be done about the Northern Territory. An increasing emphasis was being placed on its lack of success compared with Queensland, whose climate and topography were considered similar. In 1895 the government convened a Royal Commission, which attempted to examine matters and find the remedy. It is apparent that the commissioners had to contend with the opposing nature of the evidence, presented on the one hand by 'professionals' associated with government and on the other by opinion of men who were actively engaged in work immediately relevant to Territory production. It is therefore not surprising that its findings were less than positive, and its recommendations were largely ignored. The Royal Commission of 1895 failed absolutely in its purpose and, as a result, many commentators, including Bauer, have described the findings as being little better than a cover up. An analysis of the evidence, however contradictory, is useful in bringing some understanding as to why things happened as they did.

7.1 Background to the Commission
The Royal Commission was convened by order of the South Australian House of Assembly under the chairmanship of William Haslam. It was held in Melbourne in 1895 and its terms of reference required it to inquire into, and report upon, 'all matters relating to the Northern Territory with a view to the further development of its resources and to its better government'.\(^1\) The Commissioners examined matters relating to the mining, pastoral and arable farming industries. In addition, they solicited opinion on further railway development. The military historians, Knox and Murray, have coined the apposite dictum:

\(^1\) "South Australian Parliamentary Papers, No.19." In Northern Territory State Library, Darwin, 1895. Hereinafter SAPP, thus SAPP 19/1895.
Individuals and organizations confront disparate choices with no means of discerning a clear path forward. The decisions they eventually take reflect personal idiosyncrasies and organizational cultures.\(^2\)

Members of Parliament and government servants with experience of Territory affairs presented the government point of view. Their limited but distinctive opinions naturally stemmed from personal perspectives. This was no different to the opinion of men who represented the Territory mining and pastoral industries. The difference between the two was that the testimony of latter was grounded in practical experience and less coloured by wishful thinking. Unfortunately no one with practical farming experience in the Territory was called upon to give evidence. Owston, whose testimony on the failure of agriculture would have been enlightening, had died in Melbourne two years previously,\(^3\) and none of the others involved directly in Territory agriculture were questioned.

The Commissioners decided that they would be unable to visit the Territory in the time available and went to Queensland instead. While their inquiry there involved questioning practical Queensland farmers, only a few had ever visited the Territory but none of them had ever worked there in any capacity. JCF Johnson, MP, and others thought that the Commissioners' failure to visit the Territory was a serious mistake\(^4\) and that their reasons were spurious. On 6 March 1895 Parsons eloquently expressed the general opinion:

> By visiting the place you would be in a better position to give an opinion than you are now. You could get by rail to Brisbane and there catch a steamer, and be in the Northern Territory in fourteen days from Adelaide, and a month there would enable you to see a very large part of the country. You would be able to charter an Adelaide steamer and visit the Daly, Victoria, Adelaide, and the three Alligator Rivers within a month.

Continuing at some length, he stressed that:

> the urgency of matters requires that you should act and act at once. No consideration of expense should in the slightest degree interfere with

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\(^3\) *Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, Melbourne and Adelaide.

\(^4\) SAPP 19/1895 p. 48, q. 831; p.49, q. 841.
The Commission was not convinced, neither by the urgency of their appeal nor of its relevance and it disregarded the protest in its entirety. Some witnesses had no doubt that the future administration of the Territory was beyond South Australia's capacity. Johnson, who had been a former Minister of the Northern Territory, was categoric in wanting to be rid of it: 6

My views are and always were, with regard to the Territory, that it is a bad job that we [South Australia] have had anything to do with it - a bad thing for South Australia and a bad thing for the Territory ... it would be advisable to get rid of the Territory in some creditable way ... the British Government would be very glad to to take over the Territory if we could see our way to let them do it. 7

Others believed that, while it was beyond South Australia's competence to manage, it was preferable to wait until such time as an Australian Federation could undertake the task. All, however, seemed to agree that, notwithstanding earlier speculation, the mining sector had the potential to expand and prosper, if the regulations that governed it were considerably tightened up. As far as the Territorians themselves were concerned, no one had had much hope in the Commission and there was little faith in its recommendations. In any case, they did not expect that South Australia would ever take up many of them. The Northern Territory Times was as always to the point when it declared, 'except in cases where ready money [was] either not essential or [was] ... well backed by private capital. It is a mercy that we have done with the Commission.' 8

There may have been a lingering suspicion that South Australian interests had been favoured to the exclusion of others, and it is perhaps significant for this reason that the Commission was held in Melbourne. The Commissioners spent a great deal of time examining the circumstances behind the complete and sudden withdrawal of the

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5 SAPP 19/1895 p.72, para.1381.
6 SAPP 19/1895, p.48, q. 827, p.50, q. 866.
7 SAPP 19/1895 p. 46, q.779.
8 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 22 November 1895. Hereinafter NTTG, thus NTTG 22/11/1895.
Victorian Palmerston Plantation Company's investment in plantation agriculture. While blame for the Adelaide interests' failure at Delissaville was placed firmly on De1issa for choosing an impossible site, it was never admitted that this area was among those surveyed during the original Goyder Survey. Consequentially, it had been among those recommended by the government as a possible site for a sugar plantation and it was not disclosed that the Melbourne investors (the Palmerston Plantation Company) had rejected Delissaville out of hand. They had made their own selection later, by negotiated agreement with government, on the Daly River. The South Australian government had subsequently reneged on this and denied them the right of free selection. Goyder's Survey Department then directed the Delissaville Company, reconstituted after bankruptcy as the Daly River Plantation Company, to the very site on the Daly, which they had failed to foist upon the more experienced Victorian, Owston. The Survey Department added insult to injury by implying that the new site now recommended for ex Delissaville investors was that selected by Owston. It was not, and the department was fully aware that it had formed no part of 'Owston's selection'. The result was that South Australia's own company failed yet again directly because of government chicanery and incompetence. The ex Minister for the Territory, ex Resident and now erstwhile Member of Parliament representing Territory interests, John Langdon Parsons himself, had been involved in the machinations, but these goings on were never so much as hinted at in evidence. Owston, himself, was now dead and no one else who shared this knowledge was called. Those who knew held silent.

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9 SAPP 19/1895, p. 64, para. 1226 and p. 66, para. 1271.
10 "Maps, Leases, Title Registrations and Data Plans on Historical Land Tenure - Daly River, Adelaide River and Cox Peninsula." In Northern Territory Government, Department of Lands and Planning, Land Record Unit. Darwin.
13 NTTG 15/8/1884, 23/8/1884, 24/1/1885, 7/3/1885, 31/1/1885, 28/3/1885, 30/5/1885, 21/8/1886, 4/9/1886, 11/9/1886; Hillock, 125-147; GRS 1 491/1883, GRS 1 505/1883, GRS 1 414/1884, GRS 1 707/1884, GRS 1 858/1884, GRS 1 1043/1884, GRS 1 971/1884, GRS 1 792/1883. See also

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7.1.1 The opposing nature of evidence

Practical evidence on tropical agriculture was gleaned from farmers whose experience was relevant to Queensland. On the question of whether Territory land was able to sustain arable farming, their evidence had only a marginal validity. Most of those who were called to testify were prosperous Queensland farmers of small acreage. They were all well chosen to speak concerning the labour inputs required and on economic size of holding relative to the tropics. These were all aspects which might be considered as applicable to the Territory, but these men lacked the appropriate immediate local knowledge.

The Territory itself provided its sole evidence on its agriculture from the South Australian 'professionals,' as they were described in the inquiry. These were Goyder, Holtze, Solomon and Parsons, none of whom were engaged in the business of farming for a living. This was unfortunate for the Commission because the testimony of these men did much to confuse the real issues, and must have been particularly confusing, as it was unable to shed any light on the loss of confidence and subsequent withdrawal of capital investment in Territory agriculture.

The Commissioners were not concerned with the question of the country's ability to sustain economic farming units. This was regarded as being self-evident. They were left to accept without question the reports of Goyder, Parsons, Holtze and others at face value and that the Territory soils and climatic environments were in every way similar to those of Queensland. What they were interested in was the type of farming structure applicable and best suited to the Territory - small farming ventures or large-scale plantation agriculture. As they saw it, it was also expedient for them to establish whether 'white men' could engage in physical labour in the tropics. All witnesses were questioned at some length on this subject, as well as their opinion on size of holding and optimal conditions of tenure. The evidence was mixed.
7.2 Expressions of practical experience
On the relative merits of coloured labour as opposed to white labour, there was a clear
divergence of opinion. Those who had been involved in physical labour had a completely
different picture from those who had not. The view of practical men engaged in both
agriculture and mining was clearly that white men were able to sustain hard physical
labour under tropical conditions. Any divergence in opinion between them on this subject
had more to do with relativities of cost than comparative ability.

7.2.1 The farmers
The evidence, given by Queenslanders of the increasing trend in their home state to
subdivide the large sugar estates of former years into smaller units farmed by tenants,
was probably relevant to establishing a view of optimal size of holding and also on
appropriate systems of tenure. The rise of the improving Queensland tenant farmer was
often ad hoc and not always universally equitable. Often it was modeled on economic
arrangements not so very different from the landlord/tenant partnerships of the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the United Kingdom. The essential difference
in Queensland compared to earlier British models was that many of the colonial farmers
began their careers as tenants, leasing land for short terms only, and taking the option to
buy at the earliest possible moment. As tenants they received the full return from their
crop and rent was assessed on the 'fair return' on the capital that had been invested by
each of the partners. Under best arrangements these tenants were not merely
'sharecroppers'. As the tenants of, and even as owner-occupiers of newly acquired
properties, they worked hand in hand with the large estates and sugar mills. This was a
very sensible form of business association. It equitably shared the costs of production and
at the same time enabled a high degree of financial efficiency. These arrangements
required harmonious working relationships and demanded of both partners an equal share
of responsibility to the land and its long-term productivity. That this approach had proved
viable in Queensland was apparent from the evidence.14

7.2.2 The pastoralists
Despite the recent occurrences of tick-borne Redwater disease and other uncertainties, most witnesses believed also that the pastoral industry would eventually become profitable. Some cattlemen were convinced that the cattle industry would only prosper in the longer term if the conditions of lease were improved, adequate underground water resources were tapped and reliable markets able to be developed. Others testified that the recent government subsidy of £5,000 per annum to advance overseas exports required strategically placed meat works to handle surplus 'off take' so that the industry could generate sufficient 'cash flow' to enable its expansion.

Marketing men in the cattle business were less sanguine about the efficacy of this solution. The station inspector for Goldsborough Mort & Co. owned the steamer used to export 200 live cattle a month to Java, and he could see no immediate prospect for a viable meat processing plant. In his view:

> The class of cattle has not been good. We have suffered very much from light weights. We have been offered cattle delivered at Townsville in Queensland for the trade for the same price as we pay on the stations in the Territory.\(^\text{15}\)

As far as he was concerned the Territory cattle industry was not yet sufficiently well established to support meat processing. Costs were still too high and marketing remained problematic because of negligible local demand and distance to outside markets. Overlanding cattle from Queensland to augment supply was prohibitive due to high wages and freight charges. He agreed that 'you can breed as good cattle in the Northern Territory as in any place I know' and that the future was promising, but for the present, cattle numbers in the Territory were still too low and their quality was not yet good enough to support a meat processing industry.\(^\text{16}\) In general, it was believed that policies for progressive development of the pastoral industry were required and the adoption of such an approach was to be desired. Currently, rents were too high and the unfortunate

\(^{15}\) SAPP 19/1895, p. 140.
\(^{16}\) SAPP 19/1895, pp. 140-143.
pastoral lessee must necessarily forfeit all possibility of recovering the costs of improvements as these became the property of government on the expiry of the lease.

John Costello was a well-known pastoralist and a capable manager. He was unable to attend the Commission hearings, but sent in his submission outlining his considered view. As he saw it, the Territory pastoral industry presented 'one of the saddest, grandest and the most pitiful pictures' - to him The Territory was 'an unlucky country'.\(^{17}\) Drawing upon his own experience, he put the failure of settlement entirely on a government that had allowed speculation in pastoral land to run out of control in the first few years of pastoral expansion.

Outlining his case, he recounted how from about 1882 the South Australian government had auctioned off vast areas of the Territory to the highest bidder - at a time when all available Crown Land in Queensland was taken up and stock prices were booming. This had irresponsibly promoted a rush to acquire Territory leases by giving free rein to the 'moneyed speculator'. Government had then allowed prices to escalate so that 'almost overnight' all available Territory land was held on the basis of 'pure speculation'. This had led to only 30% of leases being occupied, with rents at 'terrible and exorbitant' levels. The outcome had been inevitable. Legitimate cattlemen were now unable to improve their leases, to sustain their stock, or to weather the inevitable cycle of low prices as it came round. In Costello's words:

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\text{The legitimate pastoralist having several thousands a year to pay in rent was obliged to cut down his improvements to the lowest level. He could not afford to make dams, sink wells or conserve water even on a small scale. In time the terrible period of drought came sweeping two-thirds of his herd away.}^{18}
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In his opinion the best grazing land in the Territory was as good as any in New South Wales or Queensland and just as capable of generating success. Had the government

\(^{17}\) SAPP 19/1895, pp. 180-183.  
\(^{18}\) SAPP 19/1895, p. 181.
only managed matters better, said Costello, pastoralism alone would have been capable of providing the nucleus of Territory settlement, just as it had in neighbouring colonies.\textsuperscript{19}

In any analysis, John Costello's views are significant because not only is his a famous name in the history of the Northern Territory pastoral industry but because he knew his business. Costello had lived and worked on Territory stations for more than ten years.\textsuperscript{20} He therefore knew the country and the industry well. He was among the first cattlemen to bring cattle to the Territory 'Tablelands' from Queensland. The 'Tablelands' as he knew them are recognized today as including the best grazing land in the Territory and stretched then eastwards from Victoria River Downs to Wavehill, the Barkly Tableland and onwards to the Queensland border. His opinion on what ailed the pastoral industry at that time is difficult to refute.

When he made the time to tender his written evidence he was personally engaged in a struggle for survival and was over-extended financially, by loans that he had had to raise to cover the costs of boring for water.\textsuperscript{21} The country had certainly been 'unlucky' as far as he and many other capable cattlemen were concerned. Many had been forced to abandon their leases, and he cannot be said to have overstated his case. Pastoralism had proved itself, not only in the Territory's neighbouring colonies, as he stated in his submission, but it had been the forerunner of settlement in many other countries as well.

Even though it was a self-evident truth that its 'tablelands' were as capable of breeding 'as good cattle as anywhere', the Territory's isolation necessarily meant that it could not provide a revenue source for the South Australian government until such time as the industry became fully established and viable. Time has proved that. His contention, therefore, that the South Australian Government should have taken cognizance of these--

\textsuperscript{19} SAPP 19/1895, p. 182.
\textsuperscript{21} Michael J Costello. *Life of John Costello*. Sydney: Dymock's Book Arcade, 1930, pp. 220-222. A good example of the high cost of boring can be derived from John Costello's experience. Costello obtained an overdraft from his bank to pay for the construction of two bores on his Lake Nash property. The financial burden became so great that Costello was forced to forfeit his property.
tyrannies of distance — instead of willingly engaging in an active encouragement of speculation in order to increase its revenues, was no more than the truth.

That the government's attitude was not entirely due to a culpable stupidity but was the result of an imperative that required it to generate revenue was, however, also true. This requirement had long been the Achilles' heel of South Australia's development initiatives. Costello therefore might have, with greater accuracy, described the Territory's government as being 'unlucky' rather than the 'country'.

7.3 The questionable objectivity of the 'professionals'
Goyder, Solomon, Holtze and Parsons were all, to a greater or lesser degree, associated with government and the establishment and recognised as 'experts' or 'professionals' with special knowledge of the Territory. All of them had been to a greater or lesser degree involved in the sudden rise of the 'plantation boom' and its equally rapid collapse. Their evidence therefore left much unsaid that was of relevance to the inquiry. The Commissioners were thus unable to understand what had happened and could neither properly evaluate the Territory's agricultural potential nor recommend for it any realistic plan. Instead, they found themselves embroiled in fruitless discussion around the question of amending legislation to facilitate the introduction of 'coolies' or other coloured labour suitable to the climate and work'.

7.3.1 George W Goyder
With 'forty-four years in the service and thirty-two years Surveyor-General', Goyder knew little of practical agriculture but much more of the political background of the failure than he was prepared to admit. He was an efficient and loyal public servant, steadfast in protecting the interests of the governments he served. The value of his agricultural appraisal and survey of the Northern Territory in 1869 had already been largely discounted. His general comment that in the long run the country would 'turn out well' was still, however, an act of faith. The more scientific investigation carried out

22 SAPP 19/1895, Recommendations p.vii, (15), Dissents p.viii. See also Minutes of Proceedings pp.xix-xxiii.
23 SAPP 19/1895 p. 21.
24 SAPP 19/1895 pp. 21-26, 30.718. f, 62.1191.1192.1193.
by Professor Tate in 1882 had covered most of Goyder's survey area and had offered considerably less hope.\textsuperscript{25}

Goyder came under some unfair criticism during the proceedings and was closely cross-examined but, retaining his composure, he expressed his opinions forcibly, firm in the convictions of his own rectitude.\textsuperscript{26} From his own experience he believed that without alcohol as a 'stimulant' no white man could work in the Territory. As leader of his surveying party in 1869 he said that he had found it necessary to administer alcohol to his men at least twice a day -'in the morning before breakfast, and again before dinner'.\textsuperscript{27} At some points his evidence was contradictory and, whether deliberate or not, might be construed as being misleading. In justifying his supposed personal experience of the Territory wet season, he told the Commissioners that he had been in the Territory for nine months between February and September and described it as being 'during the whole of the wet season'.\textsuperscript{28} Later, under hostile questioning by Commissioner Solomon,\textsuperscript{29} he admitted that the wet season 'falls from November to March'.\textsuperscript{30}

7.3.2 VL Solomon
The evidence of Solomon, entrepreneur, businessman and Member of Parliament for the Northern Territory, and also a member of the Commission, was heard on the first day of the hearing.\textsuperscript{31} His association with both the failed Delissaville Company of Adelaide and its successor the Daly River Plantation Company\textsuperscript{32} was never made clear from his evidence. His testimony was masterful and was delivered in the form of a comprehensive written report upon which he was later questioned. His appraisal covered every aspect of affairs. It was written very much from his own point of view, and must have been

\textsuperscript{25} SAPP 19/1895, p.23, q.502.
\textsuperscript{26} SAPP 19/1895, pp.21-26.
\textsuperscript{27} SAPP 19/1895, p. 24, q. 536, 537, and p. 23, q.497, 493, 491.
\textsuperscript{28} SAPP 19/1895, pp. 21, 23, q. 467.
\textsuperscript{29} SAPP 19/1895, q. 515 - 567.
\textsuperscript{30} SAPP 19/1895, p. 24, q. 530.
\textsuperscript{31} SAPP 19/1895, pp. 1 - 6.
\textsuperscript{32} "List of Shareholders and Directors of the Daly River Plantation Company." In Northern Territory Government, Department of Lands and Planning, Land Record Unit. Darwin, 1886. See also "Maps, Leases, Title Registrations and Data Plans on Historical Land Tenure - Daly River, Adelaide River and
considered as a useful primer by his fellow Commissioners. He had had experience in mining, public works, railways and finance and on these subjects his views were informed and backed by plausible, though unsubstantiated, figures.

On pastoralism and agriculture Solomon was on less secure ground. Under questioning, his opinions, though generally forceful and well versed, were at times less than candid. When he endeavoured to convince the commissioners of the consistency of the climate and its suitability for sustained agriculture, for example, he said:

Dry seasons only occur in certain portions of the country, on the Queensland border, for instance where it is just outside the line of tropical rainfall. The matter of dry seasons does not apply generally to the Territory.33

His vision for the Territory was rather confused. He strongly recommended the need for greater expenditure if it were to develop, and he advocated a partnership between government and private enterprise, the required capital to be raised by floating South Australian Government loans and by encouraging private enterprise by means of land grants. He believed that administration by a Federal Government was merely a vision for the future. He doubted that it would ever eventuate because no Federal Government would wish to take over the Territory.34 Nonetheless, he was convinced that the Imperial authorities ‘would be only too pleased to take it’ 35 because it was ‘too valuable’ and for that reason South Australia should never hand the Territory back to an imperial government for they would not keep the Chinese and other coloureds out.36

7.3.3 Maurice W Holtze
Holtze was at that time director of the Botanic Gardens in Adelaide but for fifteen years before that he had been curator of the Darwin Experimental Gardens. His evidence was often ambiguous and not very useful. As a foreigner, on the periphery of the

Cox Peninsula." In Northern Territory Government, Department of Lands and Planning, Land Record Unit, Darwin.
33 SAPP 19/1895, p. 13, q. 217.
34 SAPP 19/1895, p. 12, q. 195.
35 SAPP 19/1895, p. 12, q. 193.
36 SAPP 19/1895, pp. 12, 15, q. 282, 286, 194, pp. 12, 15.
establishment, he had survived in a highly politicised environment. Whilst generally recognised as the government's Territory agricultural expert for many years, his reports seem to have been moulded in positive or negative terms dependent on his estimation of the requirements of his political masters and because of this were often contradictory.

Holtze's evidence to the Commission was illustrative of a practised technique that was maintained with effortless consistency. On Territory soil fertility, his opinion was that it was 'the same as other countries having the same climate - there is no difference' he said. He informed the Commission that he was unable to advise on the optimal size of agricultural blocks because, 'I have seen very little of the Territory'. Nonetheless, he said that he knew that 'there is plenty of suitable land' for sugar production - 'enough to grow all the sugar used in the colonies for the next 100 years'. He told the Commissioners that he had never visited Queensland. Yet when asked whether he could evaluate the 'relative value of Queensland and Northern Territory land from personal inspection' he replied mysteriously that 'the Territory land, or some of it, is just as good as the Queensland. The land in Queensland may do much better.' It is little wonder that Commissioners were confused.

Holtze's report of 27 June 1884 was tendered in evidence. It specifically praised the locality of the Melbourne Palmerston Plantation Company's site on the Daly River. He clearly identified its position in his introductory paragraph. It was situated 'in a straight line about forty miles, following the course of the River about sixty miles from the mouth'. He continued, 'cane does grow here [and] has been shown by Mr Owston to satisfaction'. He concluded:

so much I may safely say that for many plantations of sugarcane, coffee, and indigo - not to mention rice for the lower part - the banks of the Daly offers sufficient land of the best description, and only capital and

37 SAPP 19/1895, p.15, q. 299.
38 SAPP 19/1895, p.16, para. 302.
39 SAPP 19/1895, p.16, para. 327.
40 SAPP 19/1895, p.18, para. 358.
41 SAPP 19/1895, pp. 20, para. 431.
42 SAPP 19/1895, p.35.
43 SAPP 19/1895, p.36.
enterprise are required to make this river a source of prosperity for the
Territory. 44

When asked the leading question by Solomon, 'Do you agree with me in regard to that
plantation (Owston's) that bad management and the selection of unsuitable land were the
causes of its failure?' he answered him with an unequivocal 'yes'. 45 In an earlier part of
his evidence he had assured Commissioner Solomon that he agreed with Solomon's
written evidence 'on every distinct point'. 46 In fairness to Holtze, his response on
Owston's selection may be construed as being an example of the semantics necessary for
survival in the political maelstrom of Territory politics. On this occasion he might well
have justified his answer to himself by referring, not to the Victorian company's
plantation, but rather to the area outlined by Goyder's survey department and rejected
absolutely by them. 47

7.3.4 John Langdon Parsons
Parsons' evidence could have provided more light, but did not. The Commissioners were
entitled to expect more from one involved for so long in Territory affairs. In his evidence,
he recounted that he had been Minister for the Territory from 1881 until 1884,
Government Resident from 1884 to 1890 and from 1890 to 1893 he had represented the
Territory in the South Australian House of Assembly. As the minister, he had been
instrumental for much of the Territory legislation passed during the crucial period of the
1880s - the Northern Territory Land Act of 1881, the Sugar Cultivation Amendment Act,
the Indian Immigration Act and the Crown Lands Consolidating Act. Additionally, he
had increased customs duties in Darwin on goods specifically imported for the
consumption of the Chinese, and had initiated the enabling legislation for the Darwin to
Pine Creek railway. 48

His initial evidence was presented in a twenty thousand-word report. It covered
everything from his view of the Territory's financial position, his reasons for its lack of

44 SAPP 19/1895, p. 36.
45 SAPP 19/1895, p. 19, q. 406, 408.
46 SAPP 19/1895, p.19, q. 395.
47 Hillock, pp. 116-129 and 133-147.

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success in procuring investment and his recommendations for future prosperity. In his introductory paragraphs he gave his own outline of the objects of the Commission. He said these were to discover:

the chief causes [which] have brought about the present deplorable conditions ... to devise methods to stop the annual deficit of nearly £60 000 per annum by developing the natural resources of the northern territory. 49

He listed fifteen reasons which had brought about the present 'deplorable conditions' and, apart from those that expressed the prejudices of the age, most of them stand up to modern analysis. Amongst those he identified were that South Australia's own population was too small to either successfully colonise or administer a vast tropical area that was some 2 000 miles (3 200 km) distant from the seat of government. Large areas had been offered for sale on a speculative basis at the outset, without proper or prior reconnaissance, and this was made worse by government litigation in its defence. 50 The loss of confidence then was only increased by 'the unsuitableness for agriculture of the great bulk of land surveyed by Mr Goyder'. 51 He believed, nonetheless, that the Northern Territory's natural bounty, particularly in regard to its agricultural potential, was sufficient to ensure successful settlement in the long term if proper steps were taken, which he then outlined and supported in bewildering detail from reports and appraisals from other numerous 'experts'.

Having digested the contents of this written report, the Hon. W Haslam, MLC, in the chair, decided that it was not enough, and Parsons was called for further evidence:

There are just one or two matters in your report upon which I think the Commission would like a little more light, which you will, no doubt be able to give. 52

48 SAPP 19/1895, pp. 30-45.
49 SAPP 19/1895, p. 30, para. 718.
50 SAPP 19/1895, p. 30, para. 718, a, b, c, d, e, f.
51 SAPP 19/1895, p. 30, para. 718, n.
52 SAPP 19/1895, p.62.
This supplementary evidence of Parsons only served to further confuse issues. His answers to a written interrogative were exhaustive and again well-larded with quotations from others, but in common with the evidence of Goyder, Solomon and Holtze revealed only a selective memory. He failed to disclose the real reason for the plantation debacle of the early 1880s. Not once were the machinations involved in the breaking of the agreement with the Melbourne interests mentioned, let alone cited, as the reason why 'wealthy Melbourne men who had intended to go in for the industry on large scale' had backed off. He reiterated the belief that the future of the Territory lay in its agricultural potential.

Parsons' recommendations were inconsistent yet he seemed unaware of any inherent paradox. He believed that the Northern Territory was not a country in which a white man could undertake manual labour. The Chinese had proved capable, but were not needed. Permanent settlement required enabling legislation to bring in coloured labour.

**Conclusion**
The Royal Commission relied on the dubious evidence of 'the professionals' and largely ignored the observations of those involved at the coalface, such as Costello and others. As a result the final report was unable to resolve the question of whether Europeans could even live, let alone work, in the Territory, even though those who had actually done it saw no problem. One of those even stated that he had regularly worked from 'eight to twenty-three hours a day' without detriment. On the other hand those whose occupations and experience had been sedentary advocated the absolute necessity of 'coloured' labour.

The Commission handed down its report and recommendations on 17 July 1895. Thirty-five meetings had been held, sixty-nine witnesses interviewed and the report was two hundred pages long. Fifteen recommendations were made in all. Only one, 'that offers

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53 SAPP 19/1895, p.66, para. 1271.
54 SAPP 19/1895, pp. 30-45, 62-72.
be invited for the construction of the transcontinental railway on the land-grant system' referred to the railway, which if nothing else, re-introduced what had become and was to remain a continuing theme in Territory history. Two of them related to the mining industry. Twelve recommendations covered the agricultural sectors but few were relevant to agriculture. Their suggestions that sugar cane mills and meat freezing works should be built at 'appropriate centres' were little more than indulgence. The Commissioners had deliberated for several weeks, but seemed undismayed at being unable to unravel 'the contradictory nature of the evidence'. The board of six handed down its report and recommendations with five dissenting, but nevertheless attempted to close on a hopeful note, by concluding that it saw no reason 'why the Northern Territory, under suitable laws and administration, should not become a prosperous settlement'.

The Royal Commission of 1895 had written finis to the affair, and while lip service continued to be paid by South Australian politicians to their original dream, they now found other priorities. The political emphasis had changed. South Australia now sought to hand over the Territory to Imperial authority or a future Federal government. The National Australasian Convention Debates were held in Adelaide in 1897 and it was assumed by most delegates that the current position of South Australia vis à vis the Territory was unwinnable. Especially for Deakin and Macrossan, it was a sine qua non that the Northern Territory must be taken over by a future Federal Government. In 1898 a petition, signed by Territory residents, strongly endorsed this view. On 18 April 1901 South Australia's Premier, Sir Frederick Holder, without even obtaining his Parliament's consent, wrote to Alfred Deakin with an offer to sell the Territory to federal authorities for £2 853 573, conditional only upon guarantees that the transcontinental railway would be completed by the Commonwealth. It was now only a matter of time.

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56 SAPP 19/1895, pp. v, xix.
57 SAPP 19/1895, p. vii, viii.
59 SAPP 27/1901.
Chapter 8

Aboriginals and the Jesuit 'Reducciones' on the Daly River
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Aboriginals and the Jesuit 'Reducciones' on the Daly River

Summary
The remit of the Royal Commission of 1895 had been to diligently 'inquire into, and report upon, all matters relating to the Northern Territory'. Indicatively, it had not one word to say of the indigenous population. Aboriginals were seldom deemed newsworthy enough to hold public attention for more than a brief spell, and then only if the matter were negative, or if some publicity-conscious politician spoke worthily on how to deal with the perceived problem. It was recognition of sorts - but very few Europeans in the Northern Territory sought actively to engage in addressing issues relating to Aboriginal welfare. This chapter relates the story of some that tried.

8.1 Aboriginal disenfranchisement
When Goyder first established Darwin in 1869, he had said that unless Aboriginals realised that the civilisation, which had unexpectedly appeared amongst them, was to their benefit also, there would be some doubt as to their future acquiescence in the 'unauthorised and unwarrantable occupation of their country'.

Today, there is often little real empathy between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and the situation was certainly worse in the nineteenth century. Reciprocal misunderstanding bred resentment. There was often tension, and there were many 'spearings' which, given the temper of the times, led to 'punitive expeditions' by police where punishment was delivered in kind and often quite indiscriminately.

Comment in the Northern Territory Times and Gazette mirrored contemporary opinion. In November 1873 it echoed the public's view of the primary role of the Territory's newly established police force - who it said were:

sent to reside [here] without any particular object in mind beyond giving
some form of protection [from Aborigines] to the persons who had
bought land and might come to settle in the new country.3

As time passed, Goyder's hope that Aboriginals might soon learn the advantages of
'working for their keep'4 had not materialised, and the original inhabitants of the Northern
territory were seldom considered as being even relevant to the question of 'civilised'
settlement and were ever only of marginal concern. Nonetheless, wherever an
understanding of mutual advantage and mutual respect could be developed, as on
Owston's plantation on the Daly River, they were able to be employed without coercion
and there was a good relationship. Typically, however, others showed less
understanding, and blamed the planter Owston for being too friendly.5

In contrast, on the Cox Peninsula at Delissa's plantation, some form of 'blackbirding' had
been used to obtain Aboriginal labour and entirely different strategies employed to retain
them. At Delissaville, the Aboriginal workers were not locals, and it has been said that
some were noted intransigents - the notoriously fierce Bathurst Islanders.6 According to
Sowden, they were not even permitted to leave the plantation. Delissa had said they had
tried it once but:

he gave them such a fright, by means of rockets and such like, while not
injuring them, that they had not tried to do so since ... and if they hint
at going over to their old ground, [he] frowns upon them unutterably,
frightening them effectually.7

As a workforce, indigenous Australians were never thought of as having anything
worthwhile to contribute to the colony. Coloured immigrants, as 'cooilies', were the
expected and preferred option. In writing on this matter, Mrs Daly said, 'until the

3 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 8 November 1873. Hereinafter NTTG, thus NTTG 8/11/1873.
4 Powell, p. 83.
5 NTTG 23/4/1881, 7/5/1881, 16/7/1881. See also IM Hillock. Broken Dreams & Broken Promise, The
Cane Conspiracy: Plantation Agriculture in the Northern Territory, 1878-79. Darwin: Northern
Territory University, 2000, pp. 57, 58, 106.
6 John Morris. The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change: A History of Encounter between an Island
question of labour is settled, and a supply of coolies available, it is impossible to expect any great results from the Northern plantation.\(^8\)

Though there are few specific reports on Aborigines, and no health statistics, in those first years their lack of resistance to diseases, such as small pox, tuberculosis and various venereal diseases, inevitably took its toll. Though Bauer has alluded to a decrease in Aboriginal population that has never been documented, he has said that there was nothing to indicate any serious epidemics.\(^9\) His conclusions may be taken as reflecting rather on the paucity of the record than on historical fact. There are certain contra-indications to his assertion that there were no epidemics, and it is known that they suffered from endemic disease as well.\(^10\) On 31 January 1895, O'Flaherty, the Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines, reported that an Aboriginal of the Alligator River district had leprosy and surmised that many more might be affected. He was unable to confirm this, because 'I have had very little to attend to in this department, as the natives prefer to follow their own customs in every particular'.\(^11\)

The total of Aboriginal employees was always small. Apart from those already mentioned, some were employed in the small pearling industry and others worked as native trackers with the police. Initially very few, if any, were employed in the pastoral industry. There the practice, according to Bauer, was to keep them at as great a distance as possible,\(^12\) with some reason, as Parsons has recorded. He voiced his concerns in his reports as Government Resident. In 1885 it is recorded that Willaroo Station, south of Katherine, had been abandoned because of 'natives' killing and molesting cattle, and he feared that 'unquiet times may be expected in connection with the native tribes'. It was a

\(^8\) Mrs Dominic D Daly. Digging, Squatting, and the Pioneer Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1887, p. 264.

\(^9\) FH Bauer. Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey Report No. 64. CSIRO, Canberra, 1964, p.141.


\(^12\) Bauer, p. 141.
serious problem, he said, and there were many disputes arising between them and the pastoralists over billabongs and waterholes. As he explained it, to pastoralists it was a reasonable right to allow cattle to drink undisturbed, but equally to Aboriginal people the very presence of cattle on a waterhole interfered with their reasonable right to fish and gather waterfowl undisturbed. Similarly, while the pastoralist needed to preserve in situ the grass as fodder, the Aboriginal needed to burn it for hunting purposes - these were his rights from time immemorial.\(^{13}\) Parsons understood that under these circumstances it was only natural that resentments on both sides smouldered and could flare up quickly into violence. The Aboriginals speared cattle and the cattlemen took appropriate action by driving the Aboriginal people off the land.

The local newspaper often led with dramatic accounts from station managers of 'outrages' at Katherine, Elsey, Newcastle Waters, the Limmen and Roper rivers, and of increasingly 'daring and defiant blacks' on the Victoria River Downs.\(^{14}\) The public became 'incensed' by newspaper reports of 'outrages on the Daly River and at Argument Flat'.\(^{15}\) As Parsons said, the problem 'was much easier to state than to solve'. He was quite sure that the conviction and public execution of four of those found guilty of the murders on the Daly, at the scene of their crime, would have 'a deterrent effect'. However, he was aware of other recalcitrants dispersed throughout the Territory and was unable to see any solution. On the one hand, an Aboriginal reserve would in theory allow the 'native' to freely roam within its boundaries, but on the other there could be no guarantee that if this were done he would remain within them - 'because the native life is essentially nomadic'.\(^{16}\)

Human nature being what it is there were certain instances where more positive relationships were able to develop, but this was not general. Those Aboriginals with whom Europeans made contact were largely not considered, unless as a curiosity or a nuisance. Throughout the early period of settlement, the Aboriginal people were excluded from official census. No mechanism was ever put in place by which their

\(^{13}\) NTGRR 45/1887, NTGRR 53/1888.  
\(^{14}\) NTGRR 45/1887, NTGRR 53/1888.  
\(^{16}\) NTGRR 45/1887, NTGRR 53/1888.
numbers might be assessed with any degree of accuracy, and for this reason their numbers were listed as 'Unknown'.

8.2 'Reducciones' on the Daly
Concurrent with Parsons' concerns, but entirely without government prompting, the problem was in fact already being tackled in a positive fashion, which had philosophical underpinnings. The Jesuit Mission on the Daly River sought to introduce indigenous people to methods of modern husbandry, and to establish them in viable Aboriginal agricultural communities to enable their autonomous economic survival.

Bauer only records that in the Top End of the Northern Territory, Jesuit mission work began with the mission at Rapid Creek in 1883 or 1884 and that it was a total failure. He briefly mentions that in 1886 the Jesuits established a second mission on the southern bank of the Daly River with only moderate success. Nonetheless, some thirty years after this mission closed, a note by Mrs Litchfield recounted that a young Daly River Aborigine - not an old man, a 'myall' or 'uncivilisid blackfellow' - was heard singing a hymn in Latin learnt from others who had been part of that same Daly River Mission.18

Some more information may be gleaned from contemporary newspapers. There are only three short, but intriguing, items in editions of the Northern Territory Times and Gazette for 1895. In March it gives an account of the 'beautiful lemons' brought to Darwin from the mission, and that a Father MacKillop19 believed that they would be able to supply 'tons of fruit in a few years'.20 In an October issue we read that:

At the Daly River Mission Station some experiments in tanning have been made with the assistance of an indigenous bark the name of which was not disclosed to us. Judging from samples of goat skins brought to

17 Bauer, p. 141.
18 J Litchfield. Far North Memories, Sydney: Angus and Robertson,1930.
19 The Scots born MacKillop was the brother of Mary MacKillop founder of the Australian teaching order of Josephite nuns.
20 NTTG 29/3/1895.
Then, on 5 December 1895, it related that LJ Brackenbury, who, following the recommendation of the Royal Commission, had been engaged by the government to investigate, and report upon, the capabilities for growing sugar on the river lands of the Territory, had returned from the Daly River on the SS Maggie. He had rested for a while with the Jesuits on the Daly, where:

he was hospitably entertained by the Rev. Father MacKillop and his little band of fellow missionaries. With the natural features of the site chosen for the mission Mr Brackenbury was delighted, and although here was little to see at the time in the shape of cultivation the general appearance about the place indicated prosperity. The 1400 goats, 108 head of cattle and about the same number of pigs, all were thriving wonderfully well and were gradually turning the place into first rate country.

8.2.1 MacKillop's hope
The Adelaide Register and the Sydney Herald give further interesting glimpses. Both contain direct comments from Father MacKillop himself, which he had made during fundraising for the mission. On yet another government proposal to bring Indian coolies into the Territory as agricultural labourers, MacKillop had this to say:

If the Government would only do for us a tithe of what they propose doing for the Indians coolies we feel confident of success in making a self-supporting reproductive settlement which will exchange goods with Palmerston.

MacKillop then went on to explain the primary objective of the mission:

Religion is primary in our intention, but in a manner secondary in our practice, because we recognise that we must first civilise the blacks.

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21 NTTG 25/10/1895.
22 NTGRR 45/1895.
23 NTTG 5/12/1895.
before we can Christianise them - it is a kind of socialism, but one that will work well, for there is true religion and self reliance at the bottom of it. 25

The reference here to the missionaries' design to introduce a 'kind of socialism' to the Aborigines is intriguing. Quoting from MacKillop again, copy from the *Sydney Herald* and the *Southern Cross* sheds some more light on what he meant. He said that if the treatment meted out to the displaced Aborigines were to continue, the effects on them would be catastrophic:

Present legislation, even when it means to be kind, is simply death and extermination to the blackman. But public opinion, the true ruler here, may change all this. Our aim and our hope is to reproduce on the banks of the Daly and among the western tribes those Reductions – triumphs of humanity even Voltaire called them – which as Henry George writes ‘to their honour the Jesuits instituted and so long maintained in Paraguay’. 26

Autonomous 'Reducciones', adapted to the nineteenth century Australian experience, but modeled on the seventeenth century Jesuit missions in South America, would only succeed if the philosophy was espoused by the Australian people and had the blessing of their governments:

For well we know that sooner or later we must inevitably fail unless Federated Australia be prepared to have in one barren corner of the continent her own Paraguay. 27

According to GJ O'Kelly, in terms of number of Aborigines concerned and compared with the scope of activities undertaken by other missions in their first twenty years, the Jesuit Daly River Mission was larger than any other in the Territory or in South Australia itself. In his thesis, *The Jesuit Mission Stations in the Northern Territory 1882-1899*, he argues that this includes comparison with Hermannsburg, Point Mcleay, Killalpaninna,

26 O'Kelly, p. 56, quoting *Southern Cross*, 6 October 1893.
Poonindie or Point Pearce in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{28} For those reasons alone, their efforts would be worth examining. Historically, they provide some insight into the period but, in the light of modern understanding, their underlying philosophy may be deserving of more interest, because its purpose was to:

\begin{quote}
settle the aboriginals on the ground and turn them into a farming population. If we succeed in this we are convinced to succeed in bestowing Christian civilization upon them.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Between 1882 and 1899 there were altogether four Jesuit Mission Stations established in the Northern Territory. Rapid Creek is often mentioned in the literature, but in fact it was soon abandoned, and only retained for a short while afterwards to supply stock for the Daly River Missions. It had originally attempted to minister to the Aboriginal 'fringe dwellers', but the Jesuits soon became convinced that they could do little to overcome the general degeneration of 'grog', and close and inferior association with white settlement that had disrupted the mores of these unfortunates. Therefore, the decision was made to establish a mission on the Daly River, which was still a remote area where Aboriginal culture remained intact. MacKillop officially closed the Rapid Creek Mission in 1891.\textsuperscript{30}

By their own admission they had failed with the mission at Rapid Creek because, they believed, it had been too close to the bad influences of white settlement. Their failure is well attested to by observers of the time, as recorded in Parliamentary Papers of 1885:

\begin{quote}
I hope the best from the efforts which are being made by the Rapid Creek Mission, but I fear little can be considered as being actually achieved.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Three years later, of the opening of the Daly River Mission, nothing much more was expected. Parsons could say no more than that 'so far as Rapid Creek is concerned the

\textsuperscript{28} O'Kelly, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{30} O'Kelly, pp. 2, 42.
\textsuperscript{31} SAPP 54/1885, p. 51.
report is a confession of failure,' and dryly added that 'at Daly River, in the early period of novelty, the report is hopeful'.

Map 4
Map of the Jesuit Missions (Daly River Area)

The map shows the three initial sites of the Jesuit Mission - Old Uniya, Serpentine Lagoon, Hermit Hill - and their final site New Uniya, on the site of the Palmerston Plantation Company's old headquarters and nursery. Source: O'Kelly, who compiled it from references in MacKillop, 'Anthropological Notes', Royal Society of South Australia Report for 1887, SAPP 53/1888, p.42.

At the time when the Jesuits established their new mission, it was still hoped that enterprising white farmers would soon settle the Daly River Agricultural Area, and government was not at first in favour of any encroachment by non-commercial interests.

32 SAPP 53/1888, p. 25.
The first mission sites there were therefore set up in inferior positions. The three centres tried on the south-west bank of the river had to be abandoned one after the other. Serpentine Lagoon, Old Uniya and Hermitage Hill were quite disastrous. The first two were prone to flooding, and all three were on poor soil, yet the mission survived during some three years of extreme privation, established its credibility with the locals and initiated its work.

In 1891, guided by the mission Aborigines themselves, the mission moved to more suitable country on the northern bank of the river. This, their final site, endured for the next decade with quite a degree of success. It was located at, or very close to, Owston's Landing, on the site of the Palmerston Plantation Company's abandoned headquarters and nursery, which they now called New Uniya (Map 4).

Fortunately for the mission, bank failures and the current depression had driven most white men from the area and there seemed no possibility of attracting further new settlement pro tem. Thus the government was amenable, and permitted them to take up this prime land. The mission now began to meet with considerable success.

8.2.2 The achievements on the Daly
It is instructive to consider the Jesuit's achievement amongst the Daly River Aborigines during their very short tenure. Influenced mainly by MacKillop, the mission attempted to model itself along the lines of the Jesuit Reductions in Paraguay. By definition, this rejected the idea of one large centre, and rather demanded small stations in different tribal territories for the 'Reductions'. The aim was to preserve local tribal autonomy.

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33 Hillock pp. 49-68, 102-104 and appendices. See also Maps, Leases, Title Registrations, and Data Plans on Historical Land Tenure (Northern Territory Government, Department of Lands and Planning, Land Record Unit) - Daly River Record of salient information adjacent to Owston’s Landing, Hundred of Hawkshaw; 1882 Pastoral Lease 33. 1883/84 Survey Plans by Cuthbertson and Hingston, Hd of Hawkshaw, plans 15 & 9; 1884 Data Plans of NT Pastoral Leases, Old Volume 1, Folio 32, signed Geo. Goyder 28/11/1884; 1885 Data Plans of NT Pastoral Leases, Old Volume 1, Folio 35, showing land proposed to be resumed for temporary use of Missionaries; 1885 Goyder's NT Pastoral Compilation. 1887 First published Map of Hundred of Hawkshaw - Daly River Plantation; 1888 First registered Title over Section 1 at ‘Owston’s Landing to William Bunting Brown. 1896 Pastoral lease 1857, Hd of Howard/Daly River. 1899 Survey of Daly River Mission Station by Copley Playford, Hd of Hawkshaw, Sections 2 & 3 - no recorded title.

34 O’Kelly, pp. 50, 51.

35 O’Kelly, pp. 50-62.

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It was unique also in several other ways. Unlike its nineteenth century South Australian counterparts, and indeed most other missions of the time in Australia, its mission stations on the Daly were concerned with Aboriginals who had been relatively unaffected by any permanent white presence. MacKillop and others expressed the underlying motivation of the mission many times, 'religion is primary in intention ... but secondary in practice'.

Their *modus operandi* was explained in succinct terms to the South Australian Government. Whilst they had no illusions as to the difficulty of the task undertaken, their primary objective 'to settle the aboriginals on the ground' was made quite clear to the government.

They understood that the work of settling Aboriginals on the 'Reductions' must necessarily be gradual for, as they explained to the Minister for the Territory:

> [the Aborigines] cannot break off at once all their former habits without running risks for their very preservation ... he may well work in vain who tears up their accustomed ways by force and suddenly attaches wild men to a life of cultivation.

MacKillop had described the 'socialist aim' of the 'reduction', and part of this required them to place great emphasis on the preservation of Aboriginal culture and language. They understood that polygamy was practised, 'not through lust but out of fear of destitution of old age', and *walkabout* was permitted as also were *corroborees*, though permission was only given for the latter if they were of reasonably short duration. Celebrations were held, with games of spear throwing and other pursuits that were more meaningful to the Aborigines than cricket. The winners received prizes that were judged suitable to Aboriginal appreciation and culture. Where necessary, discipline was enforced in traditional Aboriginal ways, and, on at least one occasion, an offender was given the choice of being handed over to the police or of accepting tribal punishment,

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36 At first on the Daly some miners and pastoralists were in the vicinity, but the depression had forced these few to leave the area by the early nineties.

37 O'Kelly, p. 42.

38 SAPP 158/1893, p. 10.

39 SAPP 158/1893, p. 10.

40 O'Kelly, Introduction.
which entailed running the gauntlet and severe beating by his own people. He chose the
tribal punishment and was indeed severely beaten by his peers.41

Then as now, the Jesuit Order was renowned for its learning, and the Mission Journal is
full of historical, musical, linguistic and classical references:

Argumentative lubras are sometimes referred to as Xantippe's - Socrates'
bad-tempered wife. Linguistic references are impressive, revealing an
acquaintance with Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Celtic and several
slavonic dialects, besides English, German and aboriginal tongues.42

Apart from MacKillop himself, who was a Scot, most of the other missionaries came
from Austria where, prior to entering the Order, they had undergone compulsory military
service in the Austro-Hungarian army. Of perhaps more relevance, all were able to
demonstrate practical abilities in carpentry, building and ploughing in the day-to-day
work of the mission.43 The Order also had a four hundred-year tradition of successful
missionary work to draw upon - not only in Paraguay, but in India, Japan and China as
well. These characteristics all played their part, in an approach which had many positive
aspects.

By January 1889, even before the move to the old plantation site, forty Aboriginals had
been hired as workers, and over fifty men, women and children were permanently in
residence on the mission. Father Strele, the first Superior, recorded that 'we [now] have
... a small village forming around us', and that nine families were living in their own
thatched houses made of bamboo, each with their own two-acre plots. They had been
given various seeds of maize, potatoes, beans, chicory and melons to plant and the 'farm'
plots had been be prepared by the people themselves, without coercion but with some
assistance from the missionaries. This alone was certainly an achievement, and Strele
was able to say, after only seven months, that the 'Aboriginal settlers' were 'gradually
accustoming themselves to work in their own gardens without getting anything from us'.

41 O'Kelly, quoting from letters, missionary journals and government reports, pp. 91, 92.
42 O'Kelly, in a footnote p. 73.
43 O'Kelly, pp. 73-74.
The 'settlers' were expected to be self-supporting and only the children received any food from the mission.

The school was soon up and running, with some thirty children in attendance. There were two grades or classes. The preparatory curriculum consisted of learning the ABC and counting up to two hundred. The children were given regular 'exams' for which prizes were awarded. Those who successfully 'graduated' from the preparatory division were advanced to the higher level to be taught 'all knowledge possible and useful here and now'. This comprised elementary arithmetic, reading and writing, and a little geography. When judged to be ready, they were apprenticed to one of the missionary brothers to learn a trade. Nothing was done for the girls, apart from teaching them sewing, and the Australian Roman Catholic hierarchy was never persuaded to allow nuns to help. Only minimal religious instruction was ever given to the children. This consisted of some common prayers, bible stories from illustrations and learning songs and hymns. The Jesuits did not accept the prevailing attitude of an inherent white superiority in either ability or intelligence:

We who saw them with our own eyes were astounded by what we saw the blacks capable of ... [their] intellectual faculties [are] better and nobler than I was informed ... of their spiritual capability I can only speak favourably.

8.2.3 New Uniya
The missionaries' first sites on the southern bank of the river had proved incapable of self-sufficiency, but despite poor soil and annual flooding it was on these sites that they had laid the foundations of their system. In 1891 when they made their final move to Owston's old plantation headquarters and nursery, the three earlier stations were closed and the general transfer made to this their last site, which they called New Uniya.

That year also saw the Jesuits with a staff of eleven, and there were about fifty fairly permanent Aboriginals residing. Their stock numbers stood at 16 horses, 6 donkeys, 39

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44 O'Kelly, pp. 39-51
45 O'Kelly p. 87, Fr Strele writing in the mission's Journal 26 October 1891.
cattle and some 550 goats. By November they had erected a temporary mission house and small chapel, a forge, stables, store and work sheds, as well as a windmill for irrigation. They had also ploughed several acres.46 They now had a basis on which to build and demonstrate good farming practice without the constant threat of actual starvation.

According to O'Kelly, the government gave them 300 acres on the site in the August of 1891,47 but O'Kelly has misunderstood the wording of the title documentation. This land was almost certainly purchased and in the same year MacKillop himself purchased, from his own pocket,48 the adjacent land which then gave them complete command of the principal landing place on the river (Owston’s Landing) where steamers could load and unload supplies (Map 5).

The new site had 'some of the finest and best soil' to be found in the area and they now had good reason to believe that all would be well.49 Nonetheless, earlier privation had left them in 'dire poverty', and any euphoria engendered by their acquisition was soon dissipated. Financial depression was everywhere current, and private donations both from within Australia and from Austria were drying up. Even before the first crops on the new site could be harvested, the 'good supply of native foods' had withered up in the dry season. To make matters worse an epidemic of influenza saw forty Aboriginals lying ill and twelve actually dying on the station by June 1892. Priests sometimes had to ride fifty miles to bring whatever aid they could to other Aboriginals who had also been struck down in the epidemic.

Recorded lectures illustrate the philosophies that underwrote the mission’s objectives.

46 O’Kelly, p. 51.
47 O’Kelly, p. 50.
48 The Title (Register Book 1X. 111, Transfer No. 1428) shows that MacKillop purchased the site for £100 from William Bunting Brown on 11 October 1889 - the Memorandum of Transfer was signed at Burrundie by MacKillop. A further Memorandum of Transfer on 13 August 1897 of the above in Adelaide shows transfer of title from MacKillop to the Society of Jesus at or about the time when he was transferred from the mission.
49 O’Kelly, p. 50.
This map shows the final improvements on the site of the Jesuit mission on the Daly (Hundred of Hawkshaw, sections 1, 2 & 3). Section 1, purchased by MacKillop himself, is shown, adjacent to Owston's Landing on the lower left. These can just be read though the condition of the original is very poor.

_Sourced:_ Northern Territory Government, Department of Lands and Land Planning Unit.

The mission sought help from government, from the Order and from the church hierarchy. They publicised their plight in magazines but this brought only temporary relief. By December, not wishing to have to disperse the school children, the missionaries took them to a billabong close by, where they all lived on goat flesh and
herbs for two months. Malaria added to the troubles and everyone suffered from malnutrition.\textsuperscript{50}

In an effort to avert further tragedy, MacKillop set off himself to try to raise money but met with little success. As may be deduced from the recorded improvements, the mission's finances were often overstretched and they never became reliable, but the mission survived and progressed. Some sixty acres were kept under cultivation at any one time and were divided into two main areas. One area was specifically for the common upkeep of the station, and the remainder, in eight-acre blocks, was again subdivided into four and two-acre fields. All field areas were fenced, with each Aboriginal 'settler' having one of the smaller blocks, actual area dependent on the size of the family unit. Young couples who married after completing their schooling were provided with a house, land and a few goats as 'marriage portions'. The missionaries were soon able to say 'from a material point of view this mission is now in a tolerable condition. Farming and stock rearing cover a good part of our actual needs'.\textsuperscript{51}

By 1899 the mission on the Daly round the large mission house had become a respectable village settlement, comprising a church, school children's dormitories, fifteen to twenty 'settler' houses, stables, a granary and a printing house. There were also many storage sheds and a forge. They had a steam engine to pump water from wells and to drive a sawmill, and had constructed underground aqueducts to carry water for irrigation. Several structures, tastefully described as \textit{cabinets de necessité}, were sited at strategic points.\textsuperscript{52}

Edwin Brady has described the Jesuit's Daly River Mission as being 'an agricultural success'.\textsuperscript{53} But this is to overstate the case. In 1892 a plague of caterpillars necessitated a double sowing of maize. The next year, a plague of rats forced four re-plantings of maize and at harvest the crop only produced six tons. In 1884 mice destroyed all crops except yams and sweet potatoes, of which only ten tons could be saved. In 1896 birds reduced

\textsuperscript{50} O'Kelly, pp. 51,52.
\textsuperscript{51} O'Kelly, p. 57, quoting from a letter from Fr. Conrath, one of the missionaries.
\textsuperscript{52} Jesuit Archives quoted by MacKillop; Journal, 31/12/1894, 30/12/1896, 31/12/1897, 19/11/1898. See also SAPP 45/1899, p. 13 and SAPP 45/1897, p. 11.
the corn harvest again, this time to only three tons, and in the following year intense heat defeated the irrigation system and an expected six-ton crop of corn was reduced to two.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, in 1898 the first flood experienced on New Uniya devastated everything that they attempted to grow, and the same occurred in 1899.\textsuperscript{55} Maize had been the intended staple crop, but the recurrent pests seem to have affected it every year so that the 'settlers' were often disappointed with poor returns for so much work. Towards the end of the mission's short life, it appears that bananas had become the main crop, and eventually the Aboriginal farmers preferred to cultivate only in the wet season and to focus on their stock during the dry.\textsuperscript{56}

Though they were never to become completely self-supporting, many different crops were grown. Maize was always problematic, but they successfully grew yams, sweet potatoes, pineapples, watermelons, and Indian beans. Half a ton of tobacco was harvested in 1897, and bananas, mangoes, pawpaw and coconuts thrived. The only market was Darwin, but that appears to have been too far, and the difficulties with regular transport stifled any real marketing, so that the 'settlers' produce was often bought for cash by the mission staff themselves to encourage the understanding of the concept of commercial enterprise. The years between 1893 and 1898 were perhaps the most successful for the mission, and the staff were generally confident that all would be well. O'Kelly relates how they expected the Josephite nuns, founded only recently by MacKillop's sister, Mary, to join them to run a school for the girls, but formal requests made in 1895 and again in 1898 were turned down for reasons unknown.

Throughout this period, between seventy and eighty Aboriginal residents worked and lived permanently on the mission. There were always between four and fourteen apprentices learning a trade at any one time, the highest number ever achieved was nineteen. The number of staff available to teach them was the only restriction on apprentice numbers. It can be argued that these numbers were perhaps not very high but, as O'Kelly makes clear, given the high standards expected by the Jesuits, they were

\textsuperscript{53} Edwin James Brady, \textit{Australia unlimited}. Melbourne: Robertson, 1915, p. 553.
\textsuperscript{54} O'Kelly, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{55} O'Kelly, p. 62.
certainly not insignificant. In addition, there were often between three hundred and four hundred other Aboriginals encamped nearby who maintained regular contact with the mission. The number of farming 'settlers' tended to fluctuate for one reason or another and reached a peak of fifteen in 1897.  

8.2.4 'Opus clausum est'
The prevailing belief in official circles had always been that in the long run the mission was bound to fail. It also appears that the closure of the mission had been under consideration by the European headquarters of the Order for some time, and shortly after MacKillop was transferred the end came suddenly. Records show that in 1898, the year prior to its closure, the mission actually produced its first positive cash flow with receipts of £663 13s 14d, as against expenses of £296 8s 3d. Had it been left to the staff on the ground, there is little doubt that it would have continued, but many factors had come together to bring about the decision and the missionaries themselves felt that it had lived on borrowed time for a number of years. In 1895 there is mention of this in the mission Journal:

Though the temporal and spiritual condition of the mission has never been better than at present ... still most of the fathers are despondent because of a telegram recently received which leads us to fear the probable destruction and end of the mission.

It is generally believed that the immediate cause of closure was the 1899 flood. The Journal of the mission fathers, however, only records the floods in a byline, and O'Kelly convincingly demonstrates that the final decision to close the mission was taken even before news of the 1899 flood could possibly have reached Rome. Given the prevailing official auguries and MacKillop's determination to pursue a philosophy of 'socialist' Reductione on the Daly River, its closure was perhaps neither unexpected nor greatly lamented. The closure was perhaps inevitable.

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56 O'Kelly, pp. 57-59.
57 O'Kelly, pp. 61-62.
58 SAPP 77/1899, pp. 110-112. See also SAPP 1885, 1886, 1888.
59 O'Kelly, p. 63, quoting from the Journal 4 June 1895.
60 O'Kelly, pp. 61-64.
The Jesuit Order had ever been controversial since its founding in 1540 as the principal agent of the Counter Reformation. In 1773 it had been disbanded due to pressure from the great eighteenth century colonial powers of Spain and Portugal, who opposed the South American Reducciones. At the turn of the nineteenth century, now restored, the Order had become the largest in the world and had missions all over the globe. The dominant European powers were now Great Britain, France and Germany, who were competing with one another for more and more colonial territory. The Order had only been restored in 1814, and it is not unreasonable to expect that its governing body was sensitive to the possibility of another intervention should it now unintentionally antagonise any current colonial power.

The Order may have felt that it was once more under threat. In France, there was a strong movement towards anti-clericalism and, concurrent with this, it had recently run foul of Britain over the restitution of its former missionary lands in Canada. Strong feeling had been aroused against it amongst the Protestants of Ontario. They argued that a land grant to the Jesuits was a threat to civil and religious liberty. In 1899 though the consequential motion raised in the House of Commons to disallow the restitution was lost, this was the same year in which the directive came to disband the Daly Reduccione and may or may not have been entirely coincidental.

Whatever the rationale for the Jesuits' sudden departure it remains unclear. The Daly River Mission had survived many worse privations than those experienced in the 1899 flood and there is every reason to believe that they achieved a measure of success. Perhaps they were too successful. The missionaries were unwilling to leave, but the orders from their Austrian headquarters were absolute. The last entry in the mission Journal reads, *ita clausum est opus hoc*. In the original Latin this has a poetic ring and seems to encapsulate in its starkness a great deal of frustration and disappointment. The work was indeed over. The Aborigines were dismissed, the stock was sold, the buildings were dismantled and the Jesuit Daly River community was itself dispersed to various locations.

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It had been a brave effort, for even as late 1906 the Government Resident was repeating the frequently expressed opinion of Parsons in the 1890s that there was still an urgent need for legislation to deal with the indigenous population. The Territory administration had paid lip service to a respect and admiration for the Jesuits’ work, but they never appear to have given them any real support. Government records show that varying amounts of £50 to £100 were allocated annually to the Daly River Mission. In the last Mission Report to the Government Resident in 1899, however, the writer states quite baldly that ‘we received, out of £500 voted by the South Australian Parliament for the aborigines of the Northern Territory, £50 and twenty blankets’.62

The verdict of the government on the mission, expressed by the Government Resident in 1899, was recorded in the minutes of a select committee as being ‘certainly praiseworthy’, but so far as he could learn it had not ‘been attended with success’.63 As Mounted Constable RC Thorpe put it to the same committee:

one thing to my mind appears conclusive, i.e., their influence upon the natives as far as their condition is concerned does not extend far beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the mission station.64

Conclusion
The concept embraced by the Jesuit mission was soon forgotten and with its demise little further was done to encourage Aboriginal people within their own communities to survive by learning the ways of a modern society. A later suggestion by the Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria to set up a mission on the Roper was disputed, because the administration still believed missions should only be established near white settlement, ‘where an attempt could be made towards combating the evil effects that civilisation carries with it among aborigines’.65

In the context of their time, with virtually no other attention given by government, or indeed anyone else, to the ‘aboriginal problem’ in the Top End, the achievements of the

63 SAPP 77/1899, p. 112.
64 SAPP 77/1889, p. 112.
Jesuits on the Daly can be considered as being quite remarkable. Modern understanding of the social and environmental implications of 'racial division' is of comparatively recent origin. Concepts of the natural place that the indigenous peoples should have in the nation are just beginning to emerge. Throughout the greater part of white settlement Aboriginals have barely been recognised as human beings, and seldom as equals. William Lines, Tim Flannery and Stephen Pyne, among others, are in the forefront in explaining longer-term perspectives, which only now might begin to minimise 'the Aboriginal-European dichotomy that blocks nearly all Australian studies'. In terms of the early attempts at settlement of the Northern Territory, concepts such as those embraced by MacKillop on the Daly were beyond comprehension.

65 NTGRR 45/1906.
Chapter 9

Pioneers and progress
Chapter 9
Pioneers and progress

Summary
Notwithstanding South Australia's failure to merge effectively with the Northern Territory, there were instances where the civil population was able, if not to prosper, at least to accomplish a great deal. The success of the Chinese was due entirely to their own efforts, despite active measures put in place by government to prevent it, and the pastoral industry, though continuously bedevilled by speculation, was able to establish itself.

Between 1876 and 1895, a period of twenty years, the recorded non-Aboriginal population in the Territory averaged only 4,729. From a low of 640 Europeans and 170 Chinese in 1877 it had risen to 4,354 by 1896. The highest number recorded overall was 7,266 in 1888, but for only five of the years between 1876 and 1896 had Europeans exceeded 1,000 persons. Throughout this twenty-year period, the ratio of Chinese to Europeans had averaged around 4:1, and, if the figures below are to be believed, in two of those years there had been as many as six Chinese for every European (Table 15).

After the 1895 Royal Commission, the European population remained fairly stable at first, but then numbers declined to reach a low of 2,569 in 1910. This was only marginally higher than the total non-Aboriginal population in 1877. Eventually the proportion of Europeans to Chinese grew closer to parity, but even so when the Federal Government took over in 1910, Chinese still marginally outnumbered Europeans.

The Resident's Report of 1894 sheds some light on a way of life. Custom duties on imports collected at Port Darwin show that the Chinese population paid import duty of £13,372, of which £8,636 was for opium and £3,247 for alcohol. Total import duties, levied separately at lower rates against a smaller European population, was £8,568, of which more than half, at £4,386, was for alcohol. Very few of these Europeans were engaged in mining and agriculture and there was little alternative employment so that

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Table 15

Indicative figures for Non-Aboriginal Population
Northern Territory, 1876 to 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Chinese/Europeans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>no record</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>1.3 : 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>1 830</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>3 230</td>
<td>2 770</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>6 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>5 071</td>
<td>4 358</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>6.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>3 404</td>
<td>2 734</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>3 570</td>
<td>2 921</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>4.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>3 455</td>
<td>2 839</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>4.6 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>3 213</td>
<td>2 637</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>4.6 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>3 383</td>
<td>2 586</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>3.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>4 203</td>
<td>3 237</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>3.4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>6 847</td>
<td>5 837</td>
<td>1 010</td>
<td>5.8 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>7 266</td>
<td>6 122</td>
<td>1 144</td>
<td>5.4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>5 502</td>
<td>4 432</td>
<td>1 070</td>
<td>4.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>5 366</td>
<td>4 141</td>
<td>1 009</td>
<td>4.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>4 802</td>
<td>3 658</td>
<td>1 144</td>
<td>3.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>4 647</td>
<td>3 714</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>4 626</td>
<td>3 661</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>3.8 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>4 457</td>
<td>3 566</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>4 323</td>
<td>3 443</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>3.9 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>4 354</td>
<td>3 396</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>3.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>4 343</td>
<td>3 359</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>3.4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>4 321</td>
<td>3 298</td>
<td>1 023</td>
<td>3.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>4 247</td>
<td>3 204</td>
<td>1 043</td>
<td>3 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3 931</td>
<td>2 928</td>
<td>1 003</td>
<td>2.9 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>3 745</td>
<td>2 690</td>
<td>1 055</td>
<td>2.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>3 554</td>
<td>2 516</td>
<td>1 038</td>
<td>2.4 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>3 307</td>
<td>2 254</td>
<td>1 053</td>
<td>2.1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>3 249</td>
<td>2 143</td>
<td>1 106</td>
<td>1.9 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>3 106</td>
<td>1 983</td>
<td>1 123</td>
<td>1.7 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>2 953</td>
<td>1 878</td>
<td>1 075</td>
<td>1.7 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>2 943</td>
<td>1 833</td>
<td>1 110</td>
<td>1.6 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>2 710</td>
<td>1 629</td>
<td>1 081</td>
<td>1.5 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>2 759</td>
<td>1 485</td>
<td>1 274</td>
<td>1.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>2 569</td>
<td>1 387</td>
<td>1 182</td>
<td>1.2 : 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived and sourced: Donovan pp.172-173 from various Northern Territory incoming correspondence; Governor's Dispatch and Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, 66/1911. Note that these figures may be understood as being, at best, indicative.
many were indigents.\textsuperscript{2} The major proportion of Europeans in any employment other than pastoralism may be presumed to have been public servants, who were in any case rotated regularly

9.1 Pioneering Chinese

The 'Anglo Saxon race' had not been much to the fore in either crop farming or mining, and it is apparent that it was only the much-maligned Chinese who were desperate enough to persevere in those pursuits. But for their presence the colony might have collapsed altogether (Table 16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>2,055</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>32:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>2,143</td>
<td>2,032</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>18:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>1,678</td>
<td>1,187</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>10:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>1,563</td>
<td>1,456</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>14:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>1,486</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>20:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>22:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>13:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>7:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1,238</td>
<td>1,077</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>8:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Derived and sourced}: Donovan p. 197, from CPP 66/1911, p. 35.

The ubiquitous Chinese were at first generally accepted. Their numbers alone ensured that it was they who were able to contribute amenities, not only by their labour alone, but also with their shops, the produce of their gardens and the fish caught for local consumption. Income from their exports of dried fish to the Far East provided one of the

\textsuperscript{2} NTGRR 14/3/1894..
few regular receipts for perennially depleted government coffers. Chinese immigrants came from an essentially rural economy and, said JD Vaughan in 1879, were able to turn their hands to everything:

they are actors, acrobats, artists, musicians, chemists and druggists, clerks, cashiers, engineers, architects, surveyors, missionaries, priests, doctors, schoolmasters, lodging house keepers, butchers, porksellers, cultivators of pepper and gambier, cakesellers, cart and hackney carriage owners, cloth hawkers, distillers of spirits, eating-house keepers, fishmongers, fruitsellers, ferrymen, grass-sellers, hawkers, merchants and agents, oilsellers, opium shopkeepers, servants, timber dealers, tobacconists, vegetable sellers, planters, market-gardeners, labourers, bakers, millers, barbers, blacksmiths, boatmen, book binders, boot and shoemakers, brickmasters, carpenters, cabinet makers, carriage builders, cartwrights, cart and hackney drivers, charcol burners and sellers, cooinmakers, confectioners, contractors and builders, cooperers, engine-drivers, and firemen, fishermen, goldsmiths, gunsmiths and locksmiths, limeburners, masons, and bricklayers, mat, kajang and basket makers, oil manufacturers, and miners ... we may add ... [many others] ... sawyers, seamen, ship and boat builders ... , wood cutters ... and fortune tellers, grocers, beggers, idle vagabonds or samsengs, and thieves.

Despite strong complaints against the contractors building the Darwin to Pine Creek Railway for favouring Chinese over ‘whitemen’, nonetheless, most of the 3 000 men ultimately employed on the construction were Chinese, and their ability, whether digging cuttings, building embankments or indeed doing any allotted task, was impressive. The construction supervising engineer for the railway noted that:

a Chinaman averaged nearly one cubic foot of earth each trip ... he moved over the ground much faster than a horse ... the contractors employed Chinese to move loaded wagons up to nine and a half tons from the jetty to the stacking yard ... five Chinamen could do the work of one horse and they were more efficient than horses in soft ground.

9.1.1 Chinese and mining
It was argued that the greatest amount of gold produced in the mining districts had often come from Chinese working on their own behalf. This was not always accepted at the time, but the figures speak for themselves. While the ratio of Chinese to European miners varied over the years it always remained high until the turn of the century, when the White Australia Policy began to take effect. After that their numbers dropped considerably, but even on the eve of Commonwealth administration in 1910, Chinese miners still comprised 75 per cent of the mining workforce and it is evident that they had retained their distinct dominance.

It has often been said, or implied, that the greater amount of gold produced by the Chinese was from alluvial diggings or of a peripheral nature, confined mainly to picking over old tailings and workings that had been abandoned as unprofitable by European miners. There is, however, much evidence to the contrary. In 1905 Timothy Jones' *The Chinese in the Northern Territory* made a detailed study of the methods employed by Chinese miners in the Territory. It is evident from this that their ability to exploit mineral deposits, not exclusively gold, was limited neither by their lack of heavy machinery nor by their inability to extract ore from difficult rock or from underground.

They were innovative. When working for prolonged periods in the open, they fabricated shade cloth from paperbark and anthills were used as waterproof magazines to store explosives. Using bush materials, they constructed windlasses to extract ore from below ground, and 'rails' were made from bamboo, jointed and stayed, to guide the buckets. Where changes of inclination or direction were necessary, they made turning pivots from small horizontal wooden rods.

Various contrivances were utilized to crush the ore. Adaptations of 'the ancient Rice Dolly' gave enough mechanical advantage to enable a hand operator to produce sufficient force to crush rock. They also used 'Hand Stampers' for this, and for working in the rock bedding they fabricated their own specialised rock-breaking hammers. The ore itself was screened by hand-operated table 'riddles'. Forges they built from wood and anthill clay,

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6 SAPP 19/1895, p. 34, qq. 727, 728, 729, 731.
with handmade bellows made from galvanised iron, beaten and shaped into a cylindrical drum, \textquoteleft closed at both ends, with a board, in which the valves were situated and only opened inwards\textquoteright, to produce a forced draught. Sluice boxes were constructed on the universal pattern but the Chinese were adept at using hydraulic principles on these and other contrivances. To pump water from lower levels they made pistons and valves from leather, \textquoteleft the action on the down and up stroke being similar to the closing and opening of an umbrella\textquoteright.\textsuperscript{8} There seemed to be no problem that was too great for Chinese energy and ingenuity.

\subsection*{9.1.2 Chinese and farming}
From an early stage many Chinese had tried to purchase land, but little beyond lip service was ever given to make this possible. Sowden presents an indicative insight into their relationship with officialdom. In 1882 Chinese businessmen gave a banquet for the visiting Minister for the Northern Territory, the Hon. JL Parsons. In his speech of welcome and their spokesman addressed the minister thus:

\begin{quote}
\textquoteleft though in some colonies our countrymen have been abused by the lower classes ... people have treated us with that generosity which is extended to other nationalities ... your parliament in its wisdom decided not to restrict the immigration of our race to this portion of Australia.\textsuperscript{9}\right]
\end{quote}

He then eloquently requested the minister to permit his countrymen to purchase land:

\begin{quote}
It has frequently been urged that we are a migratory race, but hitherto no inducement has been held out for us to settle in this country. Had there been, many of us, would have been cultivators of the soil instead of being mere labourers ... If grants of 50 to 500 acres could be made to us on easy terms of purchase, cultivation of tropical products would be entered into, which would prove of great benefit to the entire community.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item SAPP 19/1895.
\item Jones, pp.134-140, Appendix C.
\item WJ Sowden. \textit{The Northern Territory as it is}. WK Thomas & Co., Adelaide, 1882, p. 79. Speech to the Honourable Minister, Parsons, Minister for Education and for the Northern Territory, at a banquet given in his honour by the Chinese residents of Palmerston in 1882.
\item Sowden, p.79.
\end{footnotes}
The Honourable Minister answered with equivocation and at length. He told his hosts that land purchase 'was as open to the Chinese as to any one else' but, as one of his entourage explained, 'under the cultivation clauses of the Act', they must first become 'British subjects'.\footnote{Sowden, p.79.} What was left unsaid, and understood by both, was that the Chinese would find great difficulty in being granted citizenship. This effectively negated their request and any further attempt on their part to buy land.

Numerous reports have attested to their contribution and ability as farmers in the Territory. Even today Chinese farming systems can be impressive. I was able to see this for myself whilst on a World Bank assignment in Tanzania during the 1970s. At that time the Chinese were engaged in constructing a railway from Zambia to the coast at Dar es Salaam. They had isolated work camps, many of which were set up in areas where even Africans, with their efficient methods of subsistence farming, were unable to eke out a living. Wherever situated they contrived means to furnish themselves with fresh vegetables in abundance, no matter how poor the soil. Their cultivations were always highly intensive, and all the more impressive because, regardless of season, they seemed able to harvest their crops within weeks of arrival.

It was only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that scientific farming became a fashionable pursuit in European culture but as Gavin Menzies has it, by then:

\begin{quote}
The Chinese had millenia of experience and expertise in every sphere of human activity. By 305 BC conservation of land and rotation of crops had been the subject of letters to the Emperor.\footnote{Gavin Menzies. \textit{The year China discovered the world.} London: Bantam Press, 2002, p.393. This book may be regarded as a suspect source, however in this instance there is some substance to Menzies' comment.}
\end{quote}

An American soil scientist, FH King, writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, was among the first westerners to study Chinese farming methods\footnote{FH King. \textit{Farmers of Forty Centuries: Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan.} Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, Inc., Book Division, 1911. King was a well-known soil scientist. As Professor of Agricultural Physics at the University of Wisconsin and Chief of Division of Soil Management for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, he wrote many books on the complex subject of soil and soil chemistry which are still relevant today.} King scientifically
examined the methods by which the Chinese were able to achieve much higher levels of agricultural productivity per acre than was generally experienced in the west, and at the same time to maintain and even improve soil fertility. His findings were arrived at empirically and not only from direct observation, and using comparative analysis with the substantial amount of research data available from both the United States and Britain.\(^\text{14}\)

King believed that 'the first lesson in the conservation of natural resources' was to be found in 'the resources of the land'. He held that America had much to learn from the Chinese.\(^\text{15}\) He advocated that higher educational institutions in the west should send their best students to work in concert with those of China, Japan and Korea to study 'specifically set problems',\(^\text{16}\) incorporating the agricultural science of both East and West, so that they might be:

```
i instructed in the ways and extent to which these nations for centuries have been and are conserving and utilizing their natural resources, surprised at the magnitude of the returns they are getting from their fields.\(^\text{17}\)
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He cited Dr Arthur Stanley, Health Officer of Shanghai, as having noted in his annual report for 1899 how much intelligence and skill was used by these old-world 'farmers in the use of their wastes'. King was convinced that there was much to be admired in waste disposal methods that were the product of an evolution extending from more than a thousand years before the Christian era.\(^\text{18}\)

When properly treated and composted before being incorporated into the soil, pathogens present in 'night soil' are rendered inactive, and while it was still readily available, this

\(^{14}\) King, pp. 193-198.
\(^{15}\) King, p. iv, from the Preface by LH Bailey.
\(^{16}\) King, p. 5.
\(^{17}\) King, p. 2.
\(^{18}\) King, pp. 198-199 - quoted from Dr Stanley, Health Officer, Annual Report of 1899, Shanghai.
material continued to be used as manure to fertilise European fields (Figure 4) well into the 1930s. 19

Figure 4
European methods of spreading Liquid Manure (Night Soil mixed with water)

He developed a great admiration for the 'labors of the strong, patient, persevering, thoughtful but ever silent husbandmen in their efforts to acquire homes and to maintain the productive power of their fields'. He noted that the Chinese peasant used rotations, leguminous crops and many of the techniques that were common in the west. 20 But what


20 King, p. 10.
impressed him most was the 'forethought, after-thought and the mind focused on the work in hand' which he found to be a 'characteristic of these people.'  

He added that:

The wastes of the body, of fuel and of fabric worn beyond other use are taken back to the field; before doing so they are housed against waste from weather, compounded with intelligence and forethought and patiently labored with through one, three or even six months, to bring them into the most efficient form to serve as manure for the soil or as feed for the crop.

King found that the Chinese were skilled farmers who had imbibed husbandry with their mothers' milk, and that they were assiduous in the care which they exercised in the daily round of farming practice:

The difference is not so much in activity of muscle as it is in alertness and efficiency of the grey matter of the brain. He sees and treats each plant individually, he loosens the ground so that his liquid manure drops immediately beneath the surface within reach of the active roots. If the rainfall has been scanty and the soil is dry he may use ten of water to two of night soil, not to supply water but to make certain sufficiently deep penetration. If the weather is rainy and the soil over wet, the food is applied more concentrated, not to lighten the burden but to avoid waste by leaching and over saturation.

9.1.3 A contagious debate
Grudging acceptance soon gave way to prejudice, and official petty, and not so petty, restrictions made life difficult for the Chinese in the Territory. As time passed, their dominance in the economy became increasingly something to resent and fear. In 1891 the then Minister for the Northern Territory reported from his own observations that they were in control of almost every aspect of it:

There are certainly a few European stores, a butcher and a baker, but the tailors, bootmakers, carpenters, jewellers, gardeners, clothes washers, house servants and other occupations are monopolised by Chinese. It is an inevitable result that where the Chinese are numerous Europeans cannot live; the reason being that owing to their secret societies and trade

\[21\] King, p. 205.
\[22\] King, p. 13.
\[23\] King, pp. 204-205.
guilds they are able to control the market. They had two prices for
everything, labour included - one, the higher, for Europeans; the other for
their own countrymen. The coolie labourer is compelled to work for a
countryman at a considerably lower rate than for a European, while on
the other hand the craftsman and trader will sell him their wares at a
lower price than a European customer. 24

An inter-colonial conference on the Chinese question was held in Sydney in 1888 under
the chairmanship of Sir Henry Parkes, and the result was the Chinese Restriction
Immigration Act. 25 Debate prior to its promulgation in the South Australian Parliament
was lively; few speakers recognised that a small Chinese population was essential to any
further development in the Territory and believed that the principal opposition to their
presence came only from 'a few storekeepers'. 26 Playford also said that:

In the Northern Territory the agitation was started by the very men who
had at first welcomed the Chinese, the storekeepers. They had heard a
good deal about a Mr. Solomon but he remembered that when the late
Mr. King was Minister for Education in 1880 he quoted that very Mr.
Solomon as in favour of allowing the Chinese to enter the Territory but
since then the Chinese had entered into competition with the merchants
and storekeepers and they thought differently. 27

One Member of Parliament went so far as to say that:

it is quite evident that if the Chinese are to be excluded the sooner the
Northern Territory is restored to natives and alligators the less money
will be lost and less valuable enterprise wasted. 28

Almost in an aside, it was mentioned in the debate that already 102 Chinese people had
been granted naturalisation in the Territory. The effect of this was that South Australia
granted no more naturalisation certificates. 29

24 SAPP, 178/1891.
   Hereinafter SAPD, thus SAPD June/July 1888.
26 SAPD Oct/Nov 1888, pp. 1303-9, 133-38, 134, 1365.
29 Jones, p. 59.
Anti-Chinese feeling was strong and seldom subtle. A later observer, Mrs Litchfield, tells us that, regardless of individual 'respectability,' all Chinese were denied the use of the public hospital,\textsuperscript{30} and had to raise funds from within their community to build their own in 1888 to look after their sick and destitute.\textsuperscript{31} Sometimes public hypocrisy associated with prejudice can be mind-boggling.

Early in 1889, a letter in the \textit{Northern Territory Times and Gazette} referred to an indigent 'white woman' who had at one time been the well-thought-of nursemaid to a 'respectable public servant'. When the family left the Territory she had remained to get married. But now she was 'wretchedly forlorn and ill' and 'living in a humpy in Cavanagh Street, dependent for her food on the charity of the Chinese'. The subsequent distaste of the respectable 'white citizens' of Darwin prompted an immediate response. Thanks to their 'charity' she was given an 'assisted passage' to Melbourne, and provided with £2 to £3 remaining from the public donation collected so that she will not wholly be without means'.\textsuperscript{32} One may wonder whether she might have been better off as a dependant of 'the detested Mongolian' than to be left to tender mercy on the cold streets of Melbourne.

It must be said, however, that whatever the antagonism encountered, the Chinese tended to be regarded more favourably in the Territory, and for much longer, than in other parts of the country. Mixed with the prejudice there is ample evidence that often they were genuinely liked and respected.\textsuperscript{33} Another letter in the press notes that the Chinese were hardworking and decent. One man, who described himself as knowing 'something of the hard side of Territory life', said that he had worked with them, had learnt something of their language and had grown to respect them. His conclusion was telling. In his opinion:

\textsuperscript{30} J Litchfield. \textit{Far North Memories}. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1930.
\textsuperscript{31} NTTG 28/4/1888.
\textsuperscript{32} NTTG 16/2/1889, 23/2/1889.
\textsuperscript{33} NTTG 12/2/1887, 30/4/1887, 28/5/1887.
if every whiteman in Palmerston was as financially sound as the average railway coolie, there would be fewer summonses and writs flying round this fair city of the north.  

A miner who had also worked with the Chinese headed his letter, 'Against anti-Chinese tyranny'. He related how the Chinese gardener who had hitherto supplied him and his workmates with fresh vegetables could no longer do so because he had been refused a renewal of his garden licence by the government on the grounds that no more garden licences were being granted. His letter signed off with:

It is bad enough that the Government should amuse itself by botching our mining laws etc but it now becomes a serious matter when they now interfere with our food supply.  

Other white residents expressed their concern at the growing agitation against the Chinese throughout the rest of Australia. One said that favourable prospects in the Territory were being 'wrecked through this unreasoning agitation' and that good mining ventures were stillborn because of the outcry. He deplored that honest Chinese were described in the press as 'the detested Mongolian' or 'obnoxious cheap labour' and he was scathing in his denunciation of the 'twaddle that appears in print about the voice of Australia' and of the cry 'Australia for the Australians'.

In counterpoint, the outcry against them was just as vociferous. In its editorial of 12 January 1889, the Northern Territory Times and Gazette declaimed, 'We don't want to have any more [Chinese] in the Northern Territory' and later followed up this theme, oblivious of any irony, with the clarion cry:

The land is our heritage, and our children's, and the settlers who are worthy of the name of White Men, should let our legislators know, in the 

34 NTTG 18/8/1888.
35 NTTG 2/2/1889.
36 NTTG 12/1/1889.
37 NTTG 12/1/1889.
plainest terms, that they object to any yellow skinned interloper owning a single acre of it.\textsuperscript{38}

By May 1889, the vitriol was in full flood with the paper calling for the formation of an 'Anti-Chinese League'.\textsuperscript{39} A fortnight later it followed with 'AN URGENT WARNING' (sic) of the violence to come from the 'thousands' of Chinese who would soon be paid off on the completion of the railway. So dire was the threat, said the editor, he 'urgently' pressed the government to avoid the calamity by continuing the line to Katherine.\textsuperscript{40} In the event, the 'thousands' did not know what was expected of them for no violence occurred, but from this time and for the next twenty years there are fairly frequent reports of severe destitution, and even death from privation, amongst Chinese.

Against all odds, however, they often earned grudging respect, even the Northern Territory Times and Gazette could seldom damn them absolutely. In 1890 the mining warden at Borroloola reported that even in that distant spot 'four occupation blocks' had been 'thoroughly planted' by Chinese and were 'flourishing', so that everyone at Borroloola was 'well supplied with all kinds of vegetables'. His one regret was that because there was no other outlet for their produce the horses were the only beneficiaries of the surplus carrots.\textsuperscript{41} At Burrundie, Chinese 'gardeners' also sold good crops of rice and maize at 'substantial profit.'\textsuperscript{42} The Premier of South Australia, Playford, could not but comment favourably on their agricultural efforts on the Daly.\textsuperscript{43}

Newspaper comment, even when favourable, included the pejorative remark whenever possible. In 1892 Chinese shopkeepers, entirely on their own initiative, had planted trees along Cavanagh Street. The paper was unable to praise their civic enterprise outright and fell back on humour - after all, the 'orientals' and their funny ways were always good for a laugh:

\textsuperscript{38} NTTG 30/3/1889.
\textsuperscript{39} NTTG 11/5/1889.
\textsuperscript{40} NTTG 25/5/1889.
\textsuperscript{41} NTTG 3/11/1890.
\textsuperscript{42} NTTG 28/3/1890.
\textsuperscript{43} NTTG 22/4/1892.
In the course of twenty or thirty years we might find Sun Mow Loong or Hang Gong or some other representative of the celestial people obliged to climb into the front of their shop through the branches of a Banyan. 44

But the ever honest Dashwood, throughout his long tenure of office as Resident was never able to say more on agriculture than 'nothing has been done worthy of being recorded here': 45 Nonetheless, he always included a good word for Chinese enterprise, sometimes even hinting that they might be given some proper form of tenure - 'Chinese have continued to cultivate successfully but have been discouraged from acquiring blocks of land to cultivate rice, sugar and other product': 46 Or again:

I regret to say that I cannot report any progress in this industry, but I was shown a first-rate sample of rice grown by Chinese on a block about fifteen miles from Palmerston. 47

To Dashwood, their enterprise was always recognised correctly as being intrinsic to the Territory's economy. Even Parsons, who as often as not had tended to run with the hare and play with the hounds, said that:

1. A limited number of Chinese are useful in the Northern Territory.
2. They are usually law-abiding, except in respect of thieving, gambling and perjury.
3. They make excellent gardeners, and supply vegetables and fruit to the European population
4. There is a merchant and storekeeping class of undoubted probity.
5. The better class of coolies make good cooks, house servants and dobies [washermen], and the lower class are handy drudges.
6. Contractors and employers of labour find the ordinary coolie a plodding workman, accepting from three shillings to three shillings and sixpence per day. He is self-reliant and his food is supplied by Chinese storekeepers. There is no trouble about caste.
7. The artizans are fairly skilful and good Copyists. 48

44 NTTG 22/1/1892.
45 NTGRR 1893.
46 NTGRR 1893.
47 NTGRR 14/3/1894.
48 Jones, p. 52, quoting from SAPP 63/1888.
Publicly, Parsons could treat the issue with unctuous probity but often he acted differently, and in this he was not alone. In 1888 some Chinese were reported to be travelling overland to the McArthur River. Parsons telegraphed the news to Adelaide, and his minister advised by return, 'Do not let the impression get abroad that Chinese are coming South or [going to] Queensland.' Parsons wired immediately for clarification, and the minister, presumably less perturbed by immediate political implications, replied, 'Let 'em alone the natives will have attended to them.' In 1895, when asked whether he thought more Chinese immigration would help settlement of the Northern Territory, he replied with absolute certainty, 'Not in the least'. His rationalisation might seem neither relevant nor logical to modern ears, but it resonated with the white man's perceived role for himself in the age of Empire:

The agricultural problem is not to be solved by Chinese labor at all. I do not know much about the agricultural Chinese as opposed from the average Chinese. The average Chinaman is an independent man and will quit anyone's service to be his own master.

9.1.4 The outcome of prejudice
The decline of the Chinese market garden in the Territory was not only the result of land legislation, which had been specifically enabled with the purpose of preventing them from acquiring land, it was the health regulations which ultimately proved a much more effective restraint on their activity.

The issue of hygiene was but one of a long list of complaints that fed the growing opposition to the presence of the Chinese. As early as 1881 the Northern Territory Times and Gazette had indignantly protested against the Chinese practice of carrying night soil.

49 Jones, p. 55, quoting "Correspondence Received: Minister for the Northern Territory, No. 484." In South Australian Archives, 1888. Hereinafter GRS1, thus GRS1 484/1888.
50 Jones, p. 55, quoting GRS1 505/1888.
51 SAPP 19/1895, p.71, q. 1355.
in open tubs and buckets to their gardens through the early morning streets of Darwin, and demanded that it be stopped.\footnote{NTTG, 15/1/1881.}

In 1887 an outbreak of smallpox and the fear of leprosy and cholera contracted from contact with Chinese migrants were justification enough for measures to be taken, and required legislation was enacted which made the health regulations at Port Darwin subject to the South Australian Public Health Act.\footnote{SAPP, 54/1885, 63/1888; GRS 1 676/1889, GRS 1 723/1887 and GRS 1 407/1888.} Finally, in 1898 the use of night soil was regulated against by the Ordinance upon which the later South Australian Public Health Act of 1952 is now based.\footnote{Ian Bidmeade and Chris Reynolds, "Public Health Law in Australia: its current state and future directions": Commonwealth of Australia, 1997. See also "Public Health Law in Australia: New Perspectives": Australian Institute of Health Law and Ethics: Commonwealth of Australia, 1998; and "Review of the Public Health Act: Discussion Paper", 2000.} Throughout the rest of Australia no legislation has been enacted specifically to prevent the use of night soil as fertilizer. The clauses regulating its use in the South Australian legislation of 1898 had more to do with removing a public nuisance, which in the opinion of 'any six householders' in the district was deemed offensive, than with the specifics of a proven health risk.\footnote{South Australian Public Health Act, 1898, Pt V11, Div 1, s 76 (v, vii, ix), s 83 (iii), s 84 (ii, iii), s 87. In Northern Territory State Library, Darwin.} Effectively it spelt the end of the Chinese gardens, and consequently the supply of fresh vegetables for Darwin gradually became more difficult to obtain. In the end the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 effectively put paid to any further discussion.

\subsection*{9.2 Pastoralism and other industry}

The value of Territory exports may be regarded as being indicative (Table 17). These official figures, show that pastoralism had established itself as a credible industry. Export values of cattle alone clearly demonstrate that its production equaled the value of the two other principal industries, mining and pearl shell fishing, combined. Indeed, when export values of horns, hides and wool are included, the pastoral sector's total output exceeded that of the other two by a considerable amount.\footnote{NTGRR 45/1903.}
Table 17
Export values: industries for Northern Territory 1895 to 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cattle sales</th>
<th>Pearl Shell</th>
<th>Mining Metals &amp; Ores</th>
<th>All Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>£26,900</td>
<td>£18,362</td>
<td>£82,960</td>
<td>£17,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>£23,211</td>
<td>£15,666</td>
<td>£81,137</td>
<td>£17,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>£42,551</td>
<td>£18,563</td>
<td>£85,244</td>
<td>£31,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>£40,826</td>
<td>£29,509</td>
<td>£63,745</td>
<td>£21,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>£39,277</td>
<td>£22,674</td>
<td>£83,233</td>
<td>£14,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>£170,241</td>
<td>£17,168</td>
<td>£90,584 *(£77,409)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>£72,801</td>
<td>£20,497</td>
<td>£78,123</td>
<td>£17,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>£63,901</td>
<td>£28,391</td>
<td>£72,362</td>
<td>£10,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>£110,951</td>
<td>£18,526</td>
<td>£81,432</td>
<td>£22,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>£107,877</td>
<td>£14,352</td>
<td>£73,440</td>
<td>£17,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>£100,000</td>
<td>£7,835</td>
<td>£105,654</td>
<td>£37,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>£206,460</td>
<td>£8,805</td>
<td>£102,577</td>
<td>£22,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>£142,998</td>
<td>£7,578</td>
<td>£64,332</td>
<td>£21,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>£121,172</td>
<td>£10,085</td>
<td>£62,695</td>
<td>£78,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>£161,605</td>
<td>£10,030</td>
<td>£64,249</td>
<td>£29,363</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals** | **£1,430,771** | **£248,041** | **£1,190,767** | **£360,324**

**Average Annually**

- **£95,385**
- **£16,536**
- **£79,451** **£25,737**

**As % of Exports**

- 44%
- 7%
- 37%
- 12%

*(£77,409) is an irreconcilable figure and has been eliminated from the average

**Excludes £3,645 per annum for hides and horns from buffalo shooting, but includes a marginal though unquantified figure for wool.

Derived and sourced: "Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, No. 66." In National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 1911. CPP, 66 (1911 Appendix D).

9.2.1 Pastoralism
New legislation for the pastoral industry was introduced in 1896 to permit mining concessions on pastoral leases. This resulted in more land being taken up in the following years, but these 'liberal mineral concessions' only encouraged further speculation in land, and as Resident Dashwood reported in 1901:
The immense area of land held under lease and the small proportion which has been stocked - a state of things which has continued year after year for a considerable time past - is very disappointing, and points to the conclusion that in many cases those applying for the country had no intention of complying with the regulations in this respect, but acquired and held the land simply for speculative purposes. In this connection I would draw attention to the fact that blocks of country, aggregating 139,110 square miles, were taken up by two syndicates nearly two years ago, and I believe I am correct in saying that no attempt whatever has been made to stock them. 57

Independent of speculation, however, pastoralism gradually developed. The records show that 10 577 cattle were exported to the neighbouring colonies of Queensland and South Australia in 1898 while 165 were sold to Singapore. 58

Soon the Resident was able to say, with some satisfaction, that the speculation seemed to have ceased and the land was now being occupied 'for stocking and settlement'. 59 There was some rumour current that Melbourne businessmen might soon establish a meatworks on the Victoria River and:

The Eastern and African Cold Storage Supply Company have purchased the Elsey, Hodgson Downs, and Woolorang herds, with the view of stocking the country they hold on the Goyder and Glyde rivers .... The company has established the station in the same locality [as Auvergne Station] ... Mr J. Bradshaw, informs me they are doing remarkably well. 60

As cattle sales improved, established stations began selling to newcomers so that the impetus continued after 1900, and some stations generated sufficient cash flow to enable them to sink bores, set up windmills and generally improve internal infrastructure. McLaren lists five stations, Rocklands, Avon Downs, Alexandria, Brunette and Alroy, that by 1908 had sunk 37 bores and wells, of which 25 were equipped with steam engines and pumps, supplying troughs with self-regulating valves from 'above ground earthen tanks' or Turkey Nests, each holding up to 400 000 gallons (1 818 kl). The rate of

57 NTGRR 20/5/1901.
58 NTGRR 45/1896, NTGRR 45/1897 and NTGRR 28/4/1899.
59 NTGRR 20/5/1901.
60 NTGRR 20/5/1901.
improvement to stock waters was stalled only because of the shortage of contractors and drilling plant. 61

Table 18

Indicative figures: NT pastoral industry 1880-1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Leases (sq. miles)</th>
<th>Declared stocked (sq. miles)</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>#Sheep</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>##Rent Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>109 987</td>
<td>16 900</td>
<td>8 000</td>
<td>1 400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>270 024</td>
<td>183 883</td>
<td>163 670</td>
<td>56 500</td>
<td>7 060</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>251 680</td>
<td>200 864</td>
<td>218 874</td>
<td>107 078</td>
<td>8 598</td>
<td>£26 371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>141 999</td>
<td>80 048</td>
<td>196 880</td>
<td>53 500</td>
<td>6 000</td>
<td>£9 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>111 000</td>
<td>61 000</td>
<td>196 000</td>
<td>60 000</td>
<td>6 000</td>
<td>£8 066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>140 563</td>
<td>28 000</td>
<td>235 000</td>
<td>28 000</td>
<td>8 000</td>
<td>£7 595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>168 549</td>
<td>28 820</td>
<td>185 000</td>
<td>***300</td>
<td>7 500</td>
<td>£81 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>147 473</td>
<td>111 997</td>
<td>316 970</td>
<td>61 538</td>
<td>16 763</td>
<td>£7 945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>139 949</td>
<td>112 729</td>
<td>346 910</td>
<td>61 730</td>
<td>20 231</td>
<td>£7 088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>138 769</td>
<td>112 729</td>
<td>354 371</td>
<td>36 276</td>
<td>17 814</td>
<td>£81 714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>135 822</td>
<td>111 182</td>
<td>374 683</td>
<td>44 232</td>
<td>17 893</td>
<td>£7 532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>129 628</td>
<td>123 854</td>
<td>407 992</td>
<td>54 048</td>
<td>21 751</td>
<td>£8 330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>108 244</td>
<td>141 046</td>
<td>43 393</td>
<td>23 479</td>
<td></td>
<td>£8 895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Official figures for land leased do not differentiate between land that was held under lease and that held only under application.
** Leased 'under permit' after the Land Act of 1902, which permitted no leases on all new land taken up. These were held under Annual Permit only.
*** There is no explanation for the sudden drop (if accurate) in recorded sheep numbers in this year.
# According to the Government Resident's Report for that year, Goldsborough Mort & Co. was the first to introduce sheep in 1891 to the Top End on Victoria Downs. Even in the late 1930s sheep were considered by some to be a possibility below the 20th parallel. However, it is true to say that sheep were never a proper consideration for the Territory pastoralist.
## Rentals received show marked fluctuations over the years. This presumably is a reflection on the wide fluctuations in income received from sale of offtake. There was also some variation in rentals charged by government at different times. These figures may reasonably be taken to indicate the precarious nature of the industry.

Sourced and derived: Northern Territory Government Reports for the relevant years.

Many in Australia and the Empire now felt that with the growth of the cattle industry the Territory would eventually flourish. If asked, they may have agreed wholeheartedly that: 'the manhood of Australia has not decayed; the same bold enterprising spirit that marked the old pioneer will be found in the younger generation.\textsuperscript{62}

9.2.2 The contrast within the farming sector

The same could not be said of arable farming. In 1904 Dashwood reported cattle sales continuing steadily with 35,160 being sold in the previous year and gave some further indication as to the likely establishment of a Territory meatworks. Nonetheless, as far as cropping was concerned, he could report 'no progress', other than to say that the Chinese gardens only increased in numbers and continued to 'thrive'.\textsuperscript{63} Though pastoralism and arable farming are intrinsically part of the same agricultural industry yet commercial arable farming, the presumptive engine of settlement, remained virtually non-existent.

In crop farming, the Chinese were not wanted. Popular politics and administrative shortsightedness had ensured that no skilled European farm worker, or farmer with capital, had been encouraged to risk being engaged in any agricultural pursuit other than stock farming. The Chinese came from what was still essentially a rural economy. The agricultural knowledge retained throughout their culture had not yet been disrupted by the urbanization, social change and the specialisation required by an industrialized society. This had affected and altered proficiencies that hitherto had been the common heritage of Europe. When contrasted with Europeans, it was not that the Chinese were supermen, but that the greater proportion of them retained a wider range of skills than the general run of unskilled industrial labourer, who found himself rootless and isolated in the Top End of North Australia. The Chinese thus remain among the few credible exemplars of what might be achieved in the cultivation of Territory soils.

Generally, in the colonial context of the time the mix of land, labour and capital made pastoralism inevitable. The pastoralist who first settled on inferior land, with little or no fixed capital improvement, had the option of moving to better country, but the farmer,

\textsuperscript{62} SAPP 19/1895, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{63} NTGRR 45/1904.
having invested in clearing and in fixed improvements, was tied to location for good or ill. The relationship between stock farming and crop farming may at times be close. Under favourable circumstances of soil, climate and markets, the farmer may combine crop and animal husbandry in mixed farming. The conditions that govern the capital involved in each enterprise, however, are essentially quite different.

The pastoralist's capital is largely tied up in his stock, and the herd once established, all things being equal, can be maintained, replenished and augmented from natural increase. Particularly during the pioneering stage, infrastructure and maintenance requirements are relatively low. In the longer term, the need of a constant and positive cash flow is minimised for the pastoralist and his capital is much more secure. On an annual basis the stockbreeder does not require large amounts of working capital.

The arable farmer, on the other hand, must be able to command adequate funds annually from profits or by borrowing. Without adequate inputs of annual capital he is unable to plant his crop or maintain his holding's productive capacity. Consequently, the farmer whose survival is solely dependent upon cropping cannot sustain prolonged adversity, and finds himself under constant pressure to create and maintain markets for his product. The unknowns that beset both farmer and stockman - the vagaries of weather, disease and markets - are less critical to the pastoralist whose productive capacity is much more easily maintained and enhanced by the inherent breeding capacity of his stock.

Though life might be problematical, the pastoral industry could survive and even grow without profit or large capital investment annually, but the farmer could not. The pastoralist could allow himself to believe that:

despite all its failures, all its accidents and misfortunes, there are still great possibilities for the Territory... a time of glowing prosperity is in store for it... the future will bring for it a measure of success counter-balancing its many failures and its long series of disasters in the past. Thirty years ago North Queensland failed as signally as the Territory has failed during the past decade; but as the years went on that unconquerable element in the Anglo-Saxon race triumphed over all obstacles, overcame all failures, and with persistent courage and
endurance established settlement on the fields once marked by failure and retrogression. So it will be for the Territory.  

The farmer, on the other hand, could not wait for something to turn up. He was entirely reliant for survival on large capital reserves, or on an annual income, to maintain his productive capacity. He might well agree that 'heroic endeavour, great heart, whole valor, restless energy, firmness, hardihood, and hope' were all right in principle, but he knew that of themselves these sentiments were not sufficient.

Conclusion
There had been an expectation that the Commission would provide solutions but, if anything, it had raised more doubt about the Territory's future under a South Australian administration. These uncertainties were acknowledged and are implicit in Dashwood's written acceptance of the post of Government Resident in 1892, in which he asked for a contract of not less than five years, only 'assuming South Australia so long retains control of the Territory'.  

In truth, there had been little progress made in the wake of the Royal Commission of 1895. The much-hoped-for 'wise laws, careful government, and judicious management' did not eventuate and the Territory remained, in John Costello's words, 'an unlucky country, much abused and misrepresented'. There had been high points, and even after the collapse of the plantations, there were still a few remaining colonists who retained hopes of improvement and seemed to believe, with some in the South Australian Parliament, that all would be well when the economic depression lifted. In 1892 Premier Playford had endorsed these sentiments, and he had reinforced them by referring to the parlous state of Territory settlement as being only of a temporary nature. The Chinese alone were able to shine in the parlous economic environment. The failure to accept the skilled Chinese while giving, at best, only lukewarm support to pastoralists were grievous errors on the administration's part.

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64 SAPP 19/1895, p. 183.
65 GRS 1 134/1892.
66 SAPP 19/1895 in written evidence.
67 SAPP 97/1892, Hon. T Playford, 6/5/1892, p. 6.
Chapter 10

Towards a Commonwealth Administration
Chapter 10
Towards a Commonwealth Administration

Summary
In 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia came into being, but it was not until 1911 that the formal handover of the Northern Territory to federal authority became fact. In the intervening years the Commonwealth planned for the event as thoroughly as it was able and conducted its own reconnaissance. Meanwhile two unknown Russians carried out investigations on behalf of potential Russian settlers and provided some objective insight. Their advice on particular social aspects, together with Dashwood’s on the need to assist potential settlers with adequate finance, amply complemented the professional advice of federal government experts.

10.1 Background ambience
Darwin had never had much pretension to be other than a frontier and administrative centre. Even during the short-lived ‘boom’ years of the plantation era, it had never been very prepossessing and it had deteriorated as time passed. The triple cyclones in 1897 and 1898 had had a demoralizing effect. Contemporary accounts tell of complete devastation. Most of the buildings in the town were damaged and scarcely any craft in the harbour was left afloat. The rail jetty was wrecked, railway wagons had been blown off the rails and the locomotive sheds and workshops at Parap had been destroyed.¹ The small community was unable to rebuild as easily as it might have in a more technological age. Future uncertainties and a growing lassitude had seen Darwin deteriorate. Grass grew in the streets and observers judged it as being something of a shantytown. HE Carey described his impressions on arriving in Darwin in 1912:

Darwin [was] a slovenly township with a ‘Chinatown’ in which conditions were appalling from a public health point of view, with rubbish lying everywhere and malaria far more prevalent than was desirable. Streets and roads were overgrown, actually part of two streets had been leased for years to a Chinese gardener by a European who considered he owned the land, and with scarcely a house designed and constructed to suit tropical conditions. ... and there were few of the

amenities which make living in tropical regions less trying for the European. 2

Since the Royal Commission of 1895, a sense of hopelessness had pervaded South Australia's engagement in the north, but disengagement was not easily accomplished. The question of whether the Commonwealth or South Australia had any right at all 'to legally carry out', to 'surrender' the Northern Territory without further imperial legislation, became a subject for contention in both parliaments, 3 and was used in argument to oppose a federal takeover. The debate was resolved ultimately by the commonsense of Alfred Deakin, who chose to cut through all the semantics, but for a short while it had caused further unnecessary complexity. 4

Notwithstanding, a takeover was inevitable and produced its own momentum. In December 1907, a formal agreement for the transfer between Deakin's federal government and Price's South Australian administration was signed. This was ratified in the following year by the 'South Australian Northern Territory Surrender Act', but the Royal Assent did not follow immediately because of continuing polemics during intervening federal elections. In 1910 Deakin's newly created Fusion Party passed the 'Northern Territory Acceptance Bill' in the Lower House, but the delays in the Senate caused this Bill to lapse. At last, however, the issue of national defence overcame contention and in the following January the Northern Territory finally came under Commonwealth control. The Governor General's assent followed with two essential Ordinances to the Acceptance Act which defined the powers and functions of a Federal Administrator and established a separate Northern Territory Supreme Court, with 'all the

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4 CPP 1909, p. 1890. See also the *Argus*, 30 January 1908, and *Melbourne Life*, 15 July 1907, pp. 36-7.
jurisdiction and powers' of the Supreme Court and Court of Insolvency in South Australia. 5

10.2 Commonwealth reconnaissance
New plans were set in train, regardless, to expand the Territory economy by intensifying efforts to encourage the pioneering farmer whom the South Australians had so signally failed to convince. Even before it took over the Territory, the Commonwealth Government had gathered reports of all previous surveys before commissioning its own. 6
On agriculture, there had been many official, semi-official and private reports, many of them misleading and contradictory.

By now the value of Goyder's agricultural appraisal and survey of 1869 had been largely discounted. 7 His general comment that in the long run the country would 'turn out well' was still however an act of faith. On the other hand, Professor Tate's 1882 report had offered considerably less hope, but indications are that his report was seen as being irrelevant, as it was in effect no more than a comment on the very limited Goyder report. Tate's investigation had been confined to the country within a short distance of the telegraph line between Darwin and Pine Creek, and to the area taken up by speculators during the 'sugar boom' in the immediate environs of Darwin and Delissaville. In consequence, his report was not very encouraging:

[whether] the climate and soil of the Northern Territory [are] suitable for the growth of tropical plants of economic value is still open for discussion. The soils of the valleys and of the hill slopes are, in my opinion, unsuited for agriculture; and, with a few exceptions, the land seen under cultivation was only that reclaimed from the jungle ... My opinion of the unfitness of the country generally for agriculture is based


6 FH Bauer. Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p. 299; CPP 45/1913, pp.243-61). See also JA Gilruth, "The Northern Territory: Some Impressions of its Possibilities". Australia Today; special number of The Australian Traveller, 1 November 1911.

7 SAPP 19/1895, pp.21-26, 30. 718.f, 62.1191.1192.1193.
on observations. 1. On the nature of the soil; 2. On the general character of the indigenous vegetation; and 3. On certain meteorological phenomena.  

There is no evidence to assume from subsequent events that much beyond lip service was paid to either of these, nor, it must be added, to the more reliable recommendations of either Dashwood or Herbert, the last two of South Australia’s Government Residents.

The Royal Commission 1895 had apparently remained sceptical of both the Goyder and Tate reports, and had recommended that ‘a competent expert be sent ‘without delay to thoroughly examine the country within easy reach of the rivers’.  

Brackenbury, one of the witnesses for the Commission, was chosen to undertake this task. He had considerable practical plantation experience in both India and Queensland and had traveled widely in Northern Australia, having some familiarity with the Wyndham (Kununurra) region. Brackenbury had seen the Queensland plantations evolve from large company operations to composites of smaller holdings run by tenant farmers and he was quite aware that white labour was able to work in the tropics. He only managed to cover riparian margins of the East Alligator and South Alligator rivers, the lower reaches of the Adelaide River, the northern bank of the Victoria River and the Daly River adjacent to Owston’s Landing, on which a Jesuit Mission had now been established.  

His report was limited in many aspects but does stand up to scrutiny.  

It was an incontrovertible fact that the South Australians had failed to establish farming in the Territory. Only Professor Tate had questioned the basis upon which the very possibility of agricultural settlement was predicated and the Commonwealth decided to rely on its own investigations.

9 SAPP 19/1895 - Recommendations, p.vii, (10).  
10 SAPP 19/1895, p.152.  
12 CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report - regarding the Suitability of Certain Lands for Purposes of Agriculture, and for the Establishment of Experimental Farms pp.16, 523-47. WS Campbell, ex-Director of Agriculture for New South Wales and principal agricultural expert engaged to report on behalf of the
WS Campbell, ex-Director of Agriculture for New South Wales, was commissioned to report specifically on agriculture, and it sent the Commonwealth Scientific Expedition to concentrate on the broader aspects of Territory developmental strategy.

Both of these reports painted a hopeful future, but neither underestimated the difficulties and the costs involved. Both emphasised that before settlement could be expected to succeed the primary need was to establish a basic infrastructure. Their advice 'that if money was spent wisely and extensively, the result would be thoroughly satisfactory' was noted, and the Prime Minister himself expressed fulsome support for the formidable task that had been presented, saying:

> When I think of the little done and the immense amount to be done, I am staggered by the extreme importance of the task from the Australian point of view. But we are not wanting in testimony from men of standing and calibre as to the possibilities up north.

Nonetheless, it would appear that in the euphoria of the moment the Commonwealth had little real appreciation of the very large initial capital inputs that would be requisite to the recommendations of these 'men of standing and calibre'.

### 10.2.1 The Campbell Report

WS Campbell, as well as being an agricultural scientist of pre-eminence, was also an agricultural historian of note, writing extensively for the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* for many years. There is little doubt that he was clearly recognised as

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17 Campbell was one of the earliest contributors to the Journal writing regularly until 1936. Memorandum. "Commonwealth of Australia, Department of External Affairs, No. 11/7935 of 18/5/1911." In National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 1911. Often they demonstrate his distinct interest in people and are of sociological interest. Some examples are; 'Arthur Phillip', Vol. 22, pt 6 (1936); 'Wattle and dab churches' Vol. 20, pt 1 (1934); 'William James Farrer' Vol. 19, pt 5 (1933); 'Use and abuse of stimulants in the early days of settlement in New South Wales: With references to the historical Ti plant and to the Australian Tea Trees', Vol. 18, pt 2 (1932); 'A matrimonial encouragement in the early days, Vol. 16, pt 4 (1930);
well able to make suitable appraisal, and to make practical recommendations for the establishment of agricultural settlement on a proper basis. He had been a successful Director of Agriculture for New South Wales and was reckoned to have:

had more experience in selecting sites for experiment and reporting on new country for settlement than any man in Australia, especially in the direction of opening up sub-tropical country ... Mr Campbell is also a surveyor and he will thus be able to indicate on the map exactly the areas he has traversed and reported on.18

His directions were clear. He was required to:

Ascertain the precise character of the country lying to the north of the 15th parallel of South latitude in order to determine the extent of tracts suitable for settlement as stock farms of about two square miles and for the production of commercial crops for which the conditions appear favourable.19

His study and examination of the country was extensive. He traveled to Darwin and its surrounds; the lower reaches of the Adelaide River; the Stapleton district; Brocks Creek; the Daly River district; Rum Jungle; Anson's Bay; the Katherine district (including the Ferguson, Flora, and Douglas rivers to the Daly River). He also looked at the less likely areas of Escape Cliffs, Alligator River, Port Essington and Melville Island.20 He talked with as many of the settlers as he could and satisfied himself that white men were quite capable of undertaking farm work under Territory conditions.21 At the junction of the Douglas and Ferguson rivers, he stayed with a settler who made good butter for his own

18 Memorandum of 18/5/1911.
20 CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.3.
use, which he described as being 'of fine quality and such as would be graded first class by a butter grader'. On the abandoned Daly River Mission, he found:

- bananas, croton oil plant, mangoes, coconuts, limes, and lemons flourishing, and also cotton, not withstanding grass fires every year...
- the remains of an irrigation pump, and a plot of irrigated land can be seen.

He found much the same situation on the derelict Poett plantation at Rum Jungle where coffee plants still survived. At the Adelaide River railway bridge he stayed with a settler 'who really [understood] the business of farming, 'but who could not make a profit because, though he produced vegetables of 'excellent quality', the 'high railway charges prevented him selling them'. He found that on various farms tobacco was being grown. Everything he saw was only on a very small scale, for nothing that was grown could be sold. He noted that Brackenbury, whom he assumed erroneously to have been a South Australian agricultural officer, had furnished a sound report in 1896 but nothing had been done with it:

It seems to me almost incredible that, although an Agricultural Department has been in existence for many years, the collecting of a few samples of soil and the making of analyses of them was the only effort ever made towards the encouragement of agriculture by the Government of South Australia.

It was apparent to him that:

The conditions required to be carried out under [the] Act(s) by which lands may be acquired for Agricultural purposes, seem to me to be sufficient to prevent the object of settlement by any but persons of considerable means.

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22 CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report p.11.
26 CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report p.16.
Campbell supported his opinion by quoting Dashwood, who in 1908 had said that though twenty-five settlers had applied for agricultural and mixed farming leases they were destined to fail 'owing to want of capital,' and because they received 'absolutely no help - direct or indirect - in the shape of government assistance'.

Campbell noted that on the occupied agricultural lands there was 'little or no stock and no cultivation to be seen'. Yet, from his own observations, mixed farming should have been encouraged, for 'there are hundreds of thousands of acres of land well suited to agricultural purposes and for stockraising'. In summation, he said:

I find that very little, if any, encouragement has been given by the South Australian Government for the promotion of agricultural settlement; indeed, it would almost seem as if this has been discouraged by prohibitory railway charges, the avoidance of experiment work, and the lack of interest generally taken in agricultural matters in the Northern Territory. ... this land is simply a waste at the present time.

He was appalled to find that all basic foodstuffs had largely to be imported, and even the price of beef was exorbitant in country where 'thousands of settlers could be located, where huge quantities and exportable produce might be raised when markets are made available.' He was fully persuaded that:

Here is an excellent opening for intelligent men, when enabled to acquire land under easy and reasonable conditions, guided in their work by the advice of agricultural experts, and lessons to be acquired from experiments made at experimental farms, which I have recommended should be established in various localities.

Campbell believed that settlement would succeed if his advice was taken. He was convinced that the country that he had identified was certainly capable of becoming 'well occupied by a thriving and contented population,' if only 'a certain amount of care be

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taken' and 'some little encouragement be given to settlers'.\textsuperscript{32} His report was unambiguous and left no room for compromise. He emphasised the need to encourage mixed farming, not only to permit rotations for the maintenance and improvement of the soil but also to enable the farmer to be less dependent on market fluctuation. He enumerated the crops that were already being grown with some success and suggested others that should be investigated by government experimentation. He advocated stocking the farms with feeder cattle, recommended pig and poultry production as well, and pointed to the need for some dairying to supply local markets. He stressed that all this was possible only if steps were taken by government to facilitate marketing:

Under a well conducted system of working, provided a market be available, cultivation of various crops, combined with the rearing of pigs, poultry, goats, and, to some extent, of cattle and horses, a settler should succeed very well upon an area of 640 acres of arable land, or even less in the districts referred to.\textsuperscript{33}

His report was comprehensive in scope and his recommendations sufficiently detailed to have been adopted in full. But it is remembered principally for his proposal to establish experimental farms. It is relevant to note that Campbell would certainly have had extensive knowledge of the New South Wales model of experimental farms, and quite probably had been responsible for putting some of them in place. His reason for recommending experimental farms was particular to their purpose. The farms were to be strategically sited in the areas of settlement that he had identified. Their purpose was to provide regional focal points, so that 'the advice of agricultural experts' could be readily available and relevant 'lessons', specific to their district, could 'be acquired from experiments made.\textsuperscript{34}

He identified three broad agricultural regions. These were the Katherine District, the Daly River Region and the area around Rum Jungle. He proposed one Experimental

\textsuperscript{32} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.5.
\textsuperscript{33} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.7.
\textsuperscript{34} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.12.
Farm of 2,560 acres (1,036 hectares) for the Katherine district on the south bank of the river\textsuperscript{35} for, as he said, there are:

\begin{quote}
thousands and thousands of [suitable] acres in the district and this land extends 10 to 20 miles or more, and along the river for many miles ... [And the location is] fairly typical of extensive areas of land about the several tributaries of the Daly river ... [The proposed site is] about 2 miles from the small settlement of Katherine, and easily accessible from that place and all parts of the district.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

He proposed two other experimental farms of the same size for the Daly River District and at Rum Jungle, the latter to service the upper reaches of the Adelaide River and the Stapleton District. He suggested, on political prompting, a fourth experimental farm for Melville Island, but gave it no precise location and advised only that it be limited in size to 320 acres (130 hectares).

He advised that caution should be taken in selecting the precise site for the Rum Jungle Demonstration Farm. This was later wrongly sited and named for the 'Darwin District' as a demonstration farm, and became known as the Batchelor Demonstration Farm. Lack of water in the region was the reason why he carefully located and described the site for this farm's headquarters. He identified this as the only place where it could reasonably be established 'in order to ensure a spring of water for the farm', and he intended that it be on the site of Poett's plantation (later known as Glyde's or Brandt's).

Campbell's specific description of its location was warranted, because he knew that it was essential that a permanent water supply be procured from the outset. He went to a great deal of trouble not only in finding it, but he described its position and gave particular detail of its physical features. In 1879 it had been mapped by Goyder's survey team, and on a subsequent copy made in 1880, when the railway was built, it was outlined in pink and delineated as a 'Water Reserve'.\textsuperscript{37} By now the survey pegs had disappeared, and that

\textsuperscript{35} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.2.
\textsuperscript{36} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.4.
is why Campbell took particular care in identifying it again and stressing that those who would later establish the farm must take similar care. He described its whereabouts as follows:

Situated near Rum Jungle on the Eastern side, and fronting the railway line from Darwin to Pine Creek: Commencing at a point opposite the 58¼ railway mile post; thence along the railway line southerly to the 60¼ post; thence easterly along part of the northern boundary of portion 1,171 to the Western Boundary of Glyde's portion 2831 of 1,020 acres; thence by a line southerly about 25 chains along the boundary of that portion southerly; thence easterly; thence westerly by lines to include 2,560 acres. 38

Because the area had been abandoned for some considerable time, he pointed out that care would be needed to properly locate this essential spring, and he gave clear instructions as to how it was to be found:

It was impossible for me to ascertain the boundaries of the measured lands in the vicinity [of the Spring], all corner marks having disappeared years ago, but an old cart track from the plantation to the plantation gives an indication of the alienated blocks ... [and] a permanent lagoon, which it is desirable to include in the farm. 39

He went further, by recommending in his report that in order to secure this spring for the farm it would also be necessary 'to resume the whole of Glyde's 1,020 acres, the value of which I estimate to be about from 12/- to 15/- per acre. 40 Finally he stressed the need to carefully safeguard the delicate nature of this source, and unmistakably spelt out the caution that 'the limestone rocks should be preserved from demolition. 41 Despite Campbell's carefully worded instruction, it seems that his advice was deliberately ignored or, if taken, that the site of the spring was either wrongly identified or irreparably damaged, or both. Whatever, the result was to be calamitous.

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38 CPP 39/1911- Campbell Report, p.3.
39 CPP 39/1911- Campbell Report, p.3.
40 CPP 39/1911- Campbell Report, p.3.
41 CPP 39/1911- Campbell Report, p.3.
Campbell's *caveats* on this were clear, as was his admonition to the Commonwealth that the mindset that had engaged the South Australian government officers must be changed. Whether employed as farm workers on the experimental farms or as extension officers, all departmental staff must be able to demonstrate real practical expertise. Staff on the experimental farms must be expert in all practical aspects of farming or they would fail as ignominiously as had the 'experimental farm' established recently at Katherine by the South Australian Government, where:

> The work carried out at this "experimental plot" was a complete failure, and could not have been otherwise, owing to the manner in which the experiments were carried out. From an examination of the work, I am quite satisfied that those who were intrusted (sic) with the experiments were quite ignorant of any method or principle upon which to work. The value of this paltry effort was nothing whatever; and the work was ridiculed by those persons who happened to visit the "Experimental Farm".\(^{42}\)

In the event, the Commonwealth Government established only two experimental farms recommended by him - one on the Daly River and the other at Batchelor/Rum Jungle. The most widely publicised, at Batchelor, was inexplicably established on the wrong site, and none of his explicit advice on how they should be staffed and operated was followed.

As to tenure, he found that there were too many types of lease and that, under present terms of lease, it was 'impossible for settlers, without good sized capital, to obey the conditions in toto'.\(^{43}\) Leases had to be allocated on selection and without qualification as to mandatory production. All leases should be for mixed farming, under long lease and at moderate rent. The timing and progress of farm development should not be stipulated. The pioneer settler must be allowed time sufficient for his particular needs as to housing, and be able to allocate, at his own discretion, his available resources for the construction of sheds, yards and fencing. The priorities decided by each pioneer would necessarily differ. The potential farmer must be free to ensure his family's everyday survival, even if

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\(^{42}\) CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.18.

\(^{43}\) CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.18.
it were necessary for him to take other employment *pro tem* to generate income whilst markets were developed.\textsuperscript{44}

Quoting from the 1909 Government Resident’s report, he emphasised the point on necessary assistance for farmer settlers:

> The same care in affording [settlers] assistance and advice should be exercised today as is extended to settlers in other countries where the industry is [already] established. If the early pioneers are neglected, early failure will most likely ensue, and the industry receive a ‘set-back’ which will be difficult to overtake.\textsuperscript{45}

Any viable settlement demanded that the provision of proper tenure and market development for produce should be the primary concern of government. Success would be largely dependent upon initial government effort. Throughout his report, and in concluding, he emphasized again and again that none of his cautions should be disregarded.

Campbell’s report was prepared within the context of an expectation that the federal government would take a holistic view of future growth, taking in hand all specifics for creating a communication structure that could integrate all necessary sociological, economic and political aspects for development. The federal government had sent its 'Commonwealth Scientific Expedition', as it was called, to do just that.

\textbf{10.2.2 The Commonwealth Scientific Expedition}

The members of the Scientific Expedition, as described by Alcorta, were Baldwin Spencer, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Dr Woolnough, Dr Breinl and Dr Gilruth.\textsuperscript{46} All were men of considerable stature in their respective fields. John Gilruth was already recognized not only as an eminent scientist but as an innovative administrator of high ability.

\textsuperscript{44} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.18.
\textsuperscript{45} CPP 39/1911 - Campbell Report, p.18.
\textsuperscript{46} Gilruth, "Bulletin of the Northern Territory of Australia.", 1912. See also Baldwin Spencer, Dr Woolnough, Dr A Breinl and Dr Gilruth. "Report of Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory.". Canberra: National Archives of Australia, Series A1/2, 12/299, 1911.
Walter Baldwin Spencer had arrived in Australia in 1887 to take up the chair of biology at the University of Melbourne (1887-1919). He was Honorary Director of the National Museum of Victoria from 1899 and was President of the Royal Society of Victoria in 1904. He was a respected anthropologist as well as being a zoologist of note. He had already participated in many field trips to central and northern Australia, and his writings on ethnology and anthropology were understood to have substantially added to the corpus of knowledge. He was to produce a further publication in 1914, on the *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, following this, his latest, expedition.\(^47\)

Walter George Woolnough later became the first Professor of Geology at the University of Western Australia, and was already a well-known geologist, having taught at both the University of Sydney from 1898 and the University of Adelaide until 1912.\(^48\)

Anton Breinl was pre-eminent in the field of tropical medicine, and subsequently gave his name to the 'Anton Breinl Centre for Public Health and Tropical Medicine'. This centre engages in public health issues in tropical Australia and its near neighbours, with special attention being given to postgraduate and undergraduate teaching for remote indigenous communities. Breinl was one of the founders of the 'Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine', initially established in 1910 to 'study methods of maintaining and improving the health of the working white race in tropical Queensland', and was its director from 1910 until 1921.\(^49\)

These were all men of competence yet, according to Alcorta and others, their reports painted an extravagant picture of Territory resources:

> Like most of the other reports previously submitted to the South Australian and Commonwealth Governments ... It was clear that

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\(^{47}\) Walter Baldwin Spencer - Biographical entry Bright Sparcs Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/bsparcs/bsparcs/home.htm

\(^{48}\) Walter George Woolnough, James Cook University http://www.jcu.edu.au/

\(^{49}\) Anton Breinl Centre http://www.jcu.edu.au/
[Gilruth] and his colleagues envisaged almost limitless possibilities for the Territory.\textsuperscript{50}

This verdict takes no account of the context within which they made their reports, when a federal government appeared to possess a determination to succeed in the Territory at whatever cost.

10.2.3 The Gilruth Report
After his arrival in Darwin, Gilruth wrote his own report, consistent with his understanding of government intentions. His report is indicative of the concept that saw the Northern Territory as being intrinsic to development in a national context. His 'notes', as he called them, followed earlier discussions with the Minister of External Affairs and the Prime Minister,\textsuperscript{51} and his broad recommendations were formed in the expectation that they would provide some strategic input to government policy. The 'notes', unabridged, were published in a Government Bulletin, and subsequently publicised by government in the principal national newspapers, giving rational vindication to these understandings.\textsuperscript{52}

At the time, there were few roads in the Territory and the Scientific Expedition was a historical first in that it was undertaken by car over vast distances. Stretches that were extremely difficult to negotiate often raised fuel consumption to an alarming three miles to the gallon (1km/litre).\textsuperscript{53} Economic realities were dominated by pastoralism, and the fact that the best roads seem to have been from Pine Creek to Katherine and from Anthony's Lagoon to Top Springs\textsuperscript{54} may be taken as indicative. The party traveled through pastoral country from Newcastle Waters to the Victoria River District and was able to see for itself the primitive nature of pioneer life, induced by an almost permanent

\textsuperscript{50} Alcorta, p.16. See also JA Gilruth, "The Northern Territory: Some Impressions of its Possibilities." Australia Today (1911).
\textsuperscript{51} Gilruth - Bulletin p.13.
\textsuperscript{52} "The Pathfinder: Dr Gilruth's 1200 mile Trip," Daily Telegraph, 10 January 1912; "Preparing for Railways." The Argus, 25 May 1912; "Captain Barclay's Surveys," The Age, 25 May 1912; "Railway Projects." The Chronicle, 1 June 1912; See also "Memorandum: Department of External affairs, Series A/15, Item 1911/7405." In National Archives of Australia. Canberra, 1911.
\textsuperscript{53} Gilruth - Bulletin, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{54} Gilruth - Bulletin, p. 3.
negative cash flow. The resultant paucity of improvement, imposed by financial constraints, was quite marked.

Throughout the pastoral area, there was very little surface water, but Gilruth surmised that in most areas boring for water was possible. He pointed out that the South Australian Government had completed the first bore at Anthony's Lagoon in 1910, and that subsequently Avon, Alroy and Brunette Downs stations had drilled and found water at between 250ft and 300ft (77m - 91m). The cost, however, had been substantial at between £1 400 and £1 500 per equipped unit. Gilruth advised putting down more bores at government expense. He also observed that many of the stations, even at this late stage, lacked any proper survey.55

He advised further that an improvement in communications throughout the Territory must be a priority of government. Current freight prices, he said, were 'enormous', at 1/- to 2/- per ton per mile. The carriers' expenses themselves were high, as they had to support heavy costs in plant, maintain an average of 30 horses and cope with the irregular nature of contracts. It was everywhere understood that cartage by teamsters was invariably high and a rate of 1/- to 2/- per ton-mile was not unusual in drought years in other colonies,56 but in the Northern Territory this was standard practice, and distances covered by Territory teamsters raised overall cost to prohibitive levels.

Railway extension would reduce these costs, said Gilruth and government had to increase expenditure on roads, for there were greater efficiencies to be expected by cars in the future.57 He backed this argument by relating how at present the mailman normally took six weeks to complete a round trip of 720 miles (1 158 km) from Katherine to Powell's Creek and then was only able to deliver mail directly to less than five people. Those not on the route had to travel large distances to the drop-off points. Gilruth suggested appropriate improvement.58

55 Gilruth - Bulletin, pp. 4-5.
56 SAPP 57/1865-6 - in a drought year in the North of South Australia, cartage increased from 9d. to 2s. 3d. per ton per mile, and six tons of horse feed were consumed in conveying one ton of provisions.
57 Gilruth - Bulletin, pp. 10, 12.
Earlier discussions held with the Prime Minister had envisaged a national transcontinental railway system (Map 6), which might enable a more central position for a capital. Gilruth’s suggestion was that this might lie somewhere in the vicinity of Bitter Springs, and accordingly he advocated a new rail route to run between Katherine and Alice Springs via the Barkly Tablelands. Cattle could then be transported readily from the pastoral country to the proposed Darwin meatworks. This route would also facilitate the construction of branch lines to Borroloola and Queensland via Camooweal.59

Map 6
Map outlining the National Transcontinental Railway proposals in 1900

With the publication of these reports the federal government appeared to have done its homework well and in comprehensive fashion. Strategic planning for Territory

development must have appeared complete, with every necessary aspect for future settlement having been covered to enable the Territory to become a fully incorporated and contributing member to the Commonwealth of Australia.

In counterpoint to official Residents' Reports, Commonwealth deliberations in far-off Melbourne and expeditions by 'experts', the local residents were never slow in voicing their own solutions. In 1909 one had advocated that a heavy duty be imposed on the minerals exported, 'so that raw products could be manufactured' in the Territory. Such a scheme, he added, would 'carry a fair amount of commonsense'. In 1912 there was again a demand for 'a full measure of self government' to give 'citizens full power to provide both shipping and railway facilities for getting products to the markets ...which are and in close proximity to it'. As for the idea of experimental farms, which by now had been established, this was 'nonsense', better, he said, to provide real incentive for 'experienced agriculturists' who knew 'what could or could not be done'. The cry for self-government may have been deeply felt by some:

The advantages of [the Territory's] position can never be realised unless the seat of government is in the Territory itself and unless the people of the Territory themselves have the right to carve out their own destiny.

These comments go some way to illustrating that the South Australian years had left the Territory with a deeper malaise that lurked unnoticed by the nation's planners. In the light of subsequent controversy it is instructive to examine a comprehensive, yet little read, report which was prepared in the interregnum before Gilruth and his ill-fated administration took up office.

10.3 The other side of the coin - the Vladimerrow and Illin Report

In 1912, in the first year of Commonwealth administration, Professor Vladimerrow, for the Russian Association in Australia, traveled extensively over the prospective farming areas of the Top End. The composite reports by Vladimerrow and his companion Illin

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60 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 12 November 1909.
61 NTTG 23/2/1912.
62 NTTG 23/2/1912.

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provide some refreshing views on contentious issues. Their study was undertaken with
the specific object of advising prospective Russian emigrants. Vladimerrow had been an
eminent member of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, which had been involved
in the expansion of farming settlement in Russia. Vladimerrow's report, the more formal
as might be expected, is ably complemented by that of Illin, written through the eyes of a
much younger man with all the enthusiastic attention to detail of a travelogue. Taken
together, as objective reports for potential settlers, they afford one of the very few
contemporary records, informed from viewpoints that were at once both practical and
academic.

Illin tells us frankly that many previous observers' analyses had been cobbled together
merely by taking 'extracts from other reports', but that his report spoke honestly only of
what he saw for himself. His gentle sense of humour was illustrated by a perceptive
and empathetic understanding of human nature, and he paints an exceptionally vivid
picture. Taken together, their investigation gives an overview that indicts not only the
consequences of South Australia's administration, but also provides some indication of
the reasons for the rapid deterioration of federal hopes. Their reports are eloquent of the
discord that endured between the public service and the aspiring settler. The narrative
speaks for itself.

On arrival in Darwin they took advice from members of the resident public service as to
how they should conduct their inspection, and wasted a considerable amount of time in so
doing. The account of their first trip under government auspices is humorously
recounted. Arrangements had been made for them to accompany the new farm manager
to the Daly Experimental Farm. After many misadventures the government expedition
by sea had to be abandoned, and the manager returned to Darwin to await more
favourable circumstances. Illin and Vladimerrow, then respectfully declining further
government 'help', struck off on their own - by foot, train and horseback - to Katherine
and Pine Creek, the headwaters of the Adelaide River (as well as its flood plain), and to

\[^{63}\] LN Illin, "Report of the Northern Territory by LN Illin: CRS A3 NT 1913/1156, Pt 3.". Canberra:
National Archives of Australia, 1912; KN Vladimerrow, "Report of the Northern Territory by KN
Vladimerrow : CRS A3 NT 1913/1156, Pt 1.". Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 1912.

\[^{64}\] Illin, p. 52.
Stapleton and the Batchelor Demonstration Farm. Returning briefly to Darwin some weeks later, they found their erstwhile companion, the farm manager, still waiting disconsolately in the pub for further government disposal.  

Many public servants with whom they came in contact, even those of long standing, were quite ignorant of anything outside Darwin. At one point, in exasperation, Illin commented that 'except by hearsay' they knew virtually nothing of 'their Territory'. In his opinion time-serving, role-playing and pomposity were their chief attributes. They were less than impressed by the Botanic Gardens:

I will restrain my report about the Gardens. Although I saw there plenty of experimenting (perhaps sometimes successfully) with some kinds of tropical plants, the cultivation in the Botanic Gardens is so different to what a simple farmer does that I do not believe that there is much for him to learn.

In contrast to the unhelpful attitude of public servants, they received invaluable help and kindness from Nelson, the railway ganger at Adelaide River. Later, as representative of the Australian Workers Union, Nelson became leader of the 'Darwin Rebellion'. The two Russians found in both Nelson and his wife a fount of strength when they were in dire need. He and his wife took them in and made them comfortable and Nelson even took the Russians on at chess, while Mrs Nelson put on the gramophone for their relaxation. Without Nelson's assistance it is doubtful whether they would have seen much of the settlers at Adelaide River or Stapleton. They had experienced a singularly unhelpful attitude from the surviving members of the old regime's bureaucracy, which at times amounted to downright obstruction. In consequence, they had only reached the

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65 Illin, p. 53.
66 Illin, pp. 61-62.
67 Illin, p. 5.
68 Alcorta's work, The Darwin Rebellion, provides an insightful record of this event which was led by Nelson, the Union leader and railwayman, culminating in Gilruth's downfall and his ejection from the Territory in 1918. I have been unable to verify absolutely whether this is the same Nelson, however Illin's descriptions of both Nelson himself and his wife compare very well with other accounts of the pair.
69 Illin, p. 32.
Daly River settlement on foot with the help of a hotel-keeper who found an Aboriginal
guide to show them the way.\textsuperscript{70}

The railway man went out of his way to transport them by a hand-propelled rail trolley to
various strategic points along the line, regardless of the weather and sometimes late at
night. Thence he would escort them to various points of interest. He introduced them to
all the farmers scattered throughout the Adelaide River and Stapleton regions, so that
they received a warm welcome and were hospitably treated. Indeed, from the tenor of
Illin's report, they might have been unable to visit the Batchelor Demonstration Farm but
for Nelson.\textsuperscript{71}

There were not of course many settlers, but generally speaking those whom they met
were hard working and self-sufficient and they knew the business of farming. Illin and
Vladimerrow stayed with each for a few days, saw the crops at the growing stage and
some weeks later returned to see them harvested. They found that the farmers' efforts
were worthy of praise. Not all were married but all had built serviceable houses and
sheds, had thriving livestock and had planted a variety of crops. All carried the fear that
they would lose their farms, for they were quite unable to generate sufficient cash income
to pay rent. Although they were within reasonable proximity to the railway they were
generally unable to market their crops because of the exorbitant freight rates.

The Miltons of Milton Springs had occupied their farm for four years, having invested
their life's savings of £600 in the venture. They had built 'a good house, kitchen, barn,
well, pumps, plenty of tanks for rainwater etc.' and had fenced their paddock with
wallaby proof netting. Illin noted the farm's assets in animals and machinery:

\begin{quote}
Over 600 goats (fat and nice), 6 horses (fat and nice), about 40 pigs, and
plenty of fowls (white leghorns), a harvester binder, harrow, stump
jumper, chaff cutter, corn threshing machine, sowing machine, stripper
etc. etc.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70} Illin, pp. 1-17, 21, 53, 57,58, 60- 70.
\textsuperscript{71} Illin, pp. 28, 31-32, 37.
\textsuperscript{72} Illin, p. 33.
At the Milton farm the Russians were pleased to find that 'Mrs Milton is not playing Red Wings in Sydney, but she is living here, in the Northern Territory and working as well as her husband', this despite popular opinion of the day that held that 'ladies must go every year or two down south for the restoration of their health'.

They related that throughout the Top End settlers employed Aboriginals and often found them more useful than the few white men otherwise available. The Miltons employed three Aboriginal employees and had a high opinion of their abilities:

[Mr Milton] says they can do any kind of work on the farm nearly as well as himself. Mr Milton treats them well, with clothing and food same as his own. This shows that the natives can be useful with good people. Mrs Milton stated that the lubra goes to get the mail and often carries money (silver), and has never lost a penny.

However, not all settlers were as 'good' to Aboriginals as the Miltons - there was always the exception to the rule, and this was particularly noticeable on certain farms on the Daly.

Some settlers managed to retain capital only by undertaking enough 'improvements' to fulfill the letter of the law in order to retain the land and do nothing else because there was no market for their produce. Sometimes milk was produced but only for domestic purposes and one hotel ran a small dairy for its guests.

They found that where the Chinese were still able to grow a crop or two they managed to live quite well for, as Illin with heavy irony put it, 'the yellow race do not recognise the scientific conserves which we are eating. They make soup, fresh beef etc'. One Chinaman said that if the government would only allow them, 'we would put all the

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73 Illin, p. 33.
74 Illin, p. 34.
75 Illin, pp. 73, 77-78.
76 Illin, p. 50.
77 Illin, p. 12.
country in crops and gardens' - and, said Illin, 'I believe it'. Contemporary opinion had it that the Chinese lived in squalor, but Illin liked their housing arrangements:

> We came to a nice little [Chinese] humpy made of bark. I like those humpy's [sic] very much, and I believe they are made of the best and cheapest materials for the starting farmer, and suitable for the climate. They are cool.  

On the potential for settlement he told the federal government and the Russian Association that:

> I would not say a man would make a fortune there (it would be a lie, as there is no open market and tropical products are produced cheaper in the East) ... Don't take the farmer with capital, as he will not be willing to spend it in a hot country, while there are districts like Atherton available for selection in Australia ... But take the man who has nothing to lose ... take the men poor and hungry, give them assistance and they will do well. Men like that do not need much money, but food and quiet living, and they will bless those who give them the chance.

These final words of Illin contained a wisdom that seemed to be quite beyond that of contemporary government. Successful farming settlement, he said, would only occur if the potential settler was selected from those who were poor but also knowledgeable in the practice of farming:

> In my opinion, if only a little assistance were given, many would come. Certainly the poorest class and only agriculturists should be assisted ... [these] men who would make the best settlers cannot come as they are too poor to pay their passage.

Vladimerrow, the professor, gave both chapter and verse. The reason for the Northern Territory not being as yet populated:

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78 Illin, p. 8.
79 Illin, pp. 22-23.
80 Illin, p. 71.
81 Illin, p. 92.
lies not in the white ants, not in the fact that the Northern Territory is
unsuitable for immigration, but in the fact that the Northern Territory
cannot be advanced by mere experiments without the immigrants
themselves and the government measures to begin with ... There are no
irresistible conditions (precluding immigration) in the climate or soil of
the Northern Territory. 82

Vladimerrow not only defined the problem but also offered a solution. Farming, he said,
was a capital-intensive pursuit that required both highly skilled labour and experienced
management. Wise farmers, who had sufficient capital and ability, recognised that high
capital inputs could not be serviced without developed markets. In addition to this, the
potential farmer with capital was also fully aware that there was no skilled farming
workforce readily available under present Territory conditions. It was therefore logical
that the government could not reasonably expect to find suitable farmer settlers with
capital and the essential agricultural knowledge. They should instead focus on the many
poor agricultural workers with the necessary skills who could be persuaded to come as
migrants provided that they were given sufficient help. Under present conditions where
no permanent work was available in the Territory, the poor, but aspiring, agriculturist
could never save sufficient capital to establish and equip a farm by working for wages. It
was necessary that government should provide them with land, housing, seed and
livestock, and the means by which they could access all necessary agricultural machinery
and implements 'under government supervision'. If this were done, poor but skilled farm
workers would quickly establish themselves, provide for their families and, like the
Chinese, survive. Given this initial assistance, these people would in time form the basis
of any desired development of the North. Vladimerrow gave full force to his argument
by telling the minister that if government were to take any other approach they would
surely 'tempt failure'. 83 Even though his advice echoed Campbell's, there is no evidence
that the government ever regarded the truth inherent in Vladimerrow's recommendations.
Both in the Territory and in later contact with government in Melbourne, the Russians'
advice was probably seen as having no relevance to matters that were already believed
well in hand.

82 Vladimerrow, p. 62.
83 Vladimerrow, pp. 60-61.
The necessary creation of the proper ambience for settlement seems to have been fairly obvious to a wide spectrum of the community and to those who would advise them, but not to successive governments. Political constraints imposed by a democracy were exacerbated because the power base remained far removed from the Territory. The last sentence of Vladimerrow's report said it all:

All that renders life in the Northern Territory possible for Europeans is the careful arrangement of their social life as separate individuals and a community as a whole.  

Conclusion
The contrast between government planning reports prior to federal takeover and the Russian situation reports in the first year of the new regime is indicative of the striking difference between intention and performance. In this context, Dashwood's advice as the penultimate South Australian Government Resident is of relevance. His tenure of twelve years was longer than he might have expected, and he demonstrated some real understanding. His first report had detailed the initial problems to be dealt with, and year after year he recorded continuing inadequacies. He believed that the vehicle of agricultural settlement, intended to 'people the North', required something more than wishful thinking, and as the years passed, his reports mirrored mounting frustration. Perhaps to shame the government into some action, he continued to report favourably on Chinese enterprise and to give emigration and immigration figures, providing detail of an ever-declining European population. In his penultimate report, he quoted President Theodore Roosevelt's recent advice to Australia - 'beware of keeping your north empty, and remember that an unmanned nation invites disaster'. Dashwood stressed that if farm settlement was to be successfully accomplished, it must be encouraged actively. If settlers in sufficient numbers were to be persuaded, so that Australia's frontier might be defended by citizen soldiers in the model of the Boer farmers of South Africa, then it was imperative that assisted passages and financial assistance be given. In his strongly

84 Vladimerrow, p. 63.
worded opinion, he said that as things stood, the Territory posed an 'absolute menace' to
the rest of Australia and only served to demonstrate the nation's weakness.85

But even if Dashwood's formula had been followed there remained a canker to be
overcome. This was a cultural phenomenon rooted within a government bureaucracy that
saw itself as being distinct and demonstrated an imperfect understanding of the very
people it served. The attitude was counter-productive and presaged difficulties that, if
left unchecked, might endanger the very success of the Commonwealth's future
endeavours in building a cohesive and viable community which, in Vladimerrow's terms,
required 'the careful arrangement of their social life as separate individuals and a
community as a whole'.

85 "Dashwood - Northern Territory Government Resident's Report, No. 45." In National Archives of
Conclusion to Part 11
Conclusion to Part II

South Australia had pushed its claim for the Territory forcefully, but was quite unprepared for the task of settlement on its annexation in 1863. South Australian politicians had benefited from the inheritance of the British Enlightenment, but, in effect, they saw the Territory as an appendage to be exploited and took possession without recourse to preparatory planning. A cartoon (Figure 5), printed in the Bulletin in 1909, provides adequate commentary on the inadequacies of successive South Australian administrations, which not only had failed to attract settlement to the Northern Territory but also had disabused and frightened off potential settlers. Unable to finance the project adequately, their politicians had expended energy and rhetoric to attract entrepreneurial investment, while ignoring the value of individual local initiative.

**Figure 5**
From John Bull to Aboriginal Bull

A commentary by the Bulletin in 1909 on the social and environmental progress in the Northern Territory.

The Royal Commission of 1895 blamed Finniss for the earlier dereliction, but also found that the discontinuity of railway construction and, by implication, the virtual non-existence of internal communication, was a major reason for South Australia's failure. Sheltering behind the generality of 'motherhood statements', it expressed the hope that

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'under suitable laws and administration' agricultural settlement in the Territory would ultimately succeed, noting only that there had been some serious shortcomings in South Australian administration, which had caused 'a loss to those engaged in the industry'. In 1964 Bauer summarised the most common interpretation of why South Australia failed, and added that the underlying malaise affected all subsequent endeavour by the Commonwealth:

[South Australia's] control was unimaginative, inconsistent, and inept, and this pattern of poor administration laid down in the 1870's and 1880's has dogged the Territory ever since.

Bauer has alluded to 'extenuating circumstances' for South Australia's repeated failures in the north. He does not elaborate but on analysis there seems to have been little evidence of any. Self-interest, speculation and financial constraints are not uncommon in any age and racial prejudice at the time was a commonplace, however South Australia's failure to adopt the tried and proven methods to encourage settlement has little rationale. All other Australian colonies, itself included, had operated as autonomous units in which the process of democratisation had been able to evolve. There was no dearth of example for South Australia to follow, yet it neglected the basic premise for successful regional settlement and was inflexible in denying its Government Residents necessary latitude for constructive response.

In 1883 Lord Derby had said that, if the Territory was to survive, it must emerge with 'a large self-supporting population'. President Theodore Roosevelt's comment that 'an unmanned nation invites disaster' was widely quoted as justification for renewed

2 "Report of the Northern Territory Commission together with Minutes of proceedings, evidence and appendices, No 19." In South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 1895. Hereinafter SAPP, thus SAPP 19/1895.
3 SAPP 19/1895, (VI 111), p. vii.
4 FH Bauer, Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p.135.
Part III

Rethinking colonial endeavour in relation to agricultural settlement in the Northern Territory, 1863 to 1945: a critical perspective

Under Federal Control (1911–1946)
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16

Conclusion

Bibliography
Part III

Under federal control (1911 – 1946)

Summary
Part Three is organised sequentially and discussed thematically in two phases. The initial impact of the years under federal control from 1910-21 is examined. Even under 'new management', old practices continued. The Commonwealth intended to change South Australia's assumption of that a periphery could survive, when decisions and policy were dictated from a distant centre. Yet, the First World War, confrontation with early union militancy, and bureaucratic intervention from Melbourne aborted attempts to permit any real degree of local autonomy.

The period 1922-1945/47 saw significant changes. The extreme circumstances of the depression and the Second World War brought about a consequential loosening of the reins by distant government that enabled local initiatives to emerge with some ephemeral successes in agriculture. The changing role of Aboriginal people is also touched upon and considered in the context of their contribution during the Second World War, which promoted some degree of mutual acceptance.

Finally, comparisons are outlined and indicative conclusions drawn.

The argument
The need for prior reconnaissance had not been overlooked by the Commonwealth, and it seemed to have recognised the need it to vest its Administrator with a proper degree of autonomy and JA Gilruth, selected for the task, apparently expected nothing less. His authority, however, proved ephemeral and became circumscribed effectively by the machinations of senior federal public servants. Ultimately, his authority was so undermined by this and by a combination of extraneous circumstance that in the end his position became untenable. The Commonwealth was never quite able to overcome the shock of what became known as the 'Darwin Rebellion', which saw their first administrator bundled unceremoniously out of the Territory in 1918. All attempts to grant sufficient local autonomy remained in tentative abeyance until, in the years immediately prior and during World War II, circumstances and personalities intervened.
and the Commonwealth became more cognizant of regional realities. In the interim, however, there remained many parallels, and characteristics that had dogged earlier South Australian administration. Failure to adequately fund development was an underlying factor that imposed its own rhythms, whether directed from Adelaide or Melbourne. Both administrative centres endured the scorn of interested contemporaries who believed that increased development, increased production, and increased settlement might still have succeeded had only wiser counsels prevailed.

The 1920s were years of relative prosperity elsewhere in Australia but not in the Territory. By Act of Parliament in 1926, the federal government created the North Australia Commission with extensive powers, ostensibly, to improve communication by sea, road, rail, telegraph and telephone. Very little was achieved by it and by 1929 Australia had entered 'the depression'. The Commission was abolished and the Act repealed in 1931.

In 1937 another inquiry was convened to 'show clearly, concisely, and impartially, the practical reforms of administration and the public works' to 'enable these things to be done'. Its recommendations, contained in the 'Payne Report', advised that:

(a) Industries must, so far as is possible, be granted conditions that will place them in a position not less advantageous than that enjoyed by similar industries operating in more favoured parts of Australia - that is a reasonable degree of 'Parity' with the rest of Australia must be established. Governmental charges, fairly applicable to other parts of Australia, must be eliminated in the Territory which is still in its pioneering stages.
(b) The administration must endeavour better to understand the problems of industry and more closely co-operate with the people.
(c) Some new transport facilities must be provided to overcome the present isolation of much of the Territory's most favoured pastoral lands, and thus enable increased development, increased production, and increased settlement to take place.  

1 The Northern Australia Act 1926.
3 Payne Report, p. 77.
The Payne Report vigorously expressed the view that with these 'fundamentals' in place the Territory would become a national asset. Its population and production could be 'multiplied many times over', and it would pay its way within 'this present generation'. It was less hopeful, however, on immediate prospects for arable farming. It noted that over 400 000 freehold acres (161 878 hectares) near Darwin were unoccupied and remained unimproved, and that the owners continued to hold the land in the hope only that it might be saleable in years to come. Nevertheless, there had been a somewhat unexpected advance made in agricultural development and this remained unrecognised by Payne.

A more assured grip by the administration emerged soon after, with concomitant relatively rapid development in the immediate pre-war years. In many respects this progress can be said to have continued unabated throughout the war. By late 1942 more than 60 000 military, Australian and American, were billeted in the Territory and were supplied largely by Territory agricultural product that paradoxically was not produced by Territory farmers. The Second World War generated new perspectives and precipitated the first gradual move towards self-government by permitting the Territory a necessary degree of autonomy.

Organisation
The first phase of Commonwealth administration is covered in three chapters. Chapter 11 examines mistakes made in the immediate aftermath of federal takeover. These circumscribed the very intent and purpose inherent in Campbell's report. Decisions were taken in undue haste, even before Gilruth's arrival, by the newly appointed Director of Agriculture, which were to undermine the policy for agricultural settlement that had been envisaged by the Commonwealth. Chapter 12 outlines the issues associated with the Gilruth administration and its collapse. The first phase of the federal period is then rounded off in Chapter 13 with an appraisal of the consequences of initial failure, and the various reports and recommendations for re-organization that followed are examined and their effects considered.

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4 Payne Report, pp. 77, 78.
The second phase, inclusive of the inter-war period and immediate post war, are considered in the final three chapters. A recapitulation of the consequences of colonial endeavour in the Northern Territory in relation to agricultural settlement from 1863 to 1945 concludes the work in support of this thesis, that the absence of requisite regional autonomy, denied by successive colonial administrations, effectively impeded progress.
Chapter 11

A 'new order of things' (1910 - 1913)
Chapter 11
A 'new order of things' (1910 - 1913)

Summary
Transfer to federal control in 1910 was greeted in Darwin with euphoria, but for Territorians, now disenfranchised, there were causes for unease inherent to the change. Though it appeared that Commonwealth strategies for rapid development had been based on sound reconnaissance, matters began to unravel even before the installation of the new Administrator, Gilruth, in 1912. The changeover was messy and as a result the broad strategies, based on pre-planning, almost immediately began to unwind. The key 'Demonstration farms', for example, were established with unwarranted haste and with singular lack of expertise.

On 31 December 1910, amid expressions of 'hope for a speedy revival of business', Mrs Mitchell, wife of the Acting Administrator, hoisted the Commonwealth Ensign at the Residency in Darwin. Her husband, SJ Mitchell, gave a short speech exhorting the small gathering of Darwin citizens 'to exhibit loyalty and patriotism to the flag', and the Northern Territory was launched once more under what Mitchell described as a 'new order of things'.

Appointments of various heads of department for the Territory were well in hand by the end of the first year. In July 1911 the Inspector of Stock and Brands arrived in Darwin, and his assistant was immediately engaged in 'looking into the questions of shipping of cattle, railway extension, and water supply on the overland route'. The Superintendent of Public Buildings, similarly, was seen to be 'pushing on with renovations and the erection of new structures'. There was a dearth of 'steady and competent workmen' but the work of this department was seen to be 'increasing rapidly'.

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2 NTAR 1911, pp.5, 6.
The eminent WS Campbell arrived on 15 May 1911 to inspect 'lands north of the 15th degree of South latitude'.\(^3\) New arrivals of government appointees were welcomed almost on every ship. Such activity had not been seen since the heady days of the 1880s. By this flurry of action emanating from the parliament in Melbourne, optimism was rekindled - not only in the hearts of the citizens of Darwin - for 'the flagging hopes of the half-dozen people … engaged in agriculture' were also 'revived'.\(^4\) The year 1911 witnessed both the Commonwealth Scientific Expedition and that of Captain Barclay, whose expedition was still something of a mystery even to Mitchell as Acting Administrator.

The Territory and adjacent islands had been transferred to the Commonwealth from January 1911 by the Northern Territory Acceptance Act of 1910 and placed under the Department of External Affairs, thus effectively relegating the region to absolute colonial status. Thus Australians living in the Territory were deprived of the political representation that they had ostensibly enjoyed since 1863 when they were able to vote in South Australian elections, and further enabled them to vote for both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament in 1901 after Federation. Citizens of the Territory now had the same status as those in the protectorate of Papua, putting an unwarranted separation between Territory settlers and their administration. This was to have future effect.

The laws of South Australia, applicable to the Territory at transfer, were to continue in force until altered or repealed, by or under any law of the Commonwealth. The Northern Territory (Administration) Act provided for an Administrator, who would administer the Territory on behalf of the Australian Government, and was appointed by the Governor-General and subject to instructions by the appropriate Minister. The agreement of transfer also included the stipulation that:

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\text{The Commonwealth shall construct or cause to be constructed a railway line from Port Darwin southwards to a point on the northern boundary of South Australia proper " (clause 1 (b) ), and " construct or cause to be constructed as part of the Transcontinental Railway a railway from a point on the Port Augusta Railway to connect with the other part of the} \]

\(^3\) NTAR 1911, p. 1.
\(^4\) NTAR 1911, p.1.
Transcontinental Railway at a point on the northern boundary of South Australia proper (clause 1 (d) )-vide Appendix H.5

The demand for the transcontinental railway was not welcomed by many outside South Australia or the Territory. The Melbourne Age used Gregory's description in The Dead Heart of Australia to declare that the region's potential was limited,6 and that 'the line would be a perpetual drain upon the national exchequer'. The nation's defence, it said, was dependent upon 'filling it with white Australians' and not with the crossing of 'a thousand miles and more of uninhabited wilderness'. This, it said, was 'sheer absurdity' - instead 'we must people it, and people it without delay'.7

Initially, with its 'can do' management, the existing Northern Territory railway continued to work in easygoing relationship with the new government, providing the one essential link in the 'Top End' capable of moving goods with some degree of efficiency. Its rolling stock might have been old and run down, but still it managed to provide the new administration with logistical support, at little or no cost, until the Commonwealth Railway Department, now a separate body which acted independently of the local administration, put a stop to free travel for government servants and goods, causing some unnecessary dissension.8

Defence had been considered essential to any rationale for federal control of the north since the turn of the century. As the new century progressed so did the expectation of war increase. By 1911 a conflict of world dimensions seemed inevitable and to counter a perceivable threat in the north became important. Following his visit to Darwin, Lord Kitchener, whose appraisal on defence had been national in scope, had furnished particular recommendations in his report on northern requirements. These included the

6 JW (John Walter) Gregory. The dead heart of Australia: a journey around Lake Eyre in the summer of 1901-1902, with some account of the Lake Eyre Basin and the flowing wells of central Australia. Facsimile ed. North Adelaide: Corkwood Press, 1997. John Gregory (1864-1932), Professor of Geology and Mineralogy at the University of Melbourne, made a sober appraisal of the inland region. He warned that even with expensive bore-sinking and irrigation, the region's potential for use was limited. Another inference that could be taken from this work was that there was a need somehow to resuscitate the centre.
7 The Age, 1 November 1907.
establishment of two batteries of 6 inch guns to control the harbour approaches and the removal of the rather futile defences on Thursday Island that had been set up in the latter years of the previous century.9 A cable guard of fifty local volunteers was inaugurated in 1912 to protect the telegraph cable and the town. Each volunteer was eligible to receive an 'efficiency grant' of £1 per annum and was issued with rifle, bayonet, ammunition, uniform and kit. A regular army instructor under the command of a captain provided military training with honorary rank in the Commonwealth Military Forces.10

11.1 An emergent strategy
Throughout 1911 detailed talks in both the Territory and Melbourne had been held between Acting Administrator Mitchell and the Minister to formulate future policy. All 'matters connected with the Territory' 11 were discussed. Consideration was given to the various reports on agriculture, communications (including railway development), ethnology (Aboriginal policy), veterinary matters, geological matters and medical health.12 The emphasis was to be placed upon advancing farm settlement and there was no shortage of advice on that subject.

The 1907 and 1908 reports of the South Australian Resident had listed a number of enterprises which were believed suited to the enterprising pioneer farmer.13 Herbert was a strong advocate for mixed farming and was quoted in the Adelaide Advertiser as believing it to be:

Preferable to pure tropical agriculture, as an industry giving scope with every assurance of success to the energies of the settlers ... it should particularly lend itself to families with some small capital and a reasonable amount of energy.14

10 NTAR 1911, p.1.
12 NTGRR 1907 and NTGRR 1908.
13 NTGRR 1907 and NTGRR 1908.
14 "The Northern Territory". Adelaide Advertiser, 7 August 1908.
Both in Australia and overseas, financial support had been a necessary adjunct to successful agricultural settlement, and almost every report by Government Residents in the lead-up to federal administration had advocated this as being no less essential for settlement in the Territory. The transfer of the Territory had removed the advantages that were expected to follow from the South Australian Advances to Settlers Act and, in 1911, Acting Administrator Mitchell stressed that attention be given to rectify this and also to make proper provision for experimental research work.\(^1\)

Mitchell agreed with Herbert on mixed farming and recommended some complementary enterprises that would be suited to the purpose. These included pig breeding, which he believed would be profitable - 'if freezing works were established ... [with] the necessary plant for bacon curing'.\(^2\) He considered that 'making ... hay and silage from native grasses would be easy' and would make dairying feasible - essential for the health of the urban population, especially near Darwin.\(^3\)

Mitchell listed a number of crops, which he understood to have shown some success.

> The most promising of the few crops [probably because best understood] are maize, paddy [rice], sisal hemp, tobacco, and cotton. The two former are capable of profitable cultivation by those acquainted with art of cultivation. Sisal hemp grows but the method of profitable treatment is not yet ascertained.\(^4\)

He suggested wheat farming as being certainly worth investigating in some depth:

> My investigations in India have given me more confidence than ever in the possibility of profitably growing wheat in the Territory .... This, however, must be preceded and accompanied by experiments, conducted by persons equipped with high scientific, and technical education, and endowed with enthusiasm and determination.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) NTAR 1907, p.1.
\(^2\) NTAR 1911, p.5.
\(^3\) NTAR 1911, p.5.
\(^4\) NTAR 1911, p.5.
\(^5\) NTAR 1911, p.5.
Mitchell had obtained the wheat seed from the Fusa Agricultural Research Institute of India and therefore reliable for testing in the Territory, but he stressed the great difficulty he had experienced in finding people with which to entrust the experiments. Amongst the few whom he had recruited were Giles at Pine Creek, Svenson at the Adelaide River, and the police corporal at Borroloola. Even though the 'small quantity of seed' he had managed to obtain reached the experimenters only when the 'the rain had entirely ceased', and sowing had therefore been late, yet by the end of August:

samples of good wheat, and one of oats grown thus by Corporal Stott [was] forwarded ... to the Department of External Affairs ... [and] the experiment showed that Borroloola itself has proved the possibility of cereal growing there ... Mr. Svenson's operations also proved remarkably successful, as evidenced by the samples sent in by him. Mr Giles' sample also indicated that wheat could he also successfully grown at Pine Creek. 20

From these small trials Mitchell was satisfied that with suitably selected seed these areas might support 'a large and important industry'. The 'trials' were hardly scientific, nor rigorous enough to support Mitchell's contention, but they are indicative of the desperation of an intelligent man with few resources, faced with the duty of persuading government to act.

He did not leave it at that but, on his own initiative, he encouraged station owners and others to carry out further trials in cooperation with the police. Following police 'success' in wheat trials these were later extended. At the Katherine, the officer in charge was instructed to take over the earlier trial area for further experimentation and was supplied seed, implements and harness. At Anthony's Lagoon, the police were again roped in to conduct trials on fodder crops. Fencing equipment, implements and various seeds were supplied and a contractor engaged to fence the police paddock of four square miles for the purpose. At Roper Bar, he had proposed an irrigation plant on the river under their supervision, and at Borroloola earlier police 'experiments' were to be extended, so it was hoped that there would soon be 'a fairly large experimental station in the district'. 21 He

20 NTAR 1911, p. 4.
21 NTAR 1911; NTAR 1912, pp. 10-11, 31.
may have believed that involvement of police in these 'experimental trials' should have clearly demonstrated to the minister the constraints under which his administration had to operate.

These discussions and reports were useful supplements to the reconnaissance of the Commonwealth's chosen experts, and government should have been well aware of the issues to be able to construct sound policy. Following the advice tendered, a broad strategy emerged for settlement and development with two essential and interrelated objectives. The first was to induce practical farmers to come to the Territory. The second was to provide them with focused 'extension', emanating from strategically placed research farms engaging specifically in research of a practical nature. Immediate outcomes were compromised, however, because key research farms were established in haste, organised on an ad hoc basis and with less than subtle changes to the specific emphases contained in Campbells's report.

The most recent of the South Australian regulations on land tenure were also ratified, but it was left to a newly appointed Director of Lands to rationalise what Mitchell had described as 'the present want of system'. Similarly, instead of finding ways of providing financial support for settlers, the emphasis was placed on attracting 'agriculturists with capital'. In accordance with a directive of February 1911, an edited version of a 1905 document, intended to be seductive, was reissued. It had originally been prepared as a general document to attract migrants to Australia, but now was given specific reference to the Territory. Annotations on the document, contained in ministry correspondence, directed the desired emphasis:

Australia (NT) desires immigrants, and welcomes to her shores all persons of white race who are prepared to make their homes in the Commonwealth (NT) ... If persons desirous of entering the Commonwealth (NT) are of white race, of good health, and are not under contract to perform manual labour, no restrictions or conditions whatever are applied to them.

Any Collector of Customs will give any information desired in particular cases, and communications addressed to the Department of External Affairs, Melbourne, which is charged with the administration of the immigration laws, will always receive a prompt reply.
The Federal Government is anxious to assist every movement that tends to promote the introduction of suitable settlers. Information as to the specific opportunities afforded can be obtained on application to the Governments in Australia or at their respective Agents in London.

Reduced fares to Australia, reception on arrival, free visits of inspection, financial assistance to approved settlers, are among the inducements offered. The class of men most desired is that comprising agriculturists with capital, though all able-bodied men willing to work on the land are accepted. The Commonwealth is not prepared to receive the idle, thriftless, or vicious, but her immigration administration impose no obstacle to any additions to the ranks of Australian workers of energetic, hardworking, and sober citizens.22

11.2 Premature Implementation
Campbell's report would seem to have validated Herbert's and Mitchell's recommendations and should have been sound grist for the mill in Melbourne but, as Burns noted, 'the plans of mice and men ait gang agley'. Not only were only two experimental farms set up instead of the three as proposed by Campbell - no attempt was made to develop an experimental farm on the Katherine - but they were apparently begun with more enthusiasm, less attention to detail and greater speed than was either prudent or necessary. This can only be construed as a major error of judgement and is the root cause of their failure. Gilruth, arriving in Darwin as Administrator only later on in the April of 1912, found the demonstration farms already a fait accompli.23 He was to record later that the undertaking had been far too ambitious at that stage but the damage had been done. As he put it:

It would have been better policy to have instituted only one farm at a time. On my arrival in the Territory I felt this to be so ... but I could not recommend the abandonment of one or the other.24

11.2.1 The Batchelor Demonstration Farm
WH Clarke, Director of Agriculture,25 landed in Darwin on 13 January 1912 and with him came the Veterinary Officer and the managers for the Daly River and Batchelor

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23 NTAR 1916-17, p.10.
24 NTAR 1915, p.10.
experimental farms. Clarke, who was to resign within two years to take up a more 'suitable position' in Customs, recorded that he began departmental operations before the end of that very month 'on the 29th idem (sic)'.

According to his first report on Agriculture for 1912, the newly appointed director discovered that he had a 'virgin field to work on'. This report is an impressive document of some 24 000 words, elegantly written and complete with a selection of photographs of farm horses, crops in early growth and such like. It makes interesting reading but, on closer analysis, it seems to exemplify Bauer's classic formula for failure in the Territory - (1) abysmal ignorance of the physical nature of the country; (2) political expediency; and (3) the nature of the men making the settlement.

After a lengthy historical preamble, Clarke related that no time was wasted:

In January, 1912, accompanied by Mr C.N. Wooley, manager of the demonstration farm, Batchelor and twelve men, I started out for the Territory, reaching Darwin on the 29th January, and on the 31st idem proceeded to the site of the proposed farm.

With little or no attention to Campbell's warning on the importance of water supply, he immediately set to and 'for the sake of convenience' set up the farm's homestead, quarters and stables in an area with no readily available water supply. At first some was obtained from a shallow well but this soon dried up, with the inevitable result that:

from April to nearly the end of the year we have had to cart water daily a distance of about one mile from a permanent spring for domestic use, and to have water hauled from the Adelaide and Darwin Rivers for the use of the traction engine.

Research has been unable to uncover any further biographical detail on WH Clarke. He has no record as a scientist, nor does he rate a mention in the Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography.

NTAR 1914-15, p. 5.

NTAR 1913 - Director of Agriculture's Report of the Department of Agriculture for 1912, p.15.

NTAR 1913, p.17.

NTAR 1913, p.17.

NTAR 1913, p.20.
According to Clarke, life was not easy down on the farm, but by late March some twenty acres (8 hectares) had been cleared and 'ploughed by a single mould board plough pulled by 'six light and weak horses'. This he described, with some understatement, as an exercise that was 'exceedingly difficult'. From this first ploughing only some ten acres (4 hectares), or perhaps less, seem to have been put down to crops and the results were pitiful (Table 19).

Table 19
Crop Results on Batchelor Demonstration Farm (1912)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Date planted/sown</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>13 March</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>23 March</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>25 March</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>cut green as fodder in May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>1 April</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucerne</td>
<td>4 April</td>
<td>strip of 100 yds</td>
<td>nodulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>10 April</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>cut for fodder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>no germination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thereafter, other sowings were tried throughout every month of the year. During the dry season from May to September there was no germination at all, and with the onset of the wet every crop was overcome by weeds. But rising above his disappointment, the director noted with some satisfaction that:

Mrs Woolley, the wife of the manager of the farm, has since her arrival in June last, grown all sorts of vegetables in any odd spot she could find, and has invariably had successful results. The thanks of the Department are due to Mrs Woolley for her great assistance in this direction.

Now well into his stride, the director went on to say that 'the conditions of districts similar to the Batchelor Farm are eminently favourable for dairy cattle', and

31 NTAR 1913, p.20.
32 NTAR 1913, p.21.
33 NTAR 1913, p.23.
recommended that no less than 500 dairy heifers be purchased for a dairy factory equipped with refrigeration. He proposed to set this up on the Daly River, 'provided only that a suitable vessel to navigate the Daly River [be procured] ... for the cool carriage of butter down the river [to Darwin].' This grandiose plan was based on the observation that Mrs Wooley 'has had no difficulty in making butter daily since her arrival at the farm in June last' 34 from a dairy herd, consisting of six cows and two calves, at Batchelor. 35

Figure 6
The good work of Mrs Woolley

Sourced: Report of WH Clarke, Director of Agriculture, NTAR, 1912.

The Russians, Vladimerrow and Illin, visited the Batchelor farm in March and again in early May of 1912. Their expedition had the specific object of advising prospective

34 NTAR 1913, p.24.
Russian emigrants. They were not impressed, and it seems that Batchelor was already well on the way to becoming the 'subject of ridicule for practical farmers' that Campbell had warned against. As Illin put it, 'generally speaking we wasted our time visiting'.

Writing to the minister on his return to Sydney in September 1912, he said that it would be inadvisable to send any Russians to work at Batchelor, because it was 'a horrible dreadful place, worst I have seen in the Territory. It is certain no man can stand it ... it is in your hands to remedy it'. He then went on to say that he believed that matters at Batchelor were so bad that they were beyond redemption. The Daly River demonstration farm was better run and he inferred that he would advise his compatriots accordingly.

After spending two days on the farm Professor Vladimerrow made special reference to the quality of the food supplied to the workers on the Batchelor farm, 'I was surprised at the food the workmen have here; it was only tinned fish served cold without potatoes or other vegetables'. He advised the minister that these men would be unable to remain healthy for long if their rations were not improved. Official records appear to justify his observation. In the first year alone, 12 men had to be admitted to Darwin Hospital suffering from various complaints, their condition exacerbated by poor living conditions, 'there is no running water, and the water in the well is not good, neither is it sufficient'. According to the Russians the horses were in equally bad condition:

On Batchelor Demonstration Farm ... there are two stallions, five cows, about forty sheep. The last named I am afraid will not do well ... The horses I have seen are the poorest I have ever met in the Territory. I asked the men if they were fed, and they said, "no not now, or very little".

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37 "Correspondence to Department of External Affairs 9/9/1912 and Correspondence from the Department of 18/9/12." In National Archives of Australia, CRS E153/1, Item 2, CA 8248. Canberra, 1912.
39 NTAR 1913, p. 31.
41 Illin, p. 38.
Illin and Vladimerrow both questioned why the group of federal politicians inspecting the Territory at the same time had been effectively prevented from having access to the Daly and Adelaide River settlers whose farms were so much more worth seeing. On the Batchelor Farm, they said:

there is nothing to see, and even the horses used to take the Federal Government Party from the railway line to the Government Farm were hired from Messrs. W. Milton and Thomas Flint (railway ganger), the farm horses being in a woefully poor condition. But I believe the inscription the Federal Party saw in big letters "Batchelor Experimental Farm" made a very good impression and filled their hearts with hopes.

Their advice was well intentioned, but whatever was thought of this Russian bombshell, they received a polite reply from the minister to assure them that 'since you were at this farm the conditions have greatly improved'. Copies of both the Illin and Vladimerrow reports, together with Illin's letter to the minister of 9 September 1912, were sent to Darwin by Permanent Secretary Atlee Hunt on the same day. It was plain for those with eyes to see that matters had now gone badly wrong at Batchelor. This only added to Gilruth's concerns. As farmer's son and veterinarian he would have been aware of the same organisational shortcomings, and as a scientist and administrator, able to extract the import of reports, he would have known that Campbell's specific instructions had been ignored.

Campbell's recommendations for the proper siting of the farm headquarters in relation to water supply had been disregarded by Clarke 'for the sake of convenience', and the water had to be brought by rail 'in leaking tanks, much of it being lost'. From a study of the evidence available, from extant maps, on-site investigation and existing records, it is clear that Campbell intended the headquarters to be sited at, or in close proximity to, the

42 Illin, pp. 53, 57, 60-61, 63-68, 87.
43 Illin, p. 64.
44 Illin, pp. 88, 89.
45 "Correspondence to Department of External Affairs 9/9/1912 and Correspondence from the Department of 18/9/12." In National Archives of Australia, CRS E153/1, item 2, CA 8248, Canberra, 1912.
46 NTAR 1913, p.15; NTAR 1914, p.17. Manager's Report, Batchelor Farm. The later report tells of water being eventually found by boring and 'a complete water scheme installed', but this was already too late for the Demonstration Farms.
only permanent water supply available. This was mapped by Goyder's survey team in 1879 and marked, 'Water Reserve'.

Campbell's recommendation that approximately half of the area should be resumed from Glyde's plantation, some 1 020 acres (413 hectares) previously known as Poett's plantation, but the area actually selected 'with the exception of one small patch of a few acres abandoned about 1890 was in virgin condition'. This would also have been evident to Gilruth and it is reasonable to assume that he hoped that these mistakes might have been rectified in time, if farm staff sufficiently expert in all practical aspects of farming could be engaged.

During its first two years, however, the turnover of farm staff was horrific. In the first year alone over sixty-three farm workers were engaged and forty had left within a few months of arrival. The second year saw thirty-four men engaged by June and only eleven of these were there a few months later. This labour turnover was excused by characterising the men as 'irresponsible and casual labour'. One of the main preoccupations at Batchelor seems to have been unnecessary fencing. Fourteen hundred acres (567 hectares) of country were subdivided into 23 paddocks but it was only by hiring contractors that this was achieved. The manager's house at Batchelor was reckoned the best in the Northern Territory at the time. It had cost £1 150, a very large sum for those days, but apart from this 'superior' residence the other buildings erected could never be regarded as permanent structures. Later in January 1914, the staff at Batchelor was reduced to four Europeans and by 1917 only Aboriginal workers remained. When Staniforth Smith evaluated the Batchelor farm for disposal in 1919, he appraised all farm buildings, other than the manager's house, as 12 tons of corrugated

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47 See Chapter 10 above, p. 187.
49 NTAR 1912, p.17.
50 NTAR 1912, pp. 28-29.
51 NTAR 1912, p. 30.
54 NTAR 1916 - 1917, p.10.
iron. However, Gilruth's Director of Agriculture, not appointed by him, presented annual progress reports that belied the facts.

Some interpretation is required. Work on establishing the Batchelor farm may have begun under difficult circumstances, but according to Clarke:

> Our operations have all been greatly impeded by lack of sufficient horses or other means of farm traction. Our big traction engine proved to be unable to haul the full set of four furrow disc ploughs ... even when the furrows were reduced to twelve ... The best cultural work that has been done ... during the year, has been by a single disc plough, drawn by three - and in some cases - four horses.  

From Clarke's own description the implement was not a disc plough. It was in fact more properly known as a disc harrow. He described it as having forty-eight discs, which was the number of discs on an implement only used in secondary cultivation to produce the 'tilth' immediately prior to sowing. It was not designed for initial plough work and was certainly totally unsuited for ploughing 'virgin land'.

Before weed killers were used in the early 1950s, weed control was dependent on the skill of cultivation. Especially on newly cleared land, if the ploughing was not to be followed by a fallow season, the efficiency with which the initial ploughing was done was critical. At Batchelor the crops were sown immediately, without fallow, and after a very poor first ploughing. As any experienced farmer would have known, resultant failure was inevitable. All else being equal, soil type, moisture retention and nutrient status of the soil, the yield of any subsequent crop depends entirely upon growth that is unimpaired by weed competition and grass re-growth.

At Batchelor, we are told that crop failure was due to weed competition and grass re-growth. Good, well-finished work in the first ploughing would have made the difference between reasonable yield and total failure, but good ploughing with horses was

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56 NTAR 1912, p.22.
57 NTAR 1912, p.22.
58 NTAR 1912, p.21.
entirely dependent on the skill of the ploughman and the power exerted by his horses. The former needed both intelligence and experience to set the plough efficiently, while the latter required well-fed horses and generally they needed supplementary rations.

The 1912 report contains some photographs of the Batchelor establishment and the horses there depicted Figures (7, 8,9) look powerful enough to undertake any work that might be expected of them, provided only that they were handled with requisite skill and fed adequate rations. Clarke excused poor ploughing, because 'six very poor and weak horses' were needed to pull a single furrow plough. His words demonstrate a deficiency in the requisite knowledge and practical expertise required of the Director of Agriculture, specific to the Northern Territory of the time. Clarke did not realise that he was out of his depth. If the breaking in of new land could not be done properly at first, he should have insisted on delay until adequate resources, both human and animal, were available.

Figure 7
Four Clydesdale horses at Batchelor Farm in 1912

Sourced: Report of WH Clarke, Director of Agriculture, NTAR 1912.
It was with good reason in those days that the ploughman was described as the 'aristocrat of farm workers', with the horse as equal partner - requiring skill, intelligence, strength and staying power in equal measure. It is instructive to compare Clarke's failure at Batchelor with the relative success on the Daly River demonstration farm, where managers were left more or less to get on with the detail of the job themselves with little interference, and with Owston's success some thirty years before under similar circumstances.

Figure 8
5 plough horses (mares) at Batchelor Demonstration farm 1912

Owston, like Clarke, was unable to find suitable horses or skilled men in the Territory but, unlike Clarke, he brought in his own men and horses and knew how to manage them. Like Clarke, he began operations in February on virgin land, yet in less than 14 months,
with seven men and himself he cleared some 200 acres, ploughed, sowed and reaped crops that to all accounts were remarkable in both quantity and quality. 59

At Batchelor the story was quite different. Here we are told that ploughing was done by a single furrow plough by the end of March. Clarke excused the generally poor plough work done on the farm by declaring that 'the draught horse, as it is known to the southern farmer, does not exist in the Territory', on evidence that was neither strictly speaking true nor was it adequate excuse for subsequent events. There was great variety in the way horses were deployed or yoked, dependent on the work. Generally two horses, sometimes three, were harnessed side by side to pull the single furrow plough. Each horse had its individual talent - the one in the furrow had to learn to walk with all four feet in line, while the 'land' horse walked normally. The strength and character of horses was a variable so that care was necessary to ensure that each horse exerted equal force to the plough.

How this was done depended on the ploughman's skill in ensuring that one horse did not pull in front of the other. This he did by fastening bands from the top of the 'haimes' on the horse's collar to the other's bit. The 'haimes' were two curved pieces of metal round each horse's collar and, with proper skill exercised in 'tying in', the horses worked well together even when horses of equal power were not matched. The mould board plough was a precision instrument, taking out a twelve-inch wide furrow on each turn across a field, and it was reckoned that a good team ploughed an acre a day. The ploughman had to know how to set his plough to a nicety. This involved adjusting for correct depth and efficiency in draught. The 'coulter' and 'skimmer' had to be adjusted so that as the furrow was inverted all surface cover was buried below with not a whisker left to show above the surface, otherwise grass and weeds would quickly re-emerge to dominate the following crop.

The knowledge required to set the plough and match his horses was not the end of the ploughman's skill for he had to calculate the setting out of the paddock, a variable,

dependent upon its dimensions. The first furrows 'drawn' were the crucial ones. Using sighting poles, these had to be drawn absolutely straight and set accurately so that as ploughing progressed each 'rig' precisely butted with the next. Not only that but techniques using the mould board plough varied according to the crop for which the land was being prepared, for crop rotation was also important in weed control. This dictated how the 'head land' was to be thrown. It was ploughed after the main body of the field and the furrow was turned outwards for cereals that were sown to the very edge. Root crops, on the other hand, requiring inter row cultivation throughout their growing period, were planted 26 inches (0.66 metres) away from the boundary, therefore the 'head land' had to be turned inwards to allow room for the subsequent weeding cultivation.

Ploughing was not a simple process and the picture of a single furrow plough pulled by 'six very poor and weak horses', as described by Clarke, on what was supposed to be a showpiece of best practice almost beggars belief. Clarke seemed to realise nothing of this, and blamed failure on a lack of suitable horses or sufficient power in the farm's traction engine. He illustrated his 'difficulties', by saying that in the Territory it was not uncommon to see as many as twenty-five horses yoked in a team unable to pull five-ton load. Attempting to sweeten the pill with a touch of humour, he said 'when one approaches the camp of an ordinary teamster on the road, the mob of horses, presents the appearance of a horse sale.' This was not an excuse worthy of the Director of Agriculture. It is a sad reflection on government priorities that the federal party of politicians was not able to visit the settler farms described by Illin and Vladimerrow. Had they done so they might have been able to make appropriate recommendation to have railway freight rates lowered to a more reasonable level. In the event the federal party did not see the farmers and nothing was done to ameliorate their plight. Sadly it appears that within a few years all of these skilled farmers had failed.

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60 As well as my own personal experience from personal communication with expert horse ploughmen, including farming relatives, and from well known and respected Northern Territory pastoralist and farmer Paul Vandeleur.  
61 NTAR 1912, p. 23.  
62 Illin, pp. 28-37.
Under the aegis of Clarke, and throughout the short period during which 'demonstration' operations at both Batchelor and the Daly continued, turnover in managers was equally high. It is difficult in the circumstances to evaluate the individual manager's expertise, but some at least left much to be desired. In 1913 a manager at Batchelor poisoned all the dairy cattle that had been brought at great expense from Queensland, by liberally covering them in undiluted dip. Most of the Batchelor managers under Clarke as director did not seem to have any real knowledge of either crop or animal husbandry.

Sourced: Report of WH Clarke, Director of Agriculture, NTAR 1912.

FH Bauer. Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, pp. 299-231.

NTAR 1912 to 1918. See various managers' reports and comments on same by Administrator and Director of Agriculture.

NTAR 1913, p. 6. For Jepson's account of the same incident which somehow tries to justify the manager by placing the blame on Gilruth for not instructing him on how to do his job, see also HI Jensen, "The Darwin Rebellions." Labour History, 11 November (1966).
Gilruth, no doubt with some relief, accepted Clarke's resignation in 1913, noting only that
he had 'secured a responsible position in the Department of Trade and Customs'.

The Department of Agriculture under Clarke had fundamentally undermined the
credibility of Batchelor as a demonstration farm so seriously that it could not be
recovered despite all later attempts, compromised additionally by government stipulation
that it must pay for itself, so that it was never properly established. The first year's
operational expenditure alone amounted to some £24 000 and it was estimated that it cost
some £1 500 annually until finally wound up in 1919. Income over the period from its
production had amounted to virtually nothing and the total value of its realizable assets at
the end came to a mere £7 248.

11.2.2 The Daly River Demonstration Farm
The Daly River was much harder to reach than Batchelor and maybe because of this the
farm there was able to show much better progress. JT Ramsay, the first manager, arrived
in Darwin on 4 March 1912, 'with extensive working plant and five men', but was unable
to reach its 1 560 acres (631 hectares) until May 1912, with only two men and no horses.
According to Clarke, this was due to various mishaps. In Illin's account, however,
departmental ignorance and sheer mismanagement had caused the delay. When at last
Ramsay was able to reach the farm, he found that he had to wait a further two months
before being supplied with his full work team. Nonetheless, he and his wife with
basically only two men cleared some forty acres (16 hectares), erected 1.5 miles (2.41
km) of fencing, constructed various storage sheds, installed an irrigation pump, built a
landing stage with a small tramway for handling supplies and ordered a good supply of
various fruit trees within the next few months. All this time they had lived under canvas
until, exhausted by his efforts, he requested sick leave in October before finally resigning.
He received no credit for what he had achieved and was actually condemned by Clarke.

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68 NTAR 1912, p.25.
69 NTAR 1912, pp. 29,30. Between July and October Ramsey's workforce was increased by an additional
9 men.
In the director's words, Ramsay had failed 'to adapt himself to the conditions of pioneering.'

**Figure 10**

Maize crop at the Daly River Demonstration farm 1912

The contrast on the Daly with the failure at Batchelor was marked. Crops grew (Figure 10) and there was never any problem with their working horses. Palmer, perhaps tongue in cheek, noted that the horses had done well, without displaying any of 'the depressed appearance' attributed 'to the humidity of the climate' at Batchelor, and had worked well without apparent effort 'when fed crushed maize.'

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71 NTAR 1912, p. 27.
72 NTAR 1912, p. 27.
Conclusion
Distance management, with its failure to seek local advice, or even to consider input from Gilruth, who had some expertise and practical experience, and the appointment as Director of Agriculture of a man whose practical inadequacy should have been recognised had a disastrous outcome.

The publicity given by the federal government to attract farmers had been justified in the immediate euphoria of acquisition, and the 'Experimental Farms' had been intended as natural focal points, to provide examples of best practice to the expected influx of farmers. Batchelor, with its ease of access by rail, might have become, as intended, an initial showpiece for Territory agriculture. The failure to establish it in those first two critical years prior to the war was serious and, arguably, was probably negative in effect, at the very least.

Bauer states that within two years 32 leases, totaling some 42 000 acres (16 997 hectares), had been taken up in the Daly River and Stapleton districts. Few of these lessees ever took up residence, however, even when the land was offered for lease rent-free for the first twenty-one years, or for the life of the settler, whichever was the shorter. The evidence does not show that any farmer, let alone 'agriculturists with capital', from overseas or from southern states succumbed to these blandishments of the federal government. Gilruth's reports record only that by 1913 some 300 applicants from different parts of Australia had been interviewed. Few had any knowledge of agriculture and those that did had been welcomed with open arms and immediately given land. To a man, dissatisfied with what they saw, they had refused and left within a few days of their arrival.

Many commentators, including Staniforth Smith, seem to have laid blame for the failure of the Batchelor Farm upon Gilruth. The record is not all that clear, but it is certain that when Clarke resigned, Territory agriculture was left much as he had found it, 'a virgin field to work on'.

73 Bauer, p. 299. From information obtained from Lands Department Files in Darwin.
74 NTAR 1912, p. 8.
75 NTAR 1914-15, p. 8.
Chapter 12

John Anderson Gilruth, Administrator (1912 -1919)
Chapter 12

John Anderson Gilruth, Administrator (1912 -1919)

Summary
Gilruth, welcomed in Darwin as new federal administrator, was soon disabused of his position. Almost immediately he became engaged in a 'turf war' with Commonwealth public service mandarins in Melbourne and his administration was soon compromised. He also found himself in the centre of union unrest. This undermined his efforts to establish a viable meat packaging industry with Vestey's. His mission ended in ignominy and he was hustled out of the Territory in February 1919. The effect of his tenure was to reverberate in the Northern Territory for many years. Darwin welcomed him on Tuesday 16 April 1912 with as much pomp and ceremony as the tired town could muster. Its former name Palmerston was officially discarded and from henceforth it was to be known as Darwin.

Arthur Bryant's comment on Samuel Pepys' plans for reform of the Royal Navy in the late seventeenth century, if applied to Gilruth, might be regarded as apposite:

[His] plans, like other men's were at the mercy of his fellow mortals' folly. Great events, moved by causes which he could not control, were about to sweep his schemes into dusty pigeon-holes and his name for awhile, into limbo.

On taking office, everyone, including Gilruth, believed that a Commonwealth-led development would now lead to an era of prosperity. Within a few months, however, circumstances were such that his high hopes turned to sand and fell through his fingers, and the indications are that he soon became quite despondent. Soon after his arrival he received a copy of the Vladimerrow and Illin reports, with their dire warnings on the mismanagement evident at Batchelor.

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As a farmer's son he was quite capable of seeing it for himself, and his initial report was to end on a sombre note:

many difficulties in the realization of our hopes will have to be faced, some known and many unknown, ... such difficulties can only be removed by scientific knowledge, by persistent effort, and by undaunted courage. I have not thought to dwell on them in this report, for they have already received undue prominence in the writings of others, a prominence which in no way tends to their removal, but the very reverse.3

Born in 1871, he was no aristocrat as Alcorta has implied.4 He was the second son of a solid Scottish tenant farmer and his potential had earmarked him at an early age for an academic career. He entered Veterinary College in Glasgow at eighteen and took the medals in Anatomy and Botany. Later he studied at the Pasteur Institute and by the age of twenty-nine was Chief Veterinarian and Government Bacteriologist for New Zealand. Within three years of that appointment, he had improved meat inspection procedures there and served as a member of the New Zealand Royal Commission into Public Health, becoming in 1902 Pathologist to the New Zealand Health Department. He was granted honorary membership of the British Medical Association and in 1907 became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. While still in the employ of New Zealand, the South African Government offered him a lucrative post, which was blocked by his employers, who did not want to lose him. He left New Zealand to accept the Chair of Veterinary Science at the University of Melbourne and in 1911, as a member of the Scientific Mission, he accompanied Sir Baldwin Spencer to the Northern Territory. Its success resulted in his appointment as the Territory's first Administrator under Commonwealth Government.

Gilruth's experiences on Spencer's Scientific Mission had impressed him with the region's 'economic potential for mining, agriculture and livestock production' and he accepted the

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position with alacrity, only to find that for the first time in his life he had made a wrong career choice. Gilruth, as both scientist and practical planner, took a logical line of approach to tactical implementation of the broad strategies that he had discussed in Melbourne with the minister (see Chapter 11).

As a priority, he attempted to establish an efficient public service and he assumed that with sufficient incentive skilled agricultural families would soon come. If good educational facilities were provided for the children of migrants, he believed that rural families from southern Europe would be more suited to the climatic conditions and that they would be able to become permanently established within a generation. To sustain sound agricultural economic growth, constructive professional 'extension', as outlined by Campbell, was essential. This rationale was premised upon the proper allocation of relatively high initial expenditure as a necessary prerequisite for development, in line with his early discussions in Melbourne:

That GREAT EXPENDITURE OF CAPITAL is a sine qua non for the development of the Territory, irrespective of the class of labour employed or the nature of the industry, whether mining, pastoral or agricultural. The past history is marked by the absence of such expenditure.

Within the Territory he believed that he had been given 'definite local control' to implement these plans on behalf of the Commonwealth but by 1915, as he sadly expressed it, this had become and 'virtually remained a dead letter'.

12.1 A situation compromised
The step by step approach was evidently neither understood nor favoured by the bureaucrats in Melbourne, who seemed to have expected that they were in the driving seat, that everything would happen overnight and that suitable British migrants would somehow come. The evidence of the differences in concept and emphasis is in the

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5 JA Gilruth, "Letter of 12/7/1912 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, p.2." National Archives of Australia, Department of Transport and Regional Transport, Central Office CRS E1531/1, Item 2, CA 8248. Canberra, 1912.


7 NTAR 1914-15, p. 5.
correspondence that flowed between Darwin and Melbourne. Difficulties in communication exacerbated matters, leading to serious misunderstandings.

Given primitive conditions in the Territory, the establishment of a permanent cadre of professional public servants, comfortable with the terms of their employment, presented Gilruth with his first major challenge. There had been an 'entire absence of information required in certain directions and there were no proper records in the Government Secretary's Office upon which to base any classification', and Gilruth attempted to develop a 'Classification of the Service' by requesting 'an officer experienced in public service matters' to prepare a draft proposal. This was completed by 5 July 1912 and forwarded to Melbourne for ministerial approval on 15 July 1912.8

The document was comprehensive, recommending the officers required immediately and their duties. It highlighted salaries needed to clearly differentiate between Northern Territory rates and those of other states. Salaries for both the Clerical and Professional Divisions and the General Division should be some 25% higher on average, and provision made 'to compensate for higher cost of living and extreme climatic conditions'. Annual or biennial increases should be allowed for, if circumstances warranted. Allowances should be discouraged but subsidized rental and free medical care should be factored in. Other issues covered included regulations for 'Unclassified Service' and arrangements for 'periodical interchange' within the External Affairs Department, to broaden both the experience and perspective within the service overall. Also advocated was 'transfer from Territory Service to that of the Commonwealth' so that only 'officers of good training and experience were sent North'.9 The final paragraph of the submission

8 "Memorandum of 15/7/1912 to Department of External Affairs: Classification of NT Service: Department of Transport and Regional Transport, Central Office." National Archives of Australia, CRS E1531/1, CA 8248. Canberra, 1912. There is no signature on this document but the initials identify the writer as CPS, Inspector for Queensland. Subsequent information contained in this bundle of correspondence identifies the writer as Skewes of the Office of the Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner.

9 Memorandum of 15/7/1912, pp. 2-6. CRS E1531/1, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
made clear that any increase to the Draft Estimates would be minimal, representing only £38 over budget for existing staff, with a further £82 required to fill existing vacancies.\(^\text{10}\)

Melbourne did not act despite vexatious correspondence back and forth.\(^\text{11}\) In late 1912 or early January 1913, Gilruth forwarded written complaints which he had received from a deputation of officers and appended his own comment:

> I regret to report that I have received complaints from every class of employee engaged in the south, that conditions have not been made clear to them at your office. The publication of conditions of service will no doubt prevent any recurrence of this.\(^\text{12}\)

Following this, a memorandum from the Secretary to the Minister, Atlee Hunt, was received, ostensibly to clarify matters. At the very least, this response was singularly unhelpful. It was in effect an indictment of Gilruth's integrity. Its style was accusatory, punctuated by phrases such as - 'some misapprehension', 'the minister would like to be informed' and 'no suggestion'.\(^\text{13}\) Atlee Hunt's final paragraph referred only in passing to the proposed classification, which Gilruth had sent to the department for urgent consideration in July 1912 - some seven months earlier. It was a classic:

> On the whole the Minister thinks the [Public Service Classification] Report is a good one, and has no doubt that the bulk of [its] recommendations will be adopted.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{10}\) Memorandum of 15/7/1912, p. 25. CRS E1531/1, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

\(^\text{11}\) Telegram of 6/11/1912 from Gilruth to Atlee Hunt: Re decision required on Classification; Telegram of 11/11/1912 from Gilruth to Department of External Affairs (appointee unsuited); Telegram 12/11/1912 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (applicant appointed); Telegram 12/11/1912 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (appointee already leaving for Darwin); Telegram Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (re 11/11/1912, appointee's application); Letter 21/11/1912 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (re 6/11/1912 and 13/11/1912 - no ground for misunderstanding); Telegram of 25/11/1912 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (Officer was not misled); Letter 7/12/1912 Gilruth to Atlee Hunt (Officer repeats his allegation of being misled in Melbourne and seeks legal redress, Gilruth agrees that his expectation was reasonable); 14/12/1912 Atlee Hunt to Gilruth (Officer's application refused for increased salary on getting married?): CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

\(^\text{12}\) Memorandum of 20/1/1913 from Gilruth to Atlee Hunt: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

\(^\text{13}\) Memorandum of 21/2/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, pp. 1-2: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

\(^\text{14}\) Memorandum of 21/2/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, p.3. Department of Transport and Regional Transport, Central Office CRS E1531/1, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
No timeframe was indicated and the memorandum ended with words which had implications for the future:

As you have referred to something which appears like a definite promise on the part of the Minister which has remained unfulfilled, he would be glad to have a precise statement as when, where and under what circumstances that promise was made.\(^\text{15}\)

This would not have restored Gilruth's equanimity and now he had a problem on his hands with his Department of Agriculture, whose personnel had compromised the future of the important Batchelor Demonstration Farm.

On 28 June 1912 he had telegraphed the minister with his plans for the finance needed to settle 1000 settlers in 1913, provided that 'surveys can be accomplished and satisfactory organization arranged'. Two weeks later, on 12 July 1912, he expanded his proposal in a detailed six-page document.\(^\text{16}\) He began by pointing out that all states were currently in competition for suitable migrants. Some gave greater assistance than others:

It may be taken broadly that those countries [states] considered to be less desirable pay the most. For example I understand Victoria pays £6 per head and Queensland pays £12. Therefore unless we are prepared to offer assistance equal to Queensland we are not likely to have the best results.\(^\text{17}\)

He continued:

preponderance of opinion, albeit on insufficient evidence, being decidedly against the possibility ... it would seem that the southern countries of Europe should afford a satisfactory field for recruiting, and I am certain that if this field be worked the results will prove in every way beneficial both to the Territory and to Australia.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{15}\) Memorandum of 21/2/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, p.3.
\(^\text{16}\) Letter of 12/7/1912 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
\(^\text{17}\) Letter of 12/7/1912 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, p.2: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
Accordingly, his view was that a successful scheme for the Territory would require, in addition to assisted passages, a further allowance of £200 for each settler. This was needed to provide sufficient capital so that they might become securely established with housing, fencing and stock, sufficient to carry them through the first three years on their farms. He also needed funding for at least another ten survey parties to complete the surveys and funds to cover the costs of access roads and bridges. Aware that immediate costs would be high (Table 20) and that longer-term provision of capital would be required for education and healthcare for a growing community, he added:

> During the succeeding two years we trust, providing funds are available, to be able to settle a further two thousand farmers on the land each year. In other words by the end of 1915 to have cleared off the life free tenure leases.\(^\text{19}\)

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Passages</th>
<th>Advances</th>
<th>Survey, Advertising</th>
<th>Roads and Bridges</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<td>£200 000</td>
<td>£25 000</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>£40 000</td>
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<td>1915</td>
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*Derived and sourced: Letter 12/7/1912, Gilruth to Minister for External Affairs.*

Once more Gilruth received no immediate reply. Perhaps with a view to injecting some urgency, he wrote on 17 January 1913, drawing the minister's attention to a recent editorial in the *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* on 'the White Australian Problem', which reflected the 'consensus of medical opinion throughout the Empire'.

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\(^{19}\) Letter of 12/7/1912 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, p.2: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1912. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
This was that 'no white labourer can thrive in the region [tropical Australia] now, nor at any time in the future'.

The experiment of peopling a large area of the Tropics permanently with white people, is one of the most stupendous that has ever been attempted in the history of the world ... Authorities, such as Dr Cantlie, agree to that it is doomed to abject failure. Many, even here, after years of experience, believe the same.

While those who were better informed might know this argument to be spurious, unfortunately it added weight to the 'prejudices and the convictions of the public at large' against settlement of the Territory. Few Britons or Australians, he said, had yet been induced to come to the Territory. Those that had were 'single men without the steadying effects of their own womenfolk' and this, 'directly or indirectly, mentally and physically, exercises a powerful influence especially in the tropics'. Though this was often 'piously ignored', the effects were manifest, as indicated by the prevalence of venereal disease in the Territory, and:

I tremble to think of what is almost bound to happen to both white and aboriginal populations as a result of the advent of a large number of single men, whether as settlers or single men.

Gilruth stressed the point that permanent settlement could only be accomplished if settlers were 'accompained by their families and relations'. The prejudices against permanent white family settlement were difficult to overcome and the 'White Australia Policy' precluded non-whites from settlement. Therefore, at least in the initial stages, the only possible alternative lay in:

immigration of white families from the Southern parts of Europe (Gilruth's emphasis); in other words from well populated countries

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22 Letter of 17/1/1913 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, pp. 4, 5: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1913. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
23 Letter of 17/1/1913 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, pp. 4,5: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1913. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
possessing a climate as closely as possible resembling that of the Territory.24

He continued to press his argument for nine pages and ended with the heartfelt plea that was open to misunderstanding:

In conclusion, Sir, I trust you will pardon the length and insistency of this communication. The successful advancement of the Territory is probably more vital to me than any other individual, seeing that, without egotism, it may be said, I have relinquished most in the endeavour to further it.25

In contrast to his proposals on reforms to the public service, his ideas on inviting 'southern Europeans' to settle in the Territory received an answer almost by return, with a letter dated 21 January 1913. It was insultingly blunt and informed him, inter alia, of the minister's 'regrets' that Gilruth had taken such a 'despondent view ... of our own countrymen,' because:

Englishmen, Scotchmen and Irishmen in all parts of the world have accommodated themselves to strange surroundings and have overcome many grave difficulties without decreasing their stamina and capacity to work.26

Furthermore, continued Atlee Hunt, 'southern Europeans' had often proved to be rather disappointing immigrants:

So far as the Minister knows there has not been any extensive settlement of southern Europeans in Australia, and certainly none of an agricultural character. A good many Austrians and Italians have come to Western Australia ... and most of them prefer when they have amassed a little money to return to their own country. We have therefore no Australian experience to induce the belief that any class of Southern Europeans

24 Letter of 17/1/1913 from Gilruth to the Minister for External Affairs, p.5: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1913. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
26 Letter of 21/1/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, pp. 1,2: CRS E1531/1, Item 2, CA 8248. 1913. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
would be able and willing to supply a satisfactory permanent population
for the Northern Territory.27

More significantly, Gilruth was then informed that proposals for subsidized immigration
had been noted, but funds would not be 'forthcoming' until 'immigrants are shown to be
arriving'.28 Melbourne had missed the point entirely and the final barb came in the last
paragraph:

The Minister will be glad to have your views formed after fully
considering all the likely requirements in the way of public works,
including railways and freezing works that are likely to be launched this
year and next. As to 1st: the number and class of persons required
including railway and road labourers, artisans and incidental workers;
2nd: what arrangements can be made for their reception and
distribution.29

Government bureaucracy had demonstrated its dominance from the beginning. Sufficient
funds were never to be made available and difficulties were compounded for Gilruth
when the decision was made in early 1914 to 'adopt a policy of economy in regard to the
cost of administration of the Northern Territory'. The services of the Director of Lands,
the Superintendent of Railways, the Inspector of Schools and the Chief Protector of
Aborigines 'were dispensed with',30 and the demonstration farms, though far from being
established on any proper basis, were expected to pay for themselves.31

Gilruth accommodated himself to these changes by reorganising staff. He may even have
believed that a shake-up might enable some improvement. Later, some indication of a
change in government attitude towards migrants from southern Europe32 seemed to augur
better things. But, if that was so, he was soon disabused, for the advent of war

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National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
28 Letter of 21/1/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, p.3: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1913.
National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
29 Letter of 21/1/1913 from Atlee Hunt to Gilruth, p.4: CRS E1531/1531, Item 1532, CA 8248. 1913.
National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
31 NTAR 1913, 1914-1915. See Commonwealth Department of External Affairs, 5/6/1914, 27/6/1914,
18/4/1915, Letters to the Minister of External Affairs. See also, Memorandum from Atlee Hunt to
Gilruth, 19/5/1915, Series A431/1, Item 48/824, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
32 NTAR 1914-15, pp. 5, 7, 9,10. See also CDEA, 25/4/1914, Memorandum on conditions of employment
and settlement. National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
complicated issues even further. Many of his key men now volunteered\textsuperscript{33} and other factors were consequential, so that the war provided only a marginal and short-term boost to the Territory economy. Alcorta maintains simply that by 1915 the government's role had become quite ambiguous:

The truth of the matter was that Gilruth had been given increased administrative responsibilities without any real executive power and, perhaps more important, without increased finances. In effect, not for the first time, the Federal government was attempting to rid itself of its real responsibilities in the Territory. If things went well the minister and his government would get the credit. If they did not there was always Gilruth to blame.\textsuperscript{34}

Additionally, Gilruth soon enough found himself in the centre of a mare's nest of union infighting and social unrest.

12.1.1 The railway
From the very outset in 1911, the government in Melbourne had been advised that transport facilities both to and within the colony needed immediate attention and 'must be provided' between Darwin and the inland as well as to the southern states.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, there was dissatisfaction with the increase in steamship fares which were already high, and in general:

One of the causes of the want of permanent settlement here is the fearful cost of travel. ... Darwin can only become a great shipping place if the hinterland is made useful. Every effort should be made to link up the back country by mail routes and telegraphs.\textsuperscript{36}

From the first, Gilruth noted 'the great difficulties and cost of traveling and of transport of goods' and the impossible state of repair that existed on the few roads that could still be traced, for many had 'fallen into complete disuse' and were 'no longer passable':

\begin{quote}
It is hoped to improve matters by the establishment of motor haulage ... next dry season... It is my intention, should you approve, to place all
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} NTAR 1917.
\textsuperscript{34} Alcorta, pp. 35-37.
\textsuperscript{36} NTAR 1911, p.12.
Once more, obstacles and procrastination - some of which were of a practical nature - disappointed his hopes for the rapid development of an efficient railway system extending to the Katherine as well. The line itself was surveyed in 1913 but it was not until Tuesday 4 December 1917 that the 80 kilometre section from Pine Creek to Emungalan (on the western bank of the Katherine River) was officially opened (see Maps 7 & 8). Disorganisation and bad communication between the railway authorities and the


37 NTAR 1912, p.11.
administrator were evident. Eight days before the official opening date, the train which was supposed to inaugurate the service from Darwin was 'already at Pine Creek, its cowcatcher pointing towards the Katherine River', and Gilruth gave full vent to his frustrations:

[He] refused to participate in a formal railway opening ceremony. He also declined an invitation to be the railway's first passenger. The maiden journey was noteworthy in that not one senior Administration member or top Darwin railway official put in an appearance. 38

Map 8
1917 Railway extension Pine Creek to Emungalan
(new stations in block letters)


Royal Commission on railways for the Northern Territory was convened in March 1913. It was asked by Melbourne to give its findings by the end of that year, even before it had completed its full investigation, and therefore produced a rushed and premature report. It proposed continuing the main line to South Australia with spur lines to the Victoria River and the Barkly pastoral districts (Map 7). There were to be no spur lines, however, and

when the legislation was introduced in 1915 it only authorised an extension of some 220 kilometres from Pine Creek as far as Mataranka. Even this was delayed as there were hold-ups in shipping sleepers from Western Australia and difficulties in obtaining sufficient steel for the bridge over the Fergusson between Pine Creek and Emungalan and it was only in 1917 that the connection was made.

Concurrently in South Australia, surveys were completed for a line north from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs in accordance with the National Transcontinental Railway proposals of 190039 (Map 6). As the line from Emungalan to Mataranka was not completed, the possibility of closing the gap from north to south with relative ease was also frustrated.

Finally, to add insult to injury, the railway extension proved inefficient, slow and costly. The journey from Darwin to Emungalan had frequent stops en route and a compulsory overnight stop at Pine Creek. Long-suffering passengers then had the compulsory impost of the cost of accommodation at the government-owned hotel. The problem of efficiently transporting cattle from Emungalan to Vestey's meat works in Darwin was never properly solved.

12.1.2 Nelson, unions and social unrest
By 1911 socialism, as both a philosophy and a political movement, was well advanced. In the Darwin of the time there was little ground for mutual understanding between the 'bosses' on the one hand and the 'workers' on the other. Alcorta, who presents a fairly balanced view of both sides, has described the unfolding of events. In describing the opening scene, he says:

the ordinary people of Darwin ... were drunken and profane northern Europeans, industrious Chinese, Greeks, Patagonians, Syrians, Turks, Afghans, Italians and Japanese: a more kaleidoscopic selection of

39 "Summaries of the main Parliamentary papers on the Territory, and other reports bearing on its economic development, 2(C)(D)." 1945?. National Archives of Australia, Series CP 859/6/1, Item 1. Canberra, See also Harvey, pp. 101-102.
humanity is difficult to imagine. They have been variously described as mean, petty, inconsequential, lazy and incompetent. The heterogeneous nature of the population created a problem in itself. Filipinos, Sinhalese, Greeks, Russians, Italians, British, Maltese and Patagonians contended with one another for employment. Alcorta tells us that unionists did not like the non-English speaking workers, whilst the Administrator and one must assume Vestey's did not care where a man came from as long as he could work. The *Adelaide Advertiser* quoted Gilruth:

> It is quite true that a number of Southern Europeans who have come to the Territory are not physically of the higher standard, yet they are accustomed to living in warmer climates, and I see little evidence of a desire on the part of the better class of white race to come to the Territory at all.

During the South Australian Royal Commission of 1895, Parsons had voiced the opinion that the advancing movement towards state socialism had made capitalists unwilling to continue to invest in the Territory:

> In a time of apprehension of the safety of invested capital and financial stringency outlying and speculative risks are the first to be abandoned ... after I left for the Northern Territory I became conscious that there was an influence [socialism] that would retard the investment of capital for its development.

To add to the confusion, controversy had always been grist to the mill for the local press, and they were now happy enough to stimulate circulation by unctuously playing one side against the other. This did nothing to alleviate tension as strike followed strike with tedious regularity. By the early months of 1915, comment published in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* could be quite inflammatory:

40 Alcorta, p.ix.
41 Alcorta, p.28.
42 The *Adelaide Advertiser*, 27/2/1915.

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There is a Department of Lands and no Land settlement; a Department of Agriculture and no agriculture; a Department of Mines and practically no mining; an Aboriginal Department that has done an immense amount of harm; a Department of Health that is a costly excrescence gaining experience without gaining wisdom; a Department of Public Works and no public works being undertaken; a Railway Department that is practically the limit; a Department of Justice and may God forgive the writer for so terming. 45

Shortly afterwards it recorded the latest strike as the twenty-sixth since 1914 - 'think what an amazing state of affairs in a town with a mere handful of people such as we have here'. 46

The raw material of ignition was ready for leadership and the railwayman Harold Nelson had all the necessary credentials. He had been very helpful to Vladimerrow and Illin on their travels and was affable, likeable and energetic, but he was not above popular manipulation to gain favour. In 1897 WW Andrews was Officer i/c SAR in the Northern Territory and knew 'just how far to bend the rules' for the benefit of both his staff and the railway. 47 At this time Nelson was ganger at Adelaide River. Andrews, on his own initiative and apparently against regulations, advanced money to Nelson's work gang to enable them to buy rations until next payday. In due course Nelson was detailed to collect the debt from his men, but he complied only when Andrews threatened to deduct the total amount advanced from Nelson's own pay. 48

By the time that Gilruth arrived in Darwin, infighting between the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Australian Workers Association (AWA) was rife. Nelson, with simple tactics, inspiring rhetoric and a little intimidation, managed to resolve this infighting. He became the organiser in 1914 for both unions after an election in which only 80 eligible votes were counted. In the following year he consolidated his position with an election that now recorded some 700 votes. 49

45 NTTG 25/3/1915.
46 NTTG 18/11/1915.
47 Harvey, p. 63.
48 Harvey, p. 63.
49 Alcorta pp. 27, 28. See also NTTG 25/6/1915.
Strikes were endemic. The *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* almost casually noted that in one year alone there had been around 140 strikes, and even printed a song often heard round the Darwin pubs:

Oi am a Darwin worker  
Oi does just as oi loike  
Winn wages doesn't plaze me  
Oi goes straight out on sthroike.\(^{50}\)

This was the backdrop to the Gilruth remit. It was not a situation conducive to constructive development, and the unrest did not go unnoticed in the rest of the country. Even before his first year was complete, in both Federal Parliament and the nation's press, Gilruth's 'autocratic nature' was being blamed for the 'chaos' in the Territory.\(^{51}\)

Alcorta argues that Nelson used the unrest to become, eventually, the most powerful man in the Territory and that this led inevitably to the 'Darwin Rebellion,' which was:

> essentially negative; it was against monopolistic capitalism in the form of Vesteys; it was against entrenched bureaucracy; against the evils of despotism; against the Federal government; against coloured immigration; against conscription; against class stratification.\(^{52}\)

As Nelson's authority waxed so that of Gilruth waned, until finally Nelson escorted the once enthusiastic Administrator on board ship for the south to banishment and disgrace.\(^{53}\) The Territory's downhill run afterwards was swift, culminating in the closure of the meat works and almost absolute economic stagnation by 1920, which Bauer blamed almost entirely on the union agitators ' who appeared to have an insatiable desire for power - in

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\(^{50}\) Alcorta p. 8. Quoting from *NT Times* 1/3/1915.  
\(^{52}\) Alcorta, p.111.  
\(^{53}\) Alcorta, pp.100-111.
the name of the working man, of course'.\textsuperscript{54} Beverley Angus is in agreement and says that:

Nelson was the leading official of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) in Darwin, who dreamed of one great union controlling all white labour in the Northern Territory ... Gilruth ran afoul of unionists by crushing a protracted wharf strike in 1913 and for imposing, arbitrarily, new hours of work on Government employees.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{12.2 Pastoralism, Vestey's and the Unions}

Throughout the Territory's history, pastoralism had never been able to develop markets capable of maintaining its prosperity. Following recommendations of the Royal Commission of 1895, the South Australian Government had offered £5 000 loans on a pound-for-pound basis to any investor prepared to operate meat preserving and canning works. There was no response until 1899, when a plant was set up on the Daly River which, according to the \textit{Northern Territory Times and Gazette}, produced within a very short time a tinned beef extract in 'neat little tins', described as being both 'palatable and nourishing'.\textsuperscript{56} Nonetheless, probably due to a shortage of local stock, it was said, the venture soon folded.\textsuperscript{57}

Sir Sidney Kidman, Director of Bovril Australian Estates Ltd, had proposed a meat works at Wyndham, where he intended to process his company's own cattle from Victoria River Downs as well as those of neighbours. The South Australian Government, however, insisted that the plant must be in Darwin. Kidman indignantly pointed out to them that there were no cattle to process anywhere near Darwin and Bovril decided not to establish

\textsuperscript{54} FH Bauer. \textit{Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region}, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p. 260.


\textsuperscript{56} NTTG 19/1/1900.

a factory at all. At the turn of the century there were rumours that yet another company, the 'Victoria River Meat Freezing and Preserving Company', had requested a subsidy of £10,000 to set up an operation capable of slaughtering 60,000 head per annum, with work for four hundred men. Nothing came of that because, it is said, the river was not deep enough and there were not enough cattle in the district to guarantee the numbers required.58

Throughout the last years of the South Australian administration, rumours continued. According to the local press, in 1909 Bovril would in the 'near future' supposedly start freezing operations at Wyndham, a small-scale canning and meat extraction plant was likely to be operating in Timber Creek, while possibilities were being investigated for the Keep River as well. The Northern Territory Times and Gazette continued breezily that though there was not sufficient water available at Wyndham, 'a big steamer' could collect cattle from different points around the coast and conduct 'freezing operations between whiles'. Of course, said the paper, all these proposals were likely to prove impractical and it hoped that the port of Darwin would 'ultimately (be) chosen as the most suitable site for meat freezing operations'.59

In more practical terms, it was recognised that the pastoral industry was the one Territory enterprise that showed any immediate prospect for economic success, but only if markets could be assured. As McLaren has observed, a large abattoir needed economies of scale and some guarantee of sustained throughput. Having to compete for available cattle over a vast area, siting was important. At the time, supply was dependent entirely upon long distance droving. The natural market for the Central Australian district lay to the south in distant Adelaide and those for Victoria River District and the Tablelands lay eastwards towards Queensland. Driving cattle to Darwin presented much greater difficulty without a railway link from the pastoral country and the logistics of supply dictated that no single meat works could compete with established markets in South Australia and Queensland.60

60 McLaren, pp.48-50.
This was a dilemma not easily overcome by federal authorities. Gilruth had been asked, whilst on the Scientific Expedition, to address his mind to finding the site for a new urban centre, a feasible railway route or both. The costs involved for a new centre, new port facilities and a new railway were obviously prohibitive and it seemed a reasonable compromise to use existing facilities at Darwin. Within this context, he began negotiations with the Vestey Company.

12.2.1 Vestey's William Vestey was one of the mould of entrepreneurs cast in the latter years of the Victorian age. The eldest son of an English butcher, he expanded his family business rapidly to grow into a worldwide concern. He was a pioneer of refrigerated shipping and developed his own fleet to transport beef, mutton and eggs from and to almost every corner of the world. From their Chicago headquarters, Vestey's conducted meat packing businesses in Columbia, Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela, Brazil, South Africa and New Zealand as well as having interests in Russia and China.

The Commonwealth actually began to plan to set up its own abattoir in Darwin in 1912, before Vestey's had even expressed its interest. The 1914 agreement between the Federal Government and Vestey's appears to have been negotiated largely by Gilruth and it seems that both parties understood that access from the pastoral districts to Darwin by rail was guaranteed. Melbourne was never fully committed to this and only took the line as far as the Katherine. It did agree, however, to construct sidings and yards, provide rolling stock (including refrigerated cars) and to transport Vestey's cattle at reduced rates. It was on this basis that Vestey's then agreed to build the abattoir, canning and freezing works in Darwin.

Vestey's Chief Executive Officer for Australian operations was Evelene or Evelyne Brodie (Figure 11), a Canadian who had risen from a stenographer in the Chicago office.

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to become one of the highest paid executives in the world, and probably the only woman of her time to achieve such a position. She is reputed to have been extremely capable. In the midst of a revolution in China, as the company's principal 'troubleshooter', she traveled 1 000 miles (1609 km) unescorted and, against all odds, succeeded in maintaining production at the company's works. On another occasion, when the local manager of one of Vestey's plants in South Africa absconded with company money, she followed him halfway round the world to catch him. On the outbreak of war in 1914, she became Chief Executive of the Vestey interests in Australia and South America. In Australia she oversaw construction of the meat works at Bullocky Point and acquisition of 30 000 square miles (48 270 sq km) in the Territory on which, according to McLaren, Vestey's intended running 250 000 head of cattle.\(^64\) She is reputed to have appraised the suitability of at least some of this vast area herself, only accompanied by an Aboriginal guide.\(^65\)

Construction of the meat works began in December 1914.\(^66\) The war brought Vestey's enormous contracts from the British government. It is said that in the last year of the war alone the Allied troops required up to 454 545 kg daily. To supply this huge amount it was necessary for the company to shift into top gear, supplying cold stores at Boulogne, Le Havre, Dunkirk, Liverpool and Glasgow.\(^67\)

Vestey's pushed vigorously ahead, planning to open their works by April 1916. They employed more than 500 men in the construction and paid unprecedented high rates. Nevertheless, from the first, they encountered considerable labour unrest and completion was delayed by twelve months. In April 1917 killing began, and within 14 weeks 19 000 head had been processed and shipped to various theatres of war. The *Northern Territory*

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\(^{64}\) McLaren and Cooper, p. 51.


\(^{66}\) McLaren, pp. 51. See also Hare, pp. 115-116.

Times and Gazette exulted that Australian soldiers 'greatly rejoiced to see the label of the North Australian Meat Company on the rations'.

Figure 11

Evelyne Brodie Vestey's Chief Executive Officer

Sourced: Bohlke [Internet]. University of Nebraska, [cited 1/5/2001 2001].

By 1918 some 1,680 cattle weekly were being processed in Darwin. The transport of cattle netted the railway an average of more than £1,000 per month and the Territory economy ran at its highest level ever. Individual meat workers earned up to £40 a fortnight and the wages earned grossed some £400,000 in the three years during which Vestey's operated. The value of beef processed during those years of full operation was £1,029,271, so that the pastoral industry was able to invest £50,000 in improvements and pay £100,000 in wages over the same period. With the meat works in Darwin, the

68 NTTG 8/6/1918; NTTG 12/6/1920; NTTG 27/9/1919.
69 McLaren, pp. 51-52, quoting from NTTG 8/6/1918; Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper No. 31, 1918, p. 7; Argus, 9/1/1925, Northern Territory Pastoral Lessee's Association Vol.10.
Territory economy seemed at last to have been placed on a sound footing. The war also brought welcome price rises to pastoralists and cattle prices were soon buoyant. Beef exports rose from 30,326 head in 1910 to 57,289 in 1913\(^70\) and by 1917 Territory cattlemen were convinced that this was no 'mere flash in the pan' and that the rapidly increasing demand for exports would soon exceed supply.\(^71\)

**12.3 The Gilruth years appraised**

The first Commonwealth administration ended in failure. Apportioning blame is more difficult. It can be argued that the *tour de force* by Vestey's might never have been achieved without Gilruth's initiative and the pressure he exerted to push it through against a background of growing difficulty. The irony is that without his efforts in this regard the fuel for conflict between labour unions and himself might not have been there. The devastating effect that his eviction from the Territory had on himself and his family is largely a matter for conjecture, but it was not trifling. Alcorta records that Gilruth lived afterwards for many years in obscurity and suffered the added indignity of 'attempting to recover the pittance which the Federal Government owed him'.\(^72\) As time went by, his disillusion with all things Territorian grew in inverse proportion to his earlier enthusiasm. As administrator, he had been in favour of a transcontinental line and had pushed strongly for it, but in later years he warned against it. Then, he was to say that, if constructed, it would cross the continent to no purpose, 'with few passengers and few cargoes'.\(^73\)

John Anderson Gilruth has often been regarded as pivotal to the disaster. But events were largely beyond his control even before his arrival and, like Finniss, he became a convenient scapegoat for government ineptitude. Ill-advised and inept decisions were quite beyond Gilruth's power to rectify. The outbreak of war did little to help and merely facilitated the diversion of government interest. The very few migrants of the type needed who came could not replace the men who had volunteered and left the Territory.

\(^{70}\) McLaren, p. 50.

\(^{71}\) NTTG 11/1/1917.

\(^{72}\) Alcorta, p. 111.

for military service. Though only some 200, they comprised, almost by definition, the most energetic and were a very high proportion from such a small population. By the end of the war around 40 per cent of Territory men had enlisted.\textsuperscript{74} In 1912 Gilruth had described the men of the Territory as 'a better stamp of men than would be difficult to find anywhere.'\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, the war disrupted arrangements for agricultural emigrant families from Wales and Argentina, which, in 1915, Gilruth had expected were 'now en route and would arrive in Darwin within a few weeks.'\textsuperscript{76}

It is difficult to establish the facts about such a controversial figure. Much of the relevant correspondence is not filed sequentially and is now difficult to trace amongst quite disparate departments and headings. It is known also that during his incumbency he travelled to Melbourne to discuss matters of policy, but much of what was said then was never recorded. Controversy increases the complexity. Often 'facts' presented are contradictory and vary, dependent upon the personal and, perhaps, the political stance of the commentator. The opinions of but two extreme protagonists, Dr HI Jensen and Beverley Angus, are in complete opposition and may suffice here as examples.

12.3.1 Some opposing views
In \textit{The heart of Rum Jungle} Douglas R Barrie quotes Jensen's opinion, which he gave in \textit{Labour History} in 1966:

\begin{quote}
Dr Gilruth (with his wife and two daughters) was received with the greatest enthusiasm and was welcomed by all sections of the people as the harbinger of a new progressive era. It was not long before his tyrannical disposition made him the most unpopular man in the Territory. Dr Gilruth was a fine looking man, spick and span, well educated, eloquent, talented and cultured. He was a most capable veterinary surgeon by profession, but he was headstrong and domineering wanting his own way in everything. He was an Aberdeen Scotsman by birth and liked to turn everything into pecuniary advantages for himself.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} NTAR 1912, p.1.
\textsuperscript{76} NTAR 1914-15, p. 9.
In fact Gilruth was cleared of any charge of taking 'pecuniary advantages', and it is on record later that as Chief of Division of Animal Health for Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) he worked for a salary that was 30% lower than any other chief of division at the time.78

In 1911 Jensen, then a scientific assistant in the chemical laboratory of the Department of Agriculture for New South Wales, had unsuccessfully applied for the assignment of reporting and making recommendations for agricultural settlement in the Territory. The Department of External Affairs rejected his application in favour of the ex-Director of Agriculture for New South Wales, WS Campbell.79 Later, Jensen was appointed Chief Geologist for the Northern Territory. Shortly afterwards he complained to the Minister for External Affairs about the Gilruth administration and as a result a Royal Commission was called to:

inquire into and report upon certain charges against the Administrator and other officers of the Northern Territory Administration referred to in the letter of the 20th November 1915, addressed to the Minister for External Affairs by Harold Ingemann Jensen, Chief Government Geologist of the Northern Territory.80

Jensen laid forty-three specific charges but, according to the Commissioner's Report, he was unable to:

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78 Angus, pp.48-49. See also the following, quoted by Angus - CSIRO archives, Series 3, PH/GIL/15, CEO of CSIR to Vice-President of Executive Council, 2 September 1929; Prime Minister's Minute, 15 January 1930; CSIRO archives, Series 3, Item PH/GIL/15, JA Gilruth to ACD Rivett, 9 January 1932; ACD Rivett to AJ McLachlan, Vice-President of Executive Council, 7 December 1933.


place the facts before the Commissioner with any regard to lucidity or coherence ... [and] did not consider himself bound by the ordinary rules of relevancy or pertinence.  

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He called no witnesses nor when given the opportunity would he cross-examine those 'who were called to rebut his charges'.  

82 The Commissioner found that 'Dr Jensen failed to substantiate any of his charges' and that they had been made without 'any justification'.  

83 Jensen resigned in 1916 and later stood unsuccessfully as Labour Party candidate in Senate and House of Representatives Elections until 1926.  

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Beverley Angus has expressed a diametrically opposed opinion of Gilruth's administration. She said:

On arrival in the Northern Territory, Gilruth personally traveled the countryside to view things for himself - riding, walking and swimming where necessary, in order to reach settlers by overland routes ... he won the respect and affection of the pastoralists ... His enthusiasm for development gained moderate support from a succession of Ministers who knew little of the Northern Territory and its problems and conditions. The outbreak of World War I, political and industrial factors, and the climate and environment all militated against his success. Nevertheless he pressed on with enthusiasm, upgraded the hospital, established a Public Health Department and rebuilt roads. During his seven years as Administrator the European population trebled ... A visitor to the Northern Territory with wide colonial experience observed that, in other circumstances, Gilruth would have gone down as one of the empire's great administrators.

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81 Royal Commission of 1916, p.3.
82 Royal Commission of 1916, p.4.
83 Royal Commission of 1916, p.12.
Bernie Brian's comprehensive study of the North Australian Workers Union provides yet another slant to the controversy.86 Allan Powell in Far country does not enter into the controversy itself, but of Gilruth he says, 'given the conditions he faced it is unlikely that any leader short of the Archangel Gabriel could have brought peace and prosperity to the Northern Territory'.87 Powell postulates three reasons underlying Gilruth's failure - unrealistically high Commonwealth government hopes; ineffectual and inconsistent policies from Melbourne; and powers vested in the administrator, insufficient to overcome these deficiencies. These reasons have validity, however it may also be said that Gilruth, like Callum's dog, 'cared too much and tried too hard'. These are no bad qualities in a sheep dog, but they proved to be Gilruth's Achilles' heel.

There were of course many supporting players, but the principal actors - Administrator Gilruth, the union leader Nelson and the Vestey executives - were all somewhat larger than life. They proved an amalgam that was far too combustible for the historical context in which they found themselves. It is beyond reasonable doubt that Gilruth did not have the government support which he had had every reason to expect. It appears that he had a disposition towards overconfidence and was saddled with a stubborn sense of determination to succeed against all odds. These attributes may have been shaped by an early career where he had never experienced failure and served to increase a vulnerable isolation. The observation of Knox and Williamson in The dynamics of military revolution may be applied equally to civil administrations:

Historical actors often take correct decisions for reasons that appear bizarre in retrospect. And commanders and military organizations are rarely wholly honest - whether in the aftermath of victory or that of defeat - about what actually happened. Historians also tend to see connections between events and developments that in the end play roles

86 Bernie Brian, "The Northern Territory's "One Big Union": The Rise and Fall of the North Australian Workers' Union, 1911-1972." PhD, Northern Territory University, 2001.
in the precipitating moment - but which in fact may have no connection. 88

Conclusion
Melbourne’s response to Gilruth’s advice was often negative. At best the government seemed indifferent to his proposals on immigration, railways and internal communications. Even his attempt to rationalise and improve wages and conditions for Northern Territory public servants was baulked by the stultifying hand of a distant bureaucracy that knew best. He never received the backing that was his due as Administrator even in the face of union activism.

During his administration no diversification of the Territory economy was possible, yet the comprehensive system of public service that Gilruth instituted, with all its shortcomings, could have sponsored realistic development. Gilruth believed in the concept of demonstration and experimentation as an adjunct to agricultural settlement. Following discussion with pastoralists, he established the government horse breeding and sheep experimental station south of Katherine at Mataranka. 89 Throughout his tenure he remained a strong advocate for the retention of the Batchelor and Daly Demonstration Farms. Although he expressed dissatisfaction with the undue haste with which Clarke had set them up, he continually sought improved funding for them, still believing, no doubt, that Clarke’s mistakes could be rectified over time. 90

89 NTAR 1914, pp. 9-10; NTAR 1914-15, p.13. This is the only experimental station established in those years to have survived to the present day. It is now administered by the NTU.
Chapter 13

Stocktaking in the aftermath of 'Rebellion' (1919-1925)
Chapter 13

Stocktaking in the aftermath of 'Rebellion' (1919-1925)

Summary
Staniforth Smith, Acting Administrator in 1919, and Administrator Urquhart who followed in 1920, provided government with their initial appraisals and recommendations. Essentially they complemented one another’s views and those of the Sectional Committee on Public Works, which made its recommendations at the same time. The Ewing Report of 1920, which was more political in orientation, is also examined. In 1925 the Minister for Home and Territories requested Sir George Buchanan to give an objective report on 'questions affecting the northern part of Australia'.

13.1 The first moves
By ministerial directive, Daly River and Batchelor Demonstration Farms had been ordered to close and A W Trower, Director of Lands and Agriculture, gave the necessary orders to muster cattle from both farms for inspection at Batchelor on 29 October 1919. The bullocks and poorer cows were sold to a local butcher and, until the windup was complete, Roney, the manager of the Daly River farm, was left in charge as caretaker with two Aboriginal workers to assist him. Roney recommended that the best of the cows should be trucked to the railhead at the Katherine before being driven on to Mataranka Farm, which had adequate water. ¹ This farm had been selected by Gilruth and was generally recognized to be worth retaining. It remains in government hands today and currently comes under the broad aegis of the Charles Darwin University.

13.2 The Ewing Report
The Gilruth years had been a shock to confidence and the system demanded simple answers. To most immediate observers, Gilruth was to blame. Within the confines of government and in private, other reasons might be discussed, but these were not debated publicly. Condemnation of Gilruth was politically inevitable at the time, but took no real

cognizance of why his administration had collapsed or why government plans to effect land settlement had foundered.

It would seem to have been accepted by parliament that analysis of the 'failure' should be restricted to an examination of Gilruth's role, and it was on these terms of reference that a Royal Commission under Mr. Justice Ewing was convened in 1920 to present its findings on Territory grievances.² The circumscribed nature of this inquiry resulted in a report that was generally hostile to Gilruth and certain of his officers:

the burden of responsibility must be divided between the failure of the Commonwealth of Australia to ... grant to the people of the Territory citizen rights, the failure of Ministers to form a proper appreciation of what was due to the Territory, and the failure of Dr. Gilruth, Judge Bevan, and those closely associated with them to exercise their great powers with firmness, common sense, discretion, and justice.³

Subsequently, Justice Ewing was accused of having avoided any examination of matters apposite and of having produced 'a report not based on or justified by the evidence' that was hostile to Gilruth.⁴ Those senior public servants who immediately followed came to their own conclusions and reported accordingly. Apart from the Ewing report there were three other official assessments with recommendations for future action by government.

### 13.3 Soldier Settlement explored

Trower, Director of Lands, proposed to establish a soldier-settler irrigation co-operative on the Batchelor farm to supply vegetables for Darwin. Staniforth Smith pointed out that

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³ The Ewing Report, p.36.


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this particular area had been badly sited in the first instance and rejected it as being suitable for the purpose. Following his inspection of all the properties, he strongly recommended to the minister that:

Batchelor Farm be put up for tender with the right of the successful tenderer to acquire the Crown lands to the east as a pastoral lease ... Unfortunately Batchelor Farm is in my opinion quite unsuited for settlement by returned soldiers. As a small cattle station it would be managed by one white man with long experience of cattle in the Territory and a few natives. 5

The Returned Soldiers Association in Darwin was keen to have a soldier settlement scheme established as soon as possible. 6 The Department of Lands had received many inquiries from servicemen that continued until 1927, and as early as 1916 an A.I.F. soldier wrote from the Sinai Desert, requesting information for himself and many others in his unit. He had received a prompt reply with assurances that the prospects were good and the promise of a warm welcome for all of them should they decide to come to the Territory after hostilities were over. 7

Local administration in Darwin was equally keen and the matter was taken up with Atlee Hunt in Melbourne in 1918, 8 and by 1920 it would appear that the Northern Territory administration had even allocated land for the purpose. In answer to one query, the applicant was informed that there were a large number of blocks reserved for 'Returned Soldiers', and that 'a Returned Soldier generally has preference, all things being equal, in any application for a Pastoral Lease'. There was a rider, however, for approval would

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6 "Letter from J Andrew to Director of Lands of 15/9/1919." Northern Territory Archives, Department of Lands - Land Administration Branch, F5/B225 "information re land; F5/ A156. Darwin, 1919.
8 "ASSISTANCE IN SETTLING RETURNED SOLDIERS, 5/1/1918." Northern Territory Archives, Department of Lands - Land Administration Branch, F5/ A 119. Darwin, 1918.

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only be given if the applicant could satisfy the Classification Board that he would be able 'to fulfill the conditions of Stocking and improving the lease'.

In effect it seems that the only returned soldier wanted was one sufficiently well heeled enough to be deemed respectable. It may be reasonably supposed that the establishment for the time being thought that revolution in the Territory was perhaps a real possibility. It was bad enough to have to deal with drunken layabouts and braggarts in Darwin, who chose to sing the 'Red Flag' and to heckle and abuse visiting politicians, without adding indigents inured to violence by war to the ever present danger.

In any the event, little was done for returned soldiers. In 1921 the Secretary to the Darwin Branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers League indignantly complained that:

The policy of preference to returned soldiers announced by the Prime Minister has not been carried out, and it seems that the Government has no intention of carrying it out in the Northern Territory.

13.4 A digest of problems
But these were minor concerns for in the aftermath of the war and the collapse of Gilruth's administration, the Commonwealth was now confronted with problems for which there plainly were no all-embracing ready solutions. Nonetheless, there was no other option but to persevere. Australia was no longer a colony and was obliged to accept responsibility for that which it might in an earlier age have been able to abrogate. The Northern Territory was now an intrinsic part of the country.

All primary industry, however, was stagnating. High wages, high transport costs and worldwide depression in the mineral market, all combined to paint a discouraging picture for the mining industry. Nationwide, pastoralism was enduring low prices, but in the Territory this was exacerbated by the cost of transporting stock to other states. The distance was too high to provide station owners with adequate return.

10 NTTG, 'Hostile demonstration on the wharf: Ministers departure', 21/6/1921, 28/7/1921.
11 NTTG 'Work for Returned Soldiers', 22/02/1921.
Work continued on the various stations, herds were increasing in number and the
government policy of providing water by means of sub-artesian bores on the stock routes
was steadily progressing.\textsuperscript{12} As can be seen in (Table 21) the population had fluctuated
during the years between 1910 and 1922 but had shown no marked increase.

Table 21

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Population & Deaths & & & & & \\
Year & Europeans & Asians & Europeans & Asians & Europeans & Asians \\
\hline
1910 & 1 173 & 1 832 & 42 & 48 & 17 & 52 \\
1911 & 1 729 & 1 542 & 22 & 46 & 12 & 45 \\
1912 & 1 931 & 1 528 & 29 & 35 & 17 & 20 \\
1913 & 2 143 & 1 445 & 23 & 34 & 22 & 37 \\
1914 & 2 694 & 1 196 & 43 & 30 & 28 & 10 \\
1915 & 3 326 & 1 194 & 51 & 30 & 33 & 21 \\
1916 & 3 291 & 1 221 & 61 & 48 & 45 & 25 \\
1917 & 3 554 & 1 128 & 17 & 11 & 23 & 3 \\
1917-18 & 3 767 & 1 177 & 35 & 21 & 54 & 18 \\
1918-19 & 3 443 & 1 152 & 40 & 27 & 70 & 14 \\
1919-20 & 2 770 & 1 076 & 27 & 29 & 59 & 14 \\
1920-21 & 2 478 & 1 094 & 32 & 27 & 25 & 25 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textit{Sourced:} Northern Territory Administrator's Report, in Northern Territory State Library, 1921, p.31.

13.5 The Northern Territory Public Service

On the other hand, the Northern Territory public service, if not yet fully integrated with
the Commonwealth's, at least now had a workable establishment (Tables 22 & 23).

Indeed Urquhart's supplementary departmental reports show that it is probable that the
Territory got more value in the provision of infrastructure, amenities and services from
the federal government's first administration than was achieved by the South Australians
after fifty.\textsuperscript{13} Federal administration had seen some improvement to general housing and
in medical facilities.

On Gilruth's arrival the hospital in Darwin was quite dilapidated. A badly designed roof
permitted rain to come inside. He had this immediately rectified, and authorized ceilings
for the wards, an operating room and a dormitory for the night nurse. He also had given

\textsuperscript{12} NTAR 1921, p.4.
considerable thought to medical staffing and tried to initiate a system for rotating medical
staff to country centres. He closed the broken down 'hospital' at Burrundie and replaced it
with a better facility at Pine Creek which could be accessed by rail.  

Table 22

NT (Permanent) Public Service at 30/6/1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Administrator's staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Head teacher/ superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katherine, Pine Creek</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent agriculture and Curator of the Botanical Gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Manager, Batchelor Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Manager, Daly River Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Works</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent &amp; Works Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock and Veterinary</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent of Government Station Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stock inspector/ Meat inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chief Health Officer (the only qualified doctor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Department</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Health Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Matron of Darwin Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pine Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pine Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dispenser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels Department</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Supervisor of hotels doubling as Collector of Public Monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mines Department</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chief Warden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Battery Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands and Survey</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chief Draughtsman who doubled as Collector of Public Moneys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Draughtsman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Surveyors (2 of whom were cadets)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived and sourced: Northern Territory Administrator's Report 1921.

13 See NTAR 1921. Statistics and Departmental Reports, pp. 22, 29-34.
Table 23
NT (Permanent) Public Service at 30/6/1920 - Police and Gaols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fanny Bay Gaol</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Dept</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Inspector/acting as Govt Secy and Registrar of Births Deaths &amp; Marriages and Registrar of companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sergeant/acting as Collector of Public Moneys Clerk of the Courts, Protector of Aborigines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borroloola</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sergeant, Keeper of the Gaol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As directed</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mounted constables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived and sourced: Northern Territory Administrator's Report 1921.

Public Works Department projects were continuing at a steady rate. An ore-sampling shed for the Mines Department had been erected. The water supply at Myilly Point was improved, more government housing built and a new bathroom block had been erected at the Darwin hospital for 'lady' patients. A new ice-making tank had been installed at the government freezer and the oil storage facilities in the port improved.

Additionally, the Works Department was regularly engaged in ongoing maintenance, with work on the Myilly Point housing and extensive repairs to the Katherine-Maranboy road carried out in that year.¹⁵

13.6 Education
Under Commonwealth administration there had been some improvement. In 1910 when James Stewart had taken charge of the Darwin school for the Commonwealth, it was not habitable and he had to attend to repairs personally until a new school was built. His residence, also in bad repair, was occupied by the harbour-master so that both had to have new residences. Perhaps due to this experience Stewart requested a couple of carpenter's benches and some tools, and for a competent teacher in carpentry and plumbing to

¹⁵ NTAR 1921 - Supplementary report of the Public Works Department.
instruct his pupils for an hour or two each week. The other small schools, at Pine Creek and Brock's Creek, had also to be rebuilt.\textsuperscript{16} Like all things in the early history, the scale of activity was small but became increasingly effective during ensuing years (Table 24).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Average school attendance 1914 -1921}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
School & 1914/15 & 1915/17 & 1917/18 & 1918/19 & 1919/20 & 1920-21 \\
\hline
Darwin & 55 & 73 & 88 & 109 & 99 & 83 \\
Parap & nil & nil & 48 & 42 & 41 & 26 \\
Pine Creek & 16 & 24 & 16 & 15 & 16 & 16 \\
Alice Springs & 25 & 29 & 30 & 30 & 41 & 39 \\
Emungalan & nil & nil & nil & 8 & 8 & 9 \\
Kahlin & 22 & 23 & 23 & 23 & 25 & 30 \\
Compound & 5 & 5 & Closed & Closed & Closed & Closed \\
Brock's Creek & nil & 7 & Closed & Closed & Closed & Closed \\
Stapleton & 8 & 4 & Closed & Closed & Closed & Closed \\
Daly River & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Derived and sourced: NT Administrator's Report 1921 - education report.

By 1921 school inspections were being regularly carried out and a good standard of efficiency had been achieved, and pupils from Darwin Public School and the Convent School competed successfully for the first time for entrance to a southern high school.

Then, due to the closure of the meat works and ensuing industrial depression, there had been a drop in attendance at Darwin and Parap schools and staff reductions, but outside Darwin's immediate environs school attendance was maintained.\textsuperscript{17} Attendance figures throughout the Territory for the years 1914 - 1921 are shown in Table 25, and are indicative of real achievement. The geographical distribution also indicates the ebb and flow of the nascent colony's economy.

In 1920, residents of Darwin requested the Minister for Home and Territories on his visit to initiate secondary education, and in the following year a special class prepared pupils for the entrance examination. Public interest was so great that a high school was planned.

\textsuperscript{16} NTAR 1911, pp.8-9.  
\textsuperscript{17} NTAR 1921 - Education Report.
for January 1922. The cosmopolitan nature of the population in 1921 is shown in (Table 25), and listed under complex racial classifications, indicative of social perceptions.

Table 25
Nationalities of NT school children in 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Malay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parap</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Crk</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emungalan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahlin.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


13.7 Staniforth Smith
Miles Staniforth Cater Smith was sent to the Territory to act for the Commonwealth, somewhat in the role of 'trouble-shooter' in 1919, immediately following the 'Darwin Rebellion'. He was a Victorian by birth, educated at St Arnaud Grammar School and the University of Melbourne, and was an engineer by profession. Later, moving to Western Australia he became Mayor of Kalgoorlie in 1900 and in the following year was elected to Federal Parliament where he gained a reputation as one of the leading federalists. From 1906 he served with distinction in the Commonwealth Public Service until appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works in Papua. He left that position for wartime military service. In the Territory 'his stay was a peaceful one and only of short duration', but he carried out his duties with practised competence before

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18 NTAR 1921 - Education Report.
moving on to become Director of Agriculture and Mines in the Papuan Government Service in 1921. His task in the Territory was to provide government with an accurate assessment on what he found there and to take immediate action where appropriate.

Both Staniforth Smith and Urquhart, his successor, were strong advocates for the welfare of Territorians. They argued the case cogently to influence policy and reiterated the need to dispel once and for all the old axiom that white people could never colonize the tropics. Staniforth Smith quoted verbatim from a paper presented to a recent medical congress in Brisbane which found nothing to prove that there were any 'insuperable obstacles' to 'permanent occupation of tropical Australia' by the 'white race'.

He further illustrated this point by showing that the death rate amongst the white population in the Territory was 6.4 per 1,000, which compared favourably with the rest of Australia. He was also able to demonstrate that the Territory was remarkably free of serious tropical disease. There was no endemic incidence of Asia plague, cholera, smallpox and many other ailments common elsewhere in the tropics, and he stressed that epidemic tropical diseases must 'be kept out by an impenetrable quarantine line at our northern ports'. It was imperative, he said, that government augment all medical facilities and continue to support recent investigation by the Quarantine Medical Officer at Darwin who, under the aegis of the International Health Board (Rockefeller Foundation), was trying to determine the prevalence of Ankylostomiasis (hookworm).

### 13.7.1 On agriculture

Though Staniforth Smith was impressed by the settlers' production on the Adelaide River of fodder crops, fruit and vegetables, he thought that the periodicity of rainfall in general in the Territory was not conducive to large-scale agricultural development and, in his opinion, precluded any potential major agricultural export except perhaps for cotton.

He noted furthermore that crop production could not be of commercial importance while the Territory's population remained low and farmers had the added disadvantage of meeting high transport and costs. He believed that this might change when the railways

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22 NTAR 1920, p. 18.
23 NTAR 1920, p.18.
were extended into the interior, but as things were local growers were not viable even though they were currently protected by the 'heavy sea freights on imported agricultural products, many of which are of a perishable nature'. Insect pests were not the problem. While the white ant was seen by many to be a serious pest, he had formed the opinion that it was probably not quite as serious a problem as they thought because:

There are healthy plantations of citrus trees and our beautiful Botanic Gardens prove that very many species of economic and ornamental trees are not destroyed by their activities.

Nonetheless, to Staniforth Smith the long-accepted premise of 'planting a large white industrious garrison in our empty north' was just not feasible as the demonstration farms had shown that 'capital and labour combined have produced no wealth'. He believed that it was a self-evident truth that on the Daly River the five or six surviving settlers were:

showing a tendency to abandon agriculture, except for the production of food for stock, and to rely for a living on the breeding of pigs and goats, for which the country appears suitable ... [moreover] there is no probability of them attempting to create wealth in other avenues of industry in the Territory if they know it is liable to be taken from them at any time by the Government.

As far as these men were concerned their condition was such that unless the government wrote off their debts they would never return to becoming 'valuable citizens' in any occupation, and he said that the only thing that could be done for these 'settlers' was to cancel their 'accumulated liabilities' and write the amount off as a bad debt.

13.7.2 On pastoralism
On pastoralism, Staniforth Smith confirmed that the construction of a line of wells from the South Australian border to Powell's Creek by the South Australians and later augmented by federal drilling had been of real benefit to the Territory. Some 2 000 miles

25 NTAR 1920, p.15.
26 NTAR 1920, p.15.
27 NTAR 1920, p.15.
28 NTAR 1920, pp.15 -16.
of government stock routes had been proclaimed. The southern stock route following the line of the telegraph was now, he said, a 'great thoroughfare for stock, pack animals and vehicles [now] well supplied with water from Darwin to the South Australia border'.\(^{29}\) The south-western stock route from Wave Hill to the Katherine had also been improved in a joint venture with Vestey's Northern Agency Company. At the time, the route to the east from the Victoria River Downs across the Barkly Tableland and into Queensland was less adequately supplied, but contracts had been let to rectify this from Anthony's Lagoon westwards via Newcastle Waters and the Murrani track to Victoria River Downs. Smith noted that there were thirty-six Government sub-artesian bores in the Territory. In addition to these as many as 120 bores had been drilled at private expense in the pastoral country. The work of augmenting these had to be considered a priority. He stressed the importance of the work by pointing out that it needed sixteen government bores to supply Darwin.\(^{30}\) As he said:

\[
\text{Next to the railway as a development agent, I believe that the most urgent constructive work that can be undertaken by the Government to develop both the pastoral and mining industries is artesian boring and road making.}^{31}\]

### 13.7.3 On infrastructure

Staniforth Smith's all-seeing eye missed little. He believed that efficient medical services were essential and were entirely dependent upon attracting and retaining proficient staff. He therefore took practical steps to 'relieve the monotony of the lives of the sisters at the Darwin Hospital', by having a tennis court constructed for them, providing them with a piano and authorizing a swimming pool in the hospital grounds for their particular use. He commended the existing medical staff as 'deserving of all praise' but advised that their numbers needed to be augmented:

\(^{29}\) NTAR 1921, p.4.

\(^{30}\) NTAR 1920, p.14.

\(^{31}\) NTAR 1920, p.14. The necessity for continued effort in the improvement of communication by road, rail and augmentation of surface water by boring for ground water was understood as being of paramount importance for further development by Gilruth, Staniforth Smith and the members of the Standing Committee on Public Works. It is a constant theme in their reports.
It would be an excellent thing for the Territory, if the Government could co-operate with the Mission in providing skilled medical assistance for those inland settlements where there are at present no doctors or nurses for hundreds of miles.  

He noted that the Government of Western Australia already recognised the Inland Mission Homes as public hospitals and recommended that the valuable work already being carried out by the Presbyterian Australian Inland Mission qualified them as being able to provide a similar service in the Territory.

The telegraph line had 'never been extended sufficiently' - and as for the postal service - 'it currently took over three months to have a letter from Darwin replied to from Wave Hill or the Queensland border'. As Staniforth Smith put it, 'the part played by our one railway line in the maintenance and development of the industries of the Territory is quite exceptional'. Staniforth Smith particularly saw the importance of improving internal communication. He understood the importance of railway extension in furthering Territory development:

As I have previously pointed out, the development of the two great natural industries of the Territory - pastoralism and mining is to a very great extent, dependent on the construction of the North-South Railway ... The mineral wealth of this huge region cannot possibly be developed until made accessible, by a railway.

In Staniforth Smith's opinion, much more could be done if the government took steps to improve communications by road and rail. As he put it - the railway might be inefficient and slow but it was the only 'corridor or thoroughfare' to the mines and southwards to the vast pastoral belt, and the Territory's 'principal source of revenue'. He reacted angrily when the Commissioner for Federal Railways cut the already inadequate weekly service from Darwin to the Katherine to a fortnightly service to save

32 NTAR 1920, p.18.  
33 NTAR 1920, p.16.  
34 NTAR 1920, p.16.  
the paltry sum of between £800 and £1 000 a year without even advising him. He voiced his concern to the minister with blunt indignation:

It is well known that many railway lines, even in populous States like Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, are run at a loss, some for many years, yet the regular service is maintained to stimulate development. If, however, the development of any one of these States was solely dependent on a single railway line, that State would hardly reduce the service to once a fortnight to save a thousand pounds a year in running expenses. 37

Staniforth Smith's sojourn, though short, was effective but his criticism may have been too blunt to have much influence on his political masters. According to his own account, his acceptance of the position of acting administrator originally had been conditional on the promise from the Commonwealth 'that the Territory would have Parliamentary representation and that he resigned when a Bill to that effect was wrecked in the Senate'. 38 He also said publicly that:

Industry will never be properly stabilised in the Territory, or the people there thoroughly content, until they are granted representation to Federal Parliament and permitted to have a voice in their own affairs by the constitution of a partly elective legislative council. 39

13.8 Frederic Charles Urquhart
Frederic Charles Urquhart, ex-Police Commissioner for Queensland, was appointed to replace Staniforth Smith in 1921. On arrival he described the Territory as being in a state of 'suspended animation'. The little trade that survived was entirely controlled by Chinese interests with only one shop owned by a European. Mining was at a 'very low ebb' without any immediate prospects for improvement. In practical terms the fishing industry no longer existed and even the pearlers could not make money. There was no

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36 NTAR 1920, p.16.
37 NTAR 1920, p.16.
38 NTTG Staniforth Smith interviewed, 24/2/1921.
39 NTTG, (Latest Telegrams Staniforth Smith), 10/3/1921.
farming and with the current slump in cattle prices, the outlook for the pastoral industry was not promising. 40

Urquhart drew the government's attention to the fact that mining in the Territory had always been worked unscientifically by 'haphazard methods' because claims hitherto had been worked with insufficient capital. He believed that with capital and 'systematic working of the immense bodies of low grade ore which are known to exist' things might be different, but he saw no prospect of that eventuating in the near future. 41

As for pastoralism, despite its temporary setback, all acknowledged that there was reason to believe it would survive. As Urquhart put it:

It is hoped, though I cannot say on what such hopes may be based, that the meat works may re-open before very long, and that the one important productive concern in the Territory may resume its activities to the great benefit, not only of the pastoral industry, but of the whole community. 42

Urquhart provided government with a factual representation of the Territory as he saw it, but his judicious advice and carefully chosen words seem to have been designed to show that whilst matters were serious they were not altogether irreparable. He was careful to allay any doubts that might be held in Melbourne about the underlying confidence of the Territorians themselves:

I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration for the cheerful courage and confidence with which the people, interested and connected with the various industries of the Territory are facing this period of undoubted adversity. They have faith in the potentialities of their chosen country. Such people deserve all the practical sympathy and assistance which would encourage investors. 43

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40 NTAR 1921, p.4.
41 NTAR 1921, pp. 4-5.
42 NTAR 1921, p.4.
43 NTAR 1921, p.4.
With a degree of indulgence not often associated with government reports, Urquhart described the situation in which he found himself as 'neither pleasing or encouraging' and:

my lines were not to be laid in pleasant places and that my position was to be one of considerable trouble and difficulty... To one like myself, accustomed for many years to the well-ordered processes of a State Public Service, the position I found in the service here was somewhat astonishing, not to say dismaying. 44

His words illustrate how he perceived the farcical nature of events in the Territory at this juncture:

the doctrines of extremist unionism, vigorously inculcated by the local union leaders (extremists of the extreme) and enforced by every subtle tyrannical device their none too scrupulous minds could conceive, until the more or less depressed and bewildered civil servants had arrived at a stage where they seemed to doubt to whom their first allegiance was really due, whether to their country as represented by the Government which employed them, or to the truculent terrorists, who in the much abused name of unionism, and without much let or hindrance from higher authority, had arrogantly claimed a right of control over them. 45

In colourful, if ironic, terms but with all the aplomb of the trusted public servant, he described the current state of affairs in biblical cadence:

The Darwin community was a house divided against itself, and the consequence assigned in Scripture to such a state has not failed to ensue. On the one hand were the extremists, who talked of "Soviets" and kindred nonsense, and on the other (unfortunately in a minority) were the few who struggled and protested bravely against the blatant and shameless tyranny, exercised by the extremists in the misused names of "Labour" and "Unionism", while striving to keep the lamp of freedom, as known to the Law and the Constitution, still burning. And so the House of Darwin's and the Northern Territory's prosperity fell, and fell upon evil days. Production stopped, industry ceased, shipping disappeared, no

44 NTAR 1921, p.3.
45 NTAR 1921, p.3.
capital came into the Territory for investment, and unemployment immediately presented an ugly problem to be dealt with.\textsuperscript{46}

Having thus allayed his minister's apprehensions, he now got down to the business of providing comprehensive information on specifics. There were no 'tangible grievances', he believed, that should have caused social unrest. The cost of living was high but wages were proportionate, and as for the general conditions for labour they were 'as good as the disadvantages of the tropical climate permitted'. He believed that 'every concession demanded by the Unions' had been 'readily accorded by employers'. In his opinion there was one reason alone that provided the extremists with a credible excuse - the Territory was without parliamentary representation. If this were rectified the bitter feeling prevalent in the community would soon lose its 'chief ostensible \textit{raison d'être}' and be 'considerably modified'.\textsuperscript{47}

Prime Minister Hughes, requested to create a seat in the House of Representatives for the Northern Territory, agreed but stipulated - 'but not a vote yet'.\textsuperscript{48} Nelson, the 'local union leader (extremists of the extreme)' and ringleader of the 'truculent terrorists', thus had his teeth drawn by being granted (in effect) the sinecure of Member of Parliament for the Northern Territory without voting rights.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{13.9 Sectional Committee on Public Works}

Staniforth Smith's and Urquhart's recommendations were broadly along the same lines as those of a Sectional Committee on Public Works which reported on Territory matters in 1922.\textsuperscript{50} Mining should be encouraged by offering bonuses to large companies for the

\textsuperscript{46} NTAR 1921, pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{47} NTAR 1921, p.4.
\textsuperscript{48} In a marginal note in: "Letter from J Newland, DS Jackson, and HS Foll to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, p.6, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2. Canberra, 1922.
\textsuperscript{49} Parliament of the Commonwealth. "Northern Territory Representation Act No.18." 1922. An Act to provide for the Representation of the Northern Territory, it provided for a single representative, bereft of voting powers, in the Federal parliament.
\textsuperscript{50} "The Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2. Canberra, 1922.
production of given quantities of metals. The Northern Territory is unquestionably rich in minerals, but it is not "a poor man's" proposition.\footnote{J Newland, DS Jackson and HS Foll. "Letter to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2, p.5, Canberra, 1922.}

The three members of the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works traveled extensively in the Territory 'in connection with the projected North-South Railway'. Their recommendations were made to Prime Minister Hughes by letter on 18 January 1922. They said that they needed further advice 'on matters appertaining to the Northern Territory - quite apart from the railway'.\footnote{"Letter to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2, p.1. Canberra, 1922.} While they endorsed the views of Gilruth, Urquhart and Staniforth Smith, they also proposed a co-operative marketing scheme for produce, and recommended that future developmental efforts be concentrated, so that 'when one settlement is successfully started others will quickly follow'.\footnote{"Letter to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2, p.4. Canberra, 1922.} To this end they advocated that:

A definite progressive developmental policy, extending over a period of at least 10 years, should be entered into ...[in] An area of 50 000 to 1000 000 acres [in which land] should be offered at a peppercorn rental.\footnote{"Letter to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Series A457/1, Item AB110/2, p.4. Canberra, 1922.}

In marginal notes to the document it can be seen that Hughes endorsed these proposals. There was no follow through, however.

13.10 The Buchanan Report
In 1925 the Minister for Home and Territories requested Sir George Buchanan, KCIE (Knight Commander of the Indian Empire), to report in general on 'questions affecting the northern part of Australia'. Buchanan was an experienced administrator with considerable experience in the development of tropical countries. He limited his findings
to that part of the Territory above the 20th parallel, which included the Top End and most of the pastoral country of the Barkly Tablelands and the Victoria River District. His personal experience of the Territory was limited, but he based his opinions on a careful study of all the available written material and on many on the spot discussions with Territorians. Within these constraints, his investigations were thorough. His professional objectivity provides refreshing insights into matters that demonstrably perplexed the Commonwealth Government.

He examined Commonwealth involvement from 1907 onwards and discussed matters comprehensively under fifteen separate headings covering every aspect of administration. He found that the Territory's Administrator, as Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Government, had no control over some of the most important public departments. He elaborated on the consequences:

> It is generally admitted that no administration nor any business can be carried on efficiently with dual or divided control, and I do not think the administration of the Northern Territory is any exception to this 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 lack of co-ordination and central control.

Buchanan recognised the dependence of Northern Territory departments upon Commonwealth financial support and that had to be accommodated within the wider framework of the national budget. Under the present order there was insufficient latitude for special needs. Without change 'no continuity of policy' was possible, nor was there any prospect of implementing systematic development.

Buchanan proposed two alternative strategies, one to be used when no major capital development was envisaged and the other for major development projects. These may be summarised as follows:

56 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.4.
57 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.4.
For implementation with no major capital development

- The Administrator should, in consultation with a small executive council and under the general direction of one Minister, submit an annual budget of revenue and expenditure.
- Any agreed deficit should be made good by a 'grant in aid' provided for in the Home and Territories estimates and sanctioned by parliament.
- All additional expenditure on capital and development works should be met by a special developmental loan that could be raised and paid for by the Federal Government until the Territory was able to raise and service sufficient capital itself.

For implementation of major capital development projects

- The Administrator would be responsible for administering only the Territory public service and works not dependent on loans.
- Any proposed major development project would be carried out by a Northern Territory Board, similar to the River Murray Commission, which would be directly responsible to the Minister for Home and Territories.
- On completion, the project would then be handed over to the Northern Territory administration.

Both of these proposals were proven strategies and had been used successfully for many years by the Colonial Office in administering its territories. Buchanan advised that the Commonwealth could easily adopt either, but added with some asperity that whatever scheme was adopted it should be done promptly, 'as the existing system makes for neither efficiency, economy, nor contentment.'

The port, roads and rail infrastructure, and communication by telegraph and wireless all required attention, and without improvement, he believed, there could be no future for the mining or agricultural industries. As things stood, he said, it was 'impracticable' to even think of attracting private enterprise to the Territory, and any proposal to connect the railway with South Australia was already an anachronism for its logical route now lay

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58 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.4.
59 Buchanan Report, 1925, pp.4,5.
60 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.5.
towards the eastern centres of population by a direct connection with Queensland Railways.

He recommended strong remedial action to improve social conditions, communications and infrastructure. On agriculture he noted the many diverse opinions. He had not been impressed with the little he had seen, but whatever its ultimate potential as an industry it was better to forgo any attempt to develop it than to use it merely as a haven for the unemployed. He was brutally unambiguous on this point:

for the sake of the good name of Australia, it would be much better, for the time being to abandon the attempt ... Nothing can be done without an abundance of economic labour combined with adequate means of transport to a market and at the present time both of these essentials are non existent.  

The encouragement of pastoralism should be 'the first policy of the administration'. He believed that the Territory's 'malaise' was due entirely to its 'isolation, inefficient system of administration, lack of communications and [its] constant labour problems.' According to Buchanan, without Aborigines it would have been 'very difficult for the country to get on at all'.

He had a special word to say on the qualities required by an effective administrator who should have:

practical knowledge of administration, and the work of the Public Services, be possessed of energy and common sense, and, above all, as he would be the head of the social fabric in Darwin, he should having regard to conditions there, be blessed with an abundance of tact.

And he advised that the Northern Territory public service must be integrated into the Public Service of the Commonwealth within the full meaning of the Public Services Act. Salaries could then, with additional and substantial tropical allowances, be properly classified. He did not bandy words:

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It is impossible to expect the best men to volunteer for service in the Northern Territory, when as under present conditions, an officer is thereby banished to the Northern Territory for life, his only alternative being resignation from the Service. 64

In the 'might have beens' of the Territory, Buchanan's advice, had it been available and applied from 1863, would have produced much better results than what was actually achieved. His advice at this juncture, however, might have had more effect had it been written in Gaelic. The Territory Public Service was not integrated. 65 The unemployed, devoid of both agricultural skills and money, continued to be placed on the land. The railway was extended but led nowhere.

The inefficiencies innate to the Territory administration were not eliminated, but by a less than subtle revision of Buchanan's suggested reforms were so circumscribed as to negate any improvement. In 1926, by Act of Parliament, responsibility for the Territory was divided between two government centres under two Government Residents based in Alice Springs and in Darwin. This effectively doubled staff numbers with a concomitant increase in complexity and cost. While a North Australian Commission was set up, under the provisions of the same Act, it had no effective power. Harvey summed up the outcome rather succinctly:

the railway continued to be run by the Railway Commissioner in Melbourne, the Postmaster-General made all the decisions about new telegraphs, and the commission had to compete for funds against all other Federal departments and the two Government Residents. 66

The North Australia Commission produced an initial report and undertook a number of railway surveys but achieved little more. 67 Within three years the Act was repealed, the

63 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.5.
64 Buchanan Report, 1925, p.5.
65 NTAR 1936, p. 8.
Commission disbanded and Territory administration reverted back to the original formula under a single Administrator with few of the 'effective' qualities identified by Buchanan.

**Conclusion**
Most of these appraisals, whether by Administrators Staniforth Smith and Urquhart, by the Sectional Committee on Public Works, or by the experienced colonial administrator, Buchanan, were well argued and produced similar recommendations. Additionally, Buchanan's Report had provided sound advice on tested methods for financing development. Yet, little of a positive nature followed. I would argue that distant Melbourne governments, distracted by affairs of more immediate moment, were unable or unwilling to digest their import and none were seen as having any immediacy. Effectively, the Territory was left to circumstance.
Chapter 14

Inter war years: railways and farming (1921-1936)
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Inter war years: railways and farming (1921-1936)

Summary
Following the shock of Gilruth's expulsion and Staniforth Smith's uncompromising departure, in 1921 the Commonwealth Government, by default, permitted its Administrators some slight degree of autonomy while it gave lip service to investigations that might establish a 'modus operandi'. Before his retirement in 1925, life in the Territory under Urquhart returned to some sort of normality. Afterwards there followed a period of confusion while long suffering Territorians had hope rekindled by a railway expansion to close the gap between Katherine and South Australia and by a resurgence in farming. The optimism was misplaced.

14.1 Urquhart's Administration
Urquhart took over as Administrator from Staniforth Smith on 17 January 1921. He was well endowed with the *sang froide* and confident demeanour of a distinguished policeman and under him the Territory settled down. He soon gained the grateful respect of the citizens. One can get the picture despite the flowery language:

> The administrator is not a professional or a presumptive politician ... He came here at a time when to take a high handed course would have spelt unpopularity and hostility, while if he were to pander his position would have become unenviable. Happily he has preserved a high appreciation of duty and tact ... Without one act of harshness, or one act of recreancy the Administrator has been insulted and villified by a few individuals from the moment of his arrival, and his forbearance and his composure indicate the quality of his manhood.¹

In his first report he noted that agriculture had made negligible progress and that there was great deal of pessimism as to its future. CF Allen, his Superintendent of Agriculture, on the other hand, still believed that there was good evidence to show that the country was capable of 'great economic improvement,' and he indicated that several settlers had done quite well in the previous year. Verburg on the Adelaide River had provided 'a

¹ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 9 August 1921.
valuable object lesson' for the future. With a loan from the Advances to Settlers' Board of £304, ² he had:

completed his irrigation works, and the water (was) flowing over his land as he wills. By the turn of the wheel of the vertical turbine the 8-inch pipes send out a full stream. ... He has sufficient water and power installed to irrigate 640 acres ... (and) is now planting pineapples largely with the idea of establishing a canning factory.³

The *Northern Territory Times* recorded that Verburg's 'irrigation works' had cost £4 000.⁴ No doubt the advance from government had been welcome, but relative to overall cost it had not amounted to much.

By the end of 1922 unemployment in the Territory became a major concern. Urquhart noted that in the last quarter of the year, savings bank deposits had declined by almost 12%, and that 'good average workers, disliking relief and willing to take any work offering' had to accept a meagre relief from government.⁵ Food rations were distributed right across the Top End. In Darwin, Pine Creek, Parap, Brock's Creek, Grove Hill, Emungalan and on the Katherine, many unemployed were offered free passages to southern states. Some had taken this up, but others were reluctant to leave the Territory because they had no warm clothes, or because they were afraid of being caught by their creditors.⁶

The government had promised a more progressive policy towards the Territory and Urquhart hoped that this would not be relegated to the 'remote future'. So it was with 'the greatest satisfaction' he received the news that the Commonwealth was to extend the railway as far as Daly Waters. The hope was that the line would soon be extended to connect with southern railway networks.⁷

² "Northern Territory Administrator's Report." National Archives of Australia, Darwin, 1922. Hereinafter NTAR, thus NTAR 1922, Department of Lands, p.27.
³ NTAR 1921, Agriculture (CF Allen), p.22.
⁵ NTAR 1923, pp. 3-4.
⁶ NTAR 1922 (Chief Health Officer), p.21.
⁷ NTAR 1923, p. 4.
By the time Urquhart wrote his final report on retirement, however, in 1925 he was able to say that that better conditions for agriculture now prevailed 'as compared with those of last year'. The cotton crop, though still very small, was expected to yield a fourfold increase over the previous year and prices on offer for peanuts were high. Exports overall had increased by some 500% and there had been a substantial rise in savings bank deposits. As to the future, the reduction of 'freights by land and sea' was the essential component and 'the speedy construction of a line to connect with the nearest Australian railway system' was an absolute prerequisite. Future development would be dependent on systematic railway extension throughout the Territory, and should be augmented by 'good feeder roads' to carry government motor transport at low rates. Meanwhile he believed that the Territory's small population should continue to be 'fostered' somehow and be assured of sufficient 'remunerative occupation'. Additionally, he advised a lowering of taxation, and that encouragement for potential settlers should be offered by:

(a) The grant of freehold land to agriculturalists.
(b) Homestead areas to miners.
(c) Extension of operations of the Primary Producers Board to the supply of building materials and all necessary implements on easy terms at lowest cost.
(d) Assistance to dispose of crops, and, where possible, a guaranteed price for them.

Currently, the pastoral industry remained 'the mainstay of the Territory' and so long as the present policy of improving stock routes and water supply was continued he believed that it would also benefit from a general reduction in freight costs. With these as priorities, along with an elected representative executive council working hand in hand with government, all 'the potentialities of growth' and planning would finally be in place. Beyond that he did not think that any great expenditure was necessary. Any other course was doomed to failure.

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8 NTAR 1925, pp.3-5.
9 NTAR 1925, p.4.
14.2 Confusion and government indecision
After Urquhart's steadying hand was lifted Territorians might have been excused for thinking that the federal government had entirely lost the plot. Initially, there was some prolonged debate in parliament on whether a new state should be formed, incorporating the Northern Territory with Queensland and Western Australia above the 26th parallel. Matters proved too difficult to resolve quickly and in the interim the Northern Australia Commission was established. Its membership was reported in the Northern Territory Times without comment:

In the House of Representatives yesterday, the Prime Minister announced the appointment of the Commission to control the Northern Territory as follows: J.H. Horsburgh (Assistant General Manager of the Mount Morgan Co, Queensland), Chairman, at £2500 a year. W. R. Easton of Northern Territory Land Board and G. A. Hobler, Chief Engineer of Commonwealth Railways, also members at £1500 a year each. The appointments are for five years.10

Within three months of this there was another announcement:

Part of North Queensland and part of Northwestern Australia has been taken over by the Federal Cabinet which has appointed Col. W.O. Mansbridge, Govt resident for North Australia with headquarters at Darwin and J.C. Cawood Govt resident for Alice Springs. Respective salaries 900 and 750 with an allowance in each case of 75 in each case in lieu of quarters.11

Territorians had only time to digest that, when less than a month later, members of the Northern Australian Commission arrived to take up 'their quarters' at Government House in Darwin. The Northern Territory Times announced the occasion without much enthusiasm but tried to put a brave face on things by commenting that 'the greatest drawback of all, in the past has been that our real rulers have resided two thousand miles away':

And now we commence a new chapter. The North Australian Commission will direct the destiny of Northern Australia on the spot.

10 NTT 13/8/1926.
11 NTT 23/11/1926.
The personnel of the Commission is a very desirable one. A successful businessman, with an expert knowledge of mining possibilities, is chairman and associated with him are Railway Engineer Hobbler and Surveyor Engineer Easton. The latter gentleman has travelled over practically the whole of North Australia and is personally acquainted with its requirements. Theirs is a trust of great responsibility they can make or mar the prospects of the vast unpeopled country. Undoubtedly they have the ability, and they have the wonderful advantage of being on the spot to attend to these vital matters.  

Finally, on 1 March 1927 Territorians woke up to learn that the Territory would effectively be split in two, with separate administrative centres in Darwin and Alice Springs. Robert Hunter Weddell was appointed Government Resident for 'North Australia' in Darwin and John Charles Cawood as Government Resident for 'Centre Australia' in Alice Springs. The much-heralded North Australia Commission faded into some twilight realm.

14.2.1 Privation
No doubt all this was of interest, but the long-suffering residents had had much to put up with in the interim. In May, news came from the Daly River that the coastal supply steamer had not yet arrived and that miners and prospectors in the district, 'who depend absolutely on the shipping service' had no supplies and the crop of peanuts which had been 'stacked at the landing awaiting shipment' for weeks was 'at the mercy of all weathers and vermin'. The farmers had lost most of the previous year's crops for the same reason and harvesting was now at a standstill because their Aboriginal workers would not work without supplies. Both the miners and the settlers were 'getting fed up with repeatedly having to take to eating fish, goannas and lily roots through no fault of their own'.  

Darwin citizens too were suffering acute shortages with 'potatoes and onions long finished'. A train had brought 'big consignments of sweet potatoes, English cabbage and tomatoes' from those lucky enough to farm within reasonable distance of the line, but as soon as it arrived everything had been 'quickly bought up by householders'.

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12 NTT 17/12/1926.
13 NTT 18/5/1926.
14 NTT 23/7/1926.
These were the tales that could be digested and argued over with a warmish beer at breakfast, dinner or tea, however by December the news arriving from the Daly was worse. No supplies had reached the farmers for months and the miners at Fletchers Gully were right out of food, some of them only surviving on 'mussels obtained from the billabongs'. All work had come to a standstill - 'no food to carry on'. Some supplies had eventually reached Owston's Landing in late May and some of the peanut crop had been loaded on the same ship. But since then:

On September 9th the mate of the Marion Sleigh, Mr Stanton, arrived at the landing in a whale boat propelled by sweeps with bag of flour and 1 pound of sugar for each resident, also 5 tons of manure ... [they] took away a few bags of nuts. Four days later a motor boat with a surfboat in tow arrived with more flour and rice but no groceries, no tea, no tobacco, matches, hops nor cartridges. Just the flour and rice and sugar. This outfit took away 105 bags of nuts. Mr. Carroll, who was in charge, told me that they would have to go straight away to the Victoria River in order to catch the tides and promised to return in three weeks time. The three weeks has now grown to ten, and still no sign of a boat. The position now is that we now have at the landing 280 bags of nuts that have been there for the past six months, awaiting shipment.\textsuperscript{15}

The coasting vessel Marion Sleigh was under contract to supply and service the coastal and river settlements. Patently, it was not doing the job and the writer requested that as this was 'certainly public matter' it required no less than a 'public meeting' to do something about this 'sorry state of affairs'. Frustration shows in his final words - 'Anyway', he said, 'publicity is required to let the people of Australia know the kind of service they are getting for their ten thousand pounds per annum'.\textsuperscript{16}

Following this, a meeting was held by the Darwin Town Council on 24 December 1926 to discuss this 'matter of the greatest importance, not only to the settler outback, but to every resident of the Northern Territory, both present and future':

Every resident of the Territory is fully conversant with the hardship of the settler outback during the last twelve months; shortage of rations and supplies necessary for the successful carrying on in their various

\textsuperscript{15} NTT 10/12/1926.  
\textsuperscript{16} NTT 10/12/1926.
occupations; the losses of primary producers of their hard won produce; the callous indifference of the contractors about the gross injustices they were inflicting on a people who had no redress.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the breathless rhetoric, the council members completely missed the point and in their self-interest demonstrated their imperfect grasp of the practicalities. They resolved that:

Each and every one interested in the development of the Territory should grasp the present moment as a momentous opportunity to further the interests of their state by presenting a united front to the powers-that-be in the matter of not renewing the contract and subsidy for a coastal shipping service and making the money available for roadmaking purposes.\textsuperscript{18}

This outcome could have provided little joy to the Daly River settlers whose needs for remedial action were of a somewhat pressing nature. They could not afford to wait for an all weather road that might take years to build. Their living depended upon their crop reaching its market with dispatch and in good condition and that, for the present and foreseeable future, only demanded an efficient coasting vessel.

Yet throughout it all, white Territorians were proud of their Territory and hope could always be rekindled by tales of success. And, as is the way with people, they still managed to take vicarious pleasure from the fortune of others who had struck it lucky in the Territory. One 'good luck story' within the columns of the \textit{Northern Territory Times} told of a Mr FE Holmes, who had come to the Territory without a penny and made his fortune pearling - 'he had many fine hauls, one oyster yielding no fewer than eighty pearls and another contained a perfect specimen which sold for £5000'.\textsuperscript{19} Territorians were pleased to bask in reflected glory and often indignantly refuted any adverse comment about their Territory. Cobham had just made the first epic return flight from London to Australia and his landing and welcome in Darwin was reported in the southern media and they had stretched the truth just a 'wee bit'.

\textsuperscript{17} NTT 24/12/1926. \textsuperscript{18} NTT 24/12/1926. \textsuperscript{19} NTT 11/6/1926.
In August 1926 an outraged local wrote to the editor, and headed his letter 'DEFAMING THE TERRITORY':

Sir, It is high time something was done to prevent these false reports appearing in the Southern press about the Territory and its doings ... these papers contained seething reports on the reception given to Captain Cobham who has really emphasised ... how well he was received in Darwin ... but when it is stated that things were so bad that we had to send blacks out to scour the country for edibles it is beyond a joke ... I suggest the Mayor be asked to call a public meeting ... to do something to stop these reports.20

14.3 Railway extension starts then stops
The saga of the railway continued. It had been a continuing theme for over thirty years. Since 1917 the train from Darwin had made regular runs at 18 miles per hour to Emungalan, on the northern bank of the Katherine, and back twice a week where cattle for Vestey's Meat Works could be loaded as required. When the meat works closed the service was reduced to once a fortnight, staff was cut from 170 to 67 and freight charges were increased.21

In Staniforth Smith's opinion there could be no further development of pastoralism and mining without an extension of the railway and the completion of the North-South link.22 Urquhart went even further and categorically stated that without it the 'settlement must languish and development stagnate'.23 In 1923 tenders were called for the steel for the Katherine River Bridge and its construction began during the next year. By May 1926, with the bridge completed, the extension of the line to Daly Waters began.24

The recommended extensions were 'to form a portion of an eventual line through Newcastle Waters to Cammooweal',25 in line with Buchanan's and Staniforth Smith's

20 NTT August 1926.
22 NTAR 1920, p.16.
23 NTAR 1921, p. 5.
24 Harvey, pp.116 - 118.
25 Harvey, p.118. Referring to Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 1922 No. 76, p. xxv, "Report together with Minutes of Evidence Relating to the Following Proposed Railways: (A) Northern Territory Railway Extension from Mataranka to Daly Waters; and (B) Extension of the Port Augusta Railway from
proposals, with the ultimate intention of connecting the Queensland Railway network with that of South Australia. In the interim matters became complicated by another arrangement signed in 1925. This bound the federal authorities to extend part of the north-south line, with the 3 ft 6 in (Narrow Gauge) of Northern Territory Railway, from the South Australian terminus at Oodnadatta directly to Alice Springs.

Figure 12
The First Train crosses the Katherine Bridge (1927)


Oodnadatta to Alice Springs." Harvey also notes that construction from Katherine to Mataranka had been recommended by the same committee in 1920 and a bill was prepared but allowed to lapse. The Northern Territory Railway Extension Act, 1923 authorised construction from Emungalan to Daly Waters.

26 NTTG, 10/3/1921.

27 Harvey, p.118. The Narrow Gauge extensions were constructed to make them easily convertible to the Standard Gauge at a later date.
Many of the nation's unemployed trekked to the Territory in the hope of work on this major construction project. The numbers arriving were too large and the many men unable to find work only served to swell the large numbers of indigents already there. Over 500 men, half of whom were on piece rates, were employed and by 1927 the work was reported to be well in hand. All too soon funds began to run out, in 1928 the work force was halved, and finally in 1929 the federal government decreed that there was no more money. So, forty miles short of Daly Waters all construction stopped, leaving a stock of rails, sleepers and telephone material worth £137 000 unused and unwanted at Mataranka. The paying off of redundant workers on this railway to nowhere was to play its part in the unexpected emergence of the Territory peanut industry.

14.4 The rise and fall of the peanut industry
The peanut industry was the result of the dedication and effort of one man, Urquhart's Superintendent of Agriculture, CEF Allen. In his first report, Urquhart noted that progress in farming, upon which hopes of settlement had been based since 1863, had been altogether 'negligible'. Yet when Allen began to voice some hope of reviving agriculture, Urquhart had the perspicacity to give him his head.

CEF Allen had joined the Territory Department of Agriculture as curator of the Botanic Gardens in 1913, where he had introduced many improvements. Prior to his enlistment in 1914, he had acted as manager at Batchelor for a short time, and under him 'labour difficulties there were less than in the previous twelve months'. At the end of hostilities, he returned to the Territory and, as Superintendent of Agriculture, enthusiastically set about looking for suitable export crops with low capital requirements. He knew that successful farming ventures were dependent on not only what could be grown, but also on what might sell readily. Under his direction the Botanic Gardens in 1920-21 had supplied large quantities of beans, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, cucumber and sweet potatoes to the hospital. Delivery of these perishable products to local markets,

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28 Harvey, pp. 118 - 128.
29 NTAR 1921, p. 4. See also "Survey of Administrator's Reports during Commonwealth's Administration, 1910-1945", pp. 5, 7, 8, 10, 11; and also "Letter to Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Hughes from the Sectional Committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works." National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
however, presented an insurmountable problem for growers outside Darwin. On the other hand, he knew that cotton, tobacco and peanuts could be grown and, potentially at least, were suitable for export. Cotton required heavy inputs of capital equipment and with the Administrator's support he applied for machinery for a cotton mill to be used cooperatively by growers - this was rejected by the minister. He regarded tobacco as a 'possible,' but was aware that there were problems in curing it properly under Territory conditions. Peanuts, on the other hand, required little labour or capital and therefore seemed to offer many immediate attractions. 31

James Parry on the Daly and Verburg at Adelaide River had grown two different varieties of peanuts. Allen sent samples of these to Marrickville Margerine Limited and received purchase orders from them for both crops at £45 and £52 per ton with the offer of even higher prices for the following season. 32 Overseas inquiry elicited an even more favourable response. In the opinion of the Trades Commissioner for South Africa, 'it was impossible to exceed the demand for peanuts in the foreseeable future'. The United Kingdom currently imported 124 294 tons per annum, imports into France exceeded 399 000 tons annually and though Germany's imports were only 10 000 tons, it was reasonably expected that this would soon return at least to the pre-war level of 70 000 tons per annum. In Australia peanuts, protected by tariff, were some 25% higher in price than in Europe - in 1922 imported peanuts and peanut oil from Hong Kong alone was valued at £27 000. 33

Peanuts it seemed had immediate prospects and in the longer term, perhaps, had the potential of alleviating chronic unemployment. As Allen put it:

There is also the possibility for a peanut butter and oil factory, and as soon as sufficient quantities are being produced it would be a simple business proposition to establish a factory and save costs of freight. In a pamphlet issued by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1920, it is stated that "one manufacturer alone produced about 6,000,000 pounds [of peanut butter] in 1919. The quantity of peanuts used in

30 NTAR 1914-15, p.31.
31 NTAR 1923, Agriculture (CF Allen), pp.11-12.
33 NTAR 1923, Agriculture (CF Allen), pp.11-12.
making peanut butter in 1919 in the States is estimated at 6,000,000 to 8,000,000 bushels.\textsuperscript{34}

There were other reasons for Allen's confidence. The expected railway extension would give easier access to the promising and more homogeneous agricultural land encompassing the Katherine, Roper, Beswick and Waterhouse rivers. This comparatively large area had given every indication of being suitable for peanuts and cotton, which were currently only grown on limited areas at Stapleton, Adelaide River and the Daly.

Allen also knew that there were many Aboriginals already being employed. Bauer put the known figure as high as 2,050 full-blood Aborigines.\textsuperscript{35} In any case Allen's previous experience in Rhodesia led him to the conclusion that though the Australian Aboriginal had no past experience of cultivation, as had the African, nevertheless he was quick to learn:

\begin{quote}
I consider these people to compare far better than they are generally given credit for, with the African black man with whom I have had some years' experience. ... In the Botanic Gardens there are always some of these people employed; the cows are milked by them, the carting is done by them, messages are taken by them; - they dig, saw wood, water plants, and mow the lawn, and do many other useful things, that but for their presence would have to be done by white men.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

He noted also that their ability was also recognised by Territory farmers:

\begin{quote}
On the farms I have seen natives doing the same work as their masters, doing as much, and doing it as well. Mr. Verburg, at Adelaide River, has 300 acres of land cleared, has a big-dam built across the river, and has planted and reaped many crops. He has never employed a white man and though I am aware that he is a man of extraordinary energy, I also know that he could only have achieved a part of what he has, without the aboriginal.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} NTAR 1923, Agriculture (CF Allen), p. 12.
\textsuperscript{35} FH Bauer. \textit{Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia, Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region}, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1. Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{36} NTAR 1923, Agriculture (CF Allen), pp.11-12.
\textsuperscript{37} NTAR 1923, Agriculture (CF Allen), p. 13.
Thus he was convinced that the labour problem need never be insurmountable if Aboriginal people were understood and treated fairly:

I am sure that they are sufficiently intelligent to be treated as white people, and made to understand what a contract is. If a system was adapted of, say, three months or longer agreement between employer and employee, to be made in presence of a Protector, it would prove of very great benefit to the farmer and also eventually to the aboriginal.  

There was therefore some reason to hope that with careful encouragement and planning, the Territory peanut crop might be developed to a sufficiently high quality to enable it to dominate the Australian market. Allen received all necessary encouragement from Urquhart and concluded:

that there is a very decided improvement since a year ago in the lookout from the agricultural point of view. I confidently hope that by the time I have the honour to write another annual report, real and permanent progress in a prosperous settlement on the land will have been accomplished.

14.4.1 Primary Producers Board

In 1923 the Primary Producers Board replaced the Advances to Settlers Board with the aim 'of relieving as far as possible the destitute section of the community'. The unrecoverable debt of £5 319 3s 7d, advanced by the Advances to Settlers Board, was written off and the primary role of the new board seems to have been to place as many of the unemployed as possible on the land. Many unemployed were thus prompted to take up land in the hope of doing something themselves towards survival. Encouraged by the 'very favourable results to growers [of peanuts], there was marked increase in

42 NTAR 1922 (Lands Department), p. 27.
applications to take up land and advances were to be repaid by income derived from a reasonable proportion of the crop.

In its first ten months the new board held 34 meetings, dealt with 83 applications and granted 36 leases. Twenty-two of the applications were for agricultural leases and the remaining fourteen were for mining. Allen, as a member of the board, was not hopeful of the outcome:

Owing to the bad record of the Territory with regard to settlers, miners and destitute ... [and] having regard to the class of settlers, the board has been very conservative in its assistance. The majority who have taken up land and have been assisted are not practical farmers, therefore some diffidence was felt as to the result of this years crops, which may be looked upon as being experimental rather than as a business criterion of future results.

Nevertheless, he threw himself into gear. In one year alone he attended 22 board meetings, travelled to Queensland to compare notes on the culture of cotton, prepared a full report on the lands of the lower Roper River and spent some 125 days visiting and giving advice to the new settlers and distributing seed. As he had expected, the immediate result of his work was not encouraging. In 1924 many of the new farmers' crops failed, and even long-established growers who had experienced a rather patchy rainfall that season produced only mediocre crops. Allen also had other reasons for concern. Queensland, with its older and more established agriculture, had now become a large grower, but he had no option and carried on in the hope that he might somehow encourage his clients to produce 'a first class article' as 'economically as possible' by 'machinery for planting, digging, threshing and grading and shelling'.

Government purchasing policy encouraged the manufacture of agricultural implements made in Australia even though they were often less efficient than the American product. Allen attempted to prompt the Minister to create a machinery pool for the use of the

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impoverished men who were on the land only as a result of government directive, and requested Melbourne to:

acquaint our [Australian implement] manufacturers on the points where they fall short of the local requirements in the Territory in order that they may be thus in a better position to compete with the American [implements].

Allen took thirteen months extended leave from November 1924, but fortunately his replacement from the Queensland Department of Agriculture, MC Goode, had a thorough grasp of the needs of the situation. He efficiently continued with Allen’s work in the Botanic Gardens and introduced many suitable fodder grasses and the methods for their conservation. He was told that silage could not be made in the Territory ‘on account of mould’, but:

Not being prepared to accept this information, I had the concrete silage pit cleared out … then filled with the rough grasses that were cut with sickles during the cleaning-up process. No particular care was taken, the object being to aim at the same condition as would pertain to the making of ensilage on any farm.

Then with the quiet authority of the true professional he showed how to initiate fermentation, how to stop it when the preservation process was complete and how, finally, to seal the silage to ensure its protection from the weather, showing that when the pit was opened, some seven months later, the nutritious product had remained completely unspoiled despite the worst that a Darwin wet season could do.

Coming as he did from Queensland, where farming was well established and understood, he was no doubt surprised to find that most settlers lacked any experience. He noted that only half of the 130 acres planted to peanuts actually germinated and he opined that the

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crops that had survived so far would inevitably yield poorly because very few of the settlers understood the necessity of inter-row cultivation and proper care at harvest:

The estimated return prepared some time ago when the crops were growing was 40 tons, but as some settlers made no attempt to cultivate the growing crop it is doubtful if this estimate will be reached... On the whole, the quality of the nuts is fair, but had a little more attention been paid to the curing during harvest it would have resulted in a much heavier and better conditioned crop.53

Goode realized that the peanut was 'well adapted to the soils and climatic conditions of the Territory' and could provide 'excellent opportunities' for the future, if the settlers could be helped to survive long enough to learn by experience 54 and did what he could to make this possible.

He introduced simple application forms for seed, that could be duplicated to record such important matters as area, field location and yield for future reference. He augmented Allen's marketing initiatives by having a fumigating chamber built to store the estimated crop for the following year - so that 'no apprehension need be felt in regard to loss by grubs or weevils'. He ordered a peanut-grader and peanut-sheller to deal with low-grade or dirty nuts and listed for the minister's 'urgently needed' attention all that must be provided by government if settlement was to survive.55 His other recommendations to the minister included:

- A government farm 'run on sound lines' to provide data and to demonstrate best practice to farmers in planting, growing, and harvesting crops which had economic potential.
- Settlement only on the largest single area of agricultural land available, adjacent to the railway or proposed railway, so that all necessary assistance could be given to settlers at reasonable government cost.
- Initial instruction for farmers in both the use and function of farm machinery.

• A machinery and cultivation equipment pool to be set up by the Primary Producers Board for hiring to farmers at reasonable cost.
• A government marketing pool to grade and sell the produce.

The Minister, GF Pearce, was sympathetic, and authorised Goode to form a Marketing Pool to handle and offer the whole Territory crop by description and to accept the highest offer on sample from buyers throughout Australia. Unfortunately, finance was never made fully available. Growers never received any advance on delivery of their crop and had to wait many months before payment could be made on completion of the sale. The other two suggestions on machinery were not taken up. Nonetheless, when Allen returned to duty on 14 December 1925 he acted as growers' agent, and this tentative marketing scheme survived for some time by dint of the trust that he engendered with growers.

In 1926, railway construction drew many of 'the destitute section of the community' away from farming, leaving only fourteen settlers with crops badly affected by adverse weather conditions. Nonetheless, Allen sold part of their crop for more than the Queensland pool price. The high quality of the peanut now being grown in the Territory was so promising that when import controls were placed on the foreign product Allen took advantage of this to distribute ten tons of fertilizer for the following season amongst his now five remaining growers. Indeed the peanut industry looked sufficiently promising that Goode, who had retired from public service, formed a company to market the crop:

Two hundred and fifty fully paid up, shares were subscribed this week in an incredibly short time by prominent white and Chinese business men of Darwin in the newly opened venture known as "Peanuts Products Limited" Brisbane, inaugurated by Mr MC Goode, our late Director of Agriculture for the Northern Territory ... The Northern Territory is producing a good class of peanut suitable for the confectionery trade and

up to the present no great difficulty has been experienced in disposing of the crop.\textsuperscript{59}

In 1928, under the new regime of a split administration, Government Resident Weddell reported a bumper crop, saying that even though the rainfall in Darwin was 50% below average, the settler's crops had met with 'remarkable success'.\textsuperscript{60} When railway construction finished in 1929, the number of growers increased to 38, most of them newcomers. The future still looked bright and Weddell reported that Territory peanuts were now recognised as being 'equal to, if not better' than any grown elsewhere in Australia.\textsuperscript{61} Veteran growers had fared well, obtaining good prices for a well-finished article. Meanwhile, the newcomers did not grow much, being engaged primarily in building houses, clearing and ploughing and generally establishing themselves. Allen was euphoric:

\begin{quote}
There has never been a year in the Territory which has shown progress of industry on the land, such as has happened during the period under consideration.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

For the next season's planting Allen selected the best of the crop for seed to distribute to the new men, who bought it by giving a lien on their following crop to government. Aspirants from the unemployed flocked to take up land with a total of seventy now hoping to produce peanuts in the next year.\textsuperscript{63} The majority lacked proper implements and, though many had shown ingenuity in finding ways to overcome this deficit,\textsuperscript{64} without machinery the industry could not long survive in a competitive market.

In the following year an additional fifty-seven unemployed were placed on the land with Allen's one-man extension service still trying to cope. The total area under peanuts was now almost 1 000 acres, one third of which was on the Katherine (Table 26).

\textsuperscript{59} NTT 19/11/1926.
\textsuperscript{60} NTAR (Weddell),1928, p.4.
\textsuperscript{61} NTAR (Weddell), 1929, p.4.
\textsuperscript{62} NTAR (Weddell), 1929, Report of the Superintendent of Agriculture, p.10.
\textsuperscript{63} NTAR (Weddell), 1929, Report of the Superintendent of Agriculture, p.10.
\textsuperscript{64} From documentary evidence compiled by M Cavanan of the Katherine Historical Society. Katherine Museum. Katherine, NT.
Allen was aware that only about five men were not entirely dependent on peanuts, which left them vulnerable, so that he encouraged them, with little success, to break the monoculture by trying other cash crops.\textsuperscript{65} A few of the established men did manage some diversification, but they were never able to fully satisfy the demand in Darwin for fruit and vegetables as the train service was quite inadequate.

Nevertheless the number of experienced farmers had grown - in the Katherine region there were a number of Russian refugees with previous farming experience - and with one or two good crops under their belt they were enabled to purchase a modicum of machinery. Many now formed partnerships and the general level of proficiency in the district rose by example.\textsuperscript{66} The 1929 crop was completely sold on their behalf by Allen, with no carry-over and at good price, in bags branded 'North Australia'.

In 1930 the vagaries of climate had their usual effects especially on the Daly River, where veteran grower James Parry lost two-thirds of his crop in the March flood. But in general those who had managed to prepare the ground properly fared well, and Allen obtained good prices for some in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.\textsuperscript{67} But many samples

\begin{table}[h!]
\centering
\caption{Distribution by area of the 1929/30 Peanut Crop}
\begin{tabular}{l|c}
\hline
Region & Acreage \\
\hline
Katherine River & 398 \\
Mataranka & 57 \\
Adelaide River & 81 \\
Grove Hill & 20 \\
Daly River & 270 \\
Edith River & 50 \\
Other growers & 100 \\
\hline
Total & 976 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{65} NTAR (Weddell), 1929, Report of the Superintendent of Agriculture, p.10.
\textsuperscript{66} From documentary evidence compiled by M Cavanan of the Katherine Historical Society. Katherine Museum. Katherine, NT.
\textsuperscript{67} NTAR (Weddell), 1930, Report of the Superintendent of Agriculture, p. 9.
offered were rejected and reflected badly on the Northern Territory product as a whole.

One long-term buyer from Marrickville NSW wrote:

Unfortunately Darwin peanuts have gained a very bad reputation with us, and, what is worse with our customers, since we started on the nuts recently purchased from you, owing to their very unsatisfactory quality... these nuts are of very little value owing [also] to their mouldy condition. 68

While another from Melbourne informed him that:

Samples of Peanuts duly arrived but am sorry I cannot give you a reasonable price for same. ...Peanuts grown on the Kathrine River this year are a total failure, consequently being 80% shell and [only] 20% with reasonable size kernel. 69

As Allen put it, however:

despite all the difficulties and hardships of isolation, [a few men] have established themselves on the land as peanut-growers. They have produced a very superior article which has sold readily in the southern markets. 70

Until now, he had single-handedly selected, graded and distributed all seed but, despite his dedication, the increasing rate of growth of the industry was making the job impossible. It was obvious to him that without real government support the industry would rapidly become unsustainable. If it were to survive at all:

The need for seed selection and production of improved seed for the peanut crop is very apparent. At present the [best] seed ...become[s] badly mixed on the farms and it is impossible to procure pure seed [from elsewhere] ...[for] distribution to new settlers.

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He advised that a government seed farm was necessary for demonstration and extension and that it need not be a burden to the Commonwealth for, as he envisaged it:

A Government farm would have an income assured by the supply of this seed... There is no reason why such establishment as that recommended could not be run on commercial lines.  

Nonetheless, no action was taken and in the following year, with over 1500 acres (607 hectares) under peanuts, the willing horse had his workload increased in proportion. Once more Allen attempted to influence a recalcitrant government by pointing out that Queensland growers were becoming increasingly efficient due to the acceptance there of government grading and central control through the 'Queensland Peanut Pool'. Without similar action the Territory product must inevitably deteriorate. 

In 1931 more indigents were given land by Resident Weddell, 'about 50 men from the ranks of the unemployed were placed on blocks [and] granted a sustenance allowance until the sale of their first crop.' And in 1932:

By order of the Minister, 44 men from the ranks of the unemployed were placed on blocks, granted subsistence allowance and assisted until the sale of their first crops. 

Many of these men, armed only with a shovel at best, were expected to repay a debt from a crop that in the circumstances they could not possibly grow. This was worse than a gaol sentence, as many soon discovered, and within months only 11 of the 44 remained. 

14.4.2 Encouragement of Primary Production Board
In 1932 Lt. Col. RH Weddell, hitherto Government Resident for North Australia, became Administrator for the whole of the Territory and, as part of the reorganisation, the Primary Producers Board was disbanded, and reconstituted as the 'Encouragement of

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73 NTAR (Weddell), 1931, p.4.
Primary Production Board' with Weddell as Chairman. The new name must have given hope to men struggling for survival, but under Weddell it became a contradiction in terms. Subsequent actions seem to have involved a degree of vindictiveness that cannot be explained. The first action of the 'Encouragement of Primary Production Board' was to restrict advances, 'in conformity with the existing national programme of strict economy', so that 'extravagances on the part of settlers' might be restrained. Weddell's explanation was that: 76

For many years there has been too great an inclination on the part of the majority of the population to look to the Government for assistance ... Too many men with no hope of permanent work remain in the town of Darwin, where there are no industries, and where, unfortunately, no avenues for the employment of their children exist. 77

Table 27
Disbursements of the Encouragement to Primary Producers Board (1932-36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Debits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loan recoveries</td>
<td>Advances to Settlers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repayments</td>
<td>Implement sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>£1 186</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>£1 300</td>
<td>*£452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>£2 005</td>
<td>£14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>£1 113</td>
<td>£64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>£1 255</td>
<td>£61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* represents a direct re-issue of machinery at agreed value.
# These figures cannot be reconciled and may indicate that 'seized' implements were later 'advanced' to settlers at a lower cost, or written down pro tem as being neither able to be sold or 'advanced'. No explanation is given.

Derived: from figures contained in NTAR, 1932-1933 (Encouragement of Primary Production).

74 CEF Allen, "Agriculture and settlement in the coastal belt of the Northern Territory." National Archives of Australia, Series F1, Control 1936/100, Canberra, 1936, p. 12.
75 Allen, "Agriculture and settlement in the coastal belt of the Northern Territory", p.12.
76 NTAR 28/10/1932, p.4.
77 NTAR 28/10/1932, p.3.
A 'systematic follow up' of debt recovery ensued, and he reported with some pride that for the first time since the inception of the Primary Producer's Board the account showed a surplus of £613 15s 10d. To augment voluntary repayment the seizure of holdings and implements (Table 27) had produced 'further benefits':

the re-issue of many of the seized implements has enabled the Board to make "fresh" advances without having to draw on the funds of the Primary Production Vote.  

14.4.3 Marketing Pool forbidden
Allen's proposal to establish a compulsory marketing pool for the Territory's growers on the Queensland model was not approved by Weddell's new board:

the Board after lengthy deliberation, decided to inform the Minister that, in view of the apathetic attitude of a large proportion of growers, it was unable to recommend the formation of a pool.

Instead it decreed that local private agents would handle all marketing and associated operations. This decision was criticised but, as Weddell put it, the 'Board's attitude was upheld by the Honorable the Minister'. Meanwhile Allen had been authorised by the minister to purchase plant to properly grade the Territory peanut crop for export, but this too was stopped by Weddell's reiteration that 'the apathetic attitude of a great number of growers' did not warrant it. Weddell was apparently unable to find a middle way between supporting and hassling and, in terms akin to the old woman in a shoe of the nursery rhyme, he declared:

settlers may rest assured that the present policy not only aims at the encouragement of genuine primary producers, but is also directed to the

78 NTAR 28/10/1932, p.5.
79 NTAR 28/10/1932, p.5.
80 NTAR 28/10/1932, p.5.
81 NTAR 1933, p. 5.
attainment of that stability so essential to pastoral and agricultural communities.\textsuperscript{82}

In 1934 Weddell reported that 'the changeover (to local agents) has proved satisfactory to all concerned', but in fact the change was a disastrous one for growers. As Allen had foreseen, the non-graded product discouraged southern buyers and when Allen himself retired in early 1936, his successor, HC Mair, lamented that:

> The industry, unfortunately, is yet under no central control and the absence of grading of nuts has a severe effect on prospective sales and, incidentally, the future of the industry as a commercial venture\textsuperscript{83}

It seems hardly credible in the circumstances for Weddell to have said in his last report as administrator that the 'clearing up', either voluntarily or by confiscation of machinery, was done 'to the entire satisfaction of the settlers concerned'.\textsuperscript{84} As can be seen from Weddell's own figures (Table 28), his measures of 'strict economy' did not amount to much and could not have been of much benefit to Treasury. The hard-won machinery confiscated from farmers was valueless to anyone else. Indeed, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that for many years afterwards Katherine police were at a loss to know how to dispose of the piles of rusting and broken implements that cluttered their station yard.

My research has been unable to uncover all the facts relating to his somewhat strange behaviour. However, social unrest associated with unemployment resulted in violent confrontation in Darwin against Weddell's authority. Militants locked him in his office and occupied his verandah in 1930. This was reminiscent of the 'Darwin Rebellion' but this time the police had the full backing of the Commonwealth and they managed to hold firm.\textsuperscript{85} It had been a close run thing, however, and no doubt goes some way towards understanding the reason for Weddell's destructive attitude as against Allen's practical approach and empathy with the destitute employed on the land.

\textsuperscript{82} NTAR 1933, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{83} NTAR 1936, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{84} NTAR 1936, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{85} PF Donovan. \textit{At the other end of Australia}, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1984, pp. 74-76.
Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott took over as Administrator on 29 March 1937. Those interested in vegetable growing for the Darwin markets were given help, and 'generous assistance' was once more offered to peanut farmers.\textsuperscript{86} Weddell's close-fisted approach was reversed.

Conclusion
Despite the privation of its people caused by the virtual Commonwealth disengagement from affairs, under the benign administration of Urquhart authority had been wisely delegated to the Superintendent of Agriculture. Allen then, on his own initiative single handedly, was able to effect the first hopeful essay in Territory farming. Destitute men were given hope through his encouragement, and they in turn respected him sufficiently to allow him to school them in agricultural technique. His attempts to market their produce seemed to augur a viable agriculture, until circumstance and the less than sympathetic authority of Administrator Weddell negated this early promise.

What little progress there was had been made by able individuals willing to take initiative. The administration, however, failed to recognise the potential contribution of a willing Aboriginal population. They failed to implement any cogent waterborne or rail transport policy and were largely responsible for the reversals in the peanut industry.

\textsuperscript{86} NTAR 1936/37, p.10.
Chapter 15

Towards war (1936 -1939)
Chapter 15
Towards war (1936 -1939)

Summary
Bauer has argued that the first twenty years of Commonwealth control of the Northern Territory were but 'variations on a theme familiar to the Far North - failure due to ignorance, misguided enthusiasm and bad luck'.

So that it became inevitable that:

The Far North went into the depression of the 1930's without a single strong card in its hand. Its meatpacking industry was defunct, its labour force chastened but unemployed, its mines idle, its agriculture a failure, and its residents without hope. The principal gains were some 170 miles of railway for which little freight was offered, some improvement in housing and sanitation in Darwin, and a generally higher level of aboriginal health. It was not a record to inspire admiration.

Bauer's judgement is perhaps a little harsh. The history of the period is certainly bleak but in some way these years witnessed a maturation of sorts. These years saw the beginnings of long-term family commitment for some residents at least, which brought with it a degree of continuity to Territory life. In 1934 the population of the Northern Territory, excluding Aboriginal people, stood at 4,549 with 69 births and 56 deaths recorded. The number of children attending school at 415 was the highest that it had ever been. The standard of primary education was reckoned as good as anywhere in Australia and scholarships were available for those able to attend secondary schools in other states where their progress was considered 'very satisfactory'.

Much had been achieved, but Weddell's attitude to the 'Encouragement to Primary Producers' Board' had destroyed the rural sector's spirit and alienated it against the administration. In fairness to Weddell, it must be said that throughout his tenure the Territory's future lay under a cloud of rumour and political uncertainty. This had largely

\footnote{1} FH Bauer. *Historical Geography of White Settlement in part of the Northern Australia. Pt 2 - the Katherine Darwin Region, CSIRO, Division of Land Research and Regional Survey. Divisional Report No. 64/1.* Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p. 259.
\footnote{2} Bauer, p.261.
dissipated by the time he retired. Part of the background uncertainty was that a large question mark hung over the Territory's very future. A bundle of correspondence, contemporary reports, records of parliamentary debates and press coverage sheds some light on the background of an attempt to resurrect the old chestnut of a joint stock company to run the north. Prior to the North Australia Act of 1929, establishing the North Australia Commission, other suggestions were mooted and these included efforts to attract British capital.4

15.1 The CSIR becomes involved
The Council for Science and Industrial Research (CSIR) was now drawn unwillingly into discussions in order to find a commercial solution, but meanwhile Abbott, as new Administrator, was permitted considerable local authority, and under him the years immediately prior to World War II witnessed progressive advancement. Abbott had greater autonomy of action in both finance and management than had been enjoyed previously by any other incumbent. He was considered as one among equals by both senior public servants and ministers and used his administrative independence to effect improvement, both in coordination with his minister and with relevant departments in other states.

Gilruth himself was drawn yet again into the controversy.5 On 3 January 1934 he received a memorandum from the Executive Committee of CSIR:

Adverting to our conversation this morning, the Executive Committee decided at a meeting which was held on 20th October last, and at which you were present, that you would be asked to furnish two reports, viz:- (a) A report surveying generally the whole position in regard to the production, transport, fattening, slaughter and shipping of beef cattle in Northern Australia. The report should include the question of the development of an export trade in chilled beef, and should also include the position in regard to peg-leg and other diseases. (b) A report on the


possibilities of the development of agricultural and pastoral industries generally in Northern Australia. 6

He submitted his reports, with a covering letter marked 'Personal', to the Council Chairman Dr ACD Rivett on 13 April 1934. He said that he had presented them with 'some trepidation', for his views were bound to be controversial and were markedly different from 'those expressed by the majority of people who claim to speak with authority':

Since I ceased to have responsibility for control, I have been favoured with opportunities of personally inspecting large areas of pastoral Australia in each State. As a result, it has become increasingly incomprehensible to me that so much effort and capital, both public and private, has been expended on that section of tropical Australia known as the Northern Territory ... that it took me so many years to assess the position as I do now may be reprehensible. But to divorce one's self of prejudices is often as difficult as it is to confess to error. 7

He spelt out his revised conclusions uncompromisingly, and said 'so long as there is land available at a reasonable price in the southern parts of Australia' the Territory would not be able to attract settlement for very many years. 8 Both mineral and agricultural prospects had such low potential that neither was capable of immediately inviting capital. The pastoral industry, he believed, would survive somehow, but isolation, unequal water distribution and current provisions of land tenure risked development capital and was not conducive to long-term improvement. He also refuted the argument that settlement was necessary for the nation's defence. 9

Hitherto he been an advocate of northern development and his revised opinions might come as a shock to some, which he said was no bad thing:

6 "Memorandum of 3 January 1934 from Secretary CSIR to Gilruth." National Archives of Australia, Series A9778, Item D30/7/4. Canberra, 1934.
7 "Confidential letter of 13/4/1934 from Gilruth to Dr Rivett: re Gilruth's Report to CSIR on NT." National Archives of Australia, Series A9778, Item D30/7/4. Canberra, 1934.
8 Gilruth Report NT, 1934, p.36.
9 Gilruth Report NT, 1934, pp. 4-14, 34-36.
Whether the report is submitted to the Government is a question, of course, for the Council's executive, but after over twenty years experience I fail to believe that any good result would ensue from its publication so far as convincing public opinion is concerned - at least in Australia. Possibly, however, it might convince the envious elsewhere in the world that our heritage is not quite so glorious as generally imagined.  

Immediately on receipt, Rivett sent copies with covering letters marked 'Personal and Confidential' to the Minister and to Senator McLachlan, Vice-President of CSIR. He drew attention to the fact that the report was 'distinctly unfavourable' to 'the prospects of developing it [the Northern Territory] along the particular lines in which, we as a Council, are interested'. He then sent other 'Personal' copies to Sir George Julius and to Professor AEV Richardson of CSIR. Richardson broadly agreed with Gilruth and responded by return:

His [Gilruth's] general conclusions appear to follow logically from the record ... If this document, good as it appears to be as a record of historical fact and achievement, is published it would undoubtedly check the ardour and enthusiasm of the British capitalists who are reported to be conspiring with the Commonwealth Government to develop the Territory and the North West of Western Australia ... Looking at the Territory broadly, it seems pretty clear that for many years to come it, apart from mining, must be regarded as cattle country and capable only of a limited amount of development as such.

Rivett, however, having received Richardson's 'confirmatory view', informed him that 'we have decided' to distribute further copies to 'interested people' and excused it by saying, 'there will be no harm done if this word is issued to those concerned.' Accordingly, he forwarded a copy to the Rt Hon. SM Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner to London, just prior to the latter's embarkation for England, advising him not to read the

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document prior to boarding, but to 'spare a few minutes for it on board'. Unfortunately, part of the report was subsequently published which was against the direct wishes of the Minister. The upshot resulted in unwarranted publicity so that Gilruth became once more subject to press vilification. Gilruth was annoyed and on 10 July 1934 informed the Council that:

It would appear if a repetition of such statements occurs that in justice to myself, no less than to the taxpayer of the Commonwealth, I may feel compelled to authorise personally the publication of my memorandum to the Council, so that facts, not opinions, can be weighed: too much publicity has been given to the latter and far too little to the former, I realise, of course, what such action would entail and would only be adopted with the utmost regret.

But the purpose of his report had been achieved and, following further public comment, the impracticality of forming a joint stock venture was forever dismissed. It had been intended that shareholders of the company include Territory residents, British capitalists and also the Australian government. A draft proposal had even been prepared, which Sir George Pearce, Minister for External Affairs, had forwarded for comment to AJC Hunter who replied that such an ungainly vehicle would never run. In the first instance, he argued that:

Even if the Government had £1,000,000 to spare I do not see how the whole scheme as it stands could pass through Parliament. Also, I am pretty sure that the general public would object to it. One of the principal objections is that which you yourself raised at the meeting, i.e., the Capital.

Furthermore, no government or any other institution, in his opinion, could be expected to put up 90% of the share capital and permit control to shareholders holding only 10%.

Finally he said:

One can scarcely imagine a company controlling meatworkers, harbours, rivers, roads, stock etc. The management of such would require the best brains in Australia today. Where would it be possible to get, for instance the Managing Director of such a Company? ... Without even examining the qualifications of any of the leaders of the North Australia movement, I would be quite safe in saying that the managerial brains do not exist among the settlers.  

With that, the matter of joint stock company involvement was now finished, but CSIR's association with the Territory was to increase in coming years.

15.2 The Hon CLA Abbott takes over
The troubled years of Weddell's incumbency contrast with the confident administration of his successor, the Hon CLA Abbott. The Territory benefited from conspicuously clearer policy imperatives that endured throughout his tenure from 29 March 1937 to 30 June 1946. During 1928-1929 Abbott had been minister responsible for the Northern Territory and would seem to have had all the ability and practical understanding of administration and the public service that Buchanan might have desired. Throughout his tenure he was able to act in a way that was more akin to the early colonial governors, treated as one among equals by his colonial masters. Some anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that he was not always popular with the public at large. There is little doubt as to his administerial ability though some, amongst whom Peter Elder should be noted, believe otherwise.  

Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott had been endowed with a goodly share of common sense and energy. Moreover he had an empathetic relationship with the Honourable J McEwen, Minister for the Interior. He also had a good working relationship with JA Carrodus

21 Peter Elder, "Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott: Countryman or Colonial Governor?" PhD, Northern Territory University, 1998.
22 John McEwen (29/3/1900 - 20/11/1980), aka 'Black Jack', throughout his long life as soldier, farmer and politician was a man of strong personality and conviction. He started work at 13, operating a telephone
who, as Permanent Secretary, had had responsibility for Territory affairs since April 1932. The use of autocratic power from a distant centre, which for various reasons had previously dogged Territory administration, was now lessened and the powers and functions of the Administrator appropriately strengthened, so that delays in dealing with Territory business were largely obviated. When the Payne Committee of 1937 recommended the abolition of the Northern Territory Land Board its powers were given to the Administrator, enabling Abbott to rationalise both the allocation and the utilisation of minor and major capital development.

The Territory of 1936 was vastly different from 1920. The world had advanced and willy-nilly so had the Territory. The census of 30 June 1937 showed a population now at 4011 and that it was less concentrated in Darwin with more people living in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. In other respects it remained the same. While other Australian ports had an unloading/loading rate of 25 to 30 tons per hour, the rate at Darwin was three times slower at 8 to 10 tons per hour. The average charge per ton for loading or unloading cargo was twice as high as Brisbane or Sydney and three times higher than at Melbourne. In Darwin it took two and a half days to unload the same amount of cargo from the same ship which in Sourabaya was unloaded in half a day. Unloading facilities remained 'uneconomical and archaic' in the port for a long time to come.

Nonetheless, the nation's attitude to the town of Darwin itself was changing. It was no longer seen merely as an outpost. Communication by air, though not commonplace, had begun to assume a much greater role:

The number of distinguished persons passing through by air is increasing weekly and it can be correctly stated that Darwin is now one of the main

23 NTAR 1937/38, p. 6.
24 NTAR 1937/38, p. 7.
25 NTAR 1936/37, p. 8.
entrances to the Commonwealth. Within a comparatively short time it is anticipated that not only the Imperial Airways will be using the Port with their huge flying boats, but that also one of the major Dutch Airlines will terminate at the Darwin Airport.26

Roads had improved and organized tours by car to Central Australia were more common and often tourists were able to drive right through to Darwin. The run from Alice Springs of 320 miles (515 km) to Tennant Creek was regarded as a fair day's run and 'good surfaced roads' made Katherine much easier to reach. Between the Katherine and Adelaide River the track was still somewhat problematical and sections of it were under survey. The last sector from Adelaide River to Darwin, however, was considered 'excellent'. In 1938 it was fully expected that the complete road north to south would shortly be consistent with the standards of the time.27

Table 28
Land Division in the Northern Territory 1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Holdings</th>
<th>Square miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienated Lands</td>
<td></td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Reserves*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Stations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(exclusive of Aboriginal Reserves)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>216 655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leased and/or Licenced)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other purposes including mining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leased and/or Licenced</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied by Commonwealth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departments</td>
<td>260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unoccupied, but reserved for public purposes</td>
<td>1 740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance unoccupied</td>
<td></td>
<td>236 848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>523 620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*797 sq mls of these reserves were occupied by 6 mission stations.

Derived and sourced: Northern Territory Administrator's Report (Lands), 1936/37.

26 NTAR 1936/37, p.17.
27 NTAR 1937/38, p.10.
A substantial area of country had been recognised as Aboriginal Reserve. There were nine established Mission Stations of various denominations, and many genuine inquiries were being received once more on opportunities for mining and pastoralism\(^28\) (Table 28).

Passengers could fly by Qantas Empire Airways from Darwin to Singapore and thence by Imperial Airways flying boats onwards to England. Mail services had been greatly improved. Airmail deliveries arrived three times a week. Between eight and twenty civil aircraft were arriving weekly in Darwin and there was a need for better hotel accommodation. It was intended to deploy airforce squadrons and work on the Darwin airfield was progressing accordingly. Naval ships were regular visitors to the port and defence personnel from both navy and army were stationed in Darwin. In step with this, amenities in town were slowly improving. Many streets were in the process of being sealed and paved and street lighting improved. Augmentation of the water supply was also underway. A general increase in business activity had seen the establishment of a Chamber of Commerce, the occupation of permanent offices by commercial banks and the construction of government buildings and more private housing.\(^29\) To some extent at least, the Territory was recognised as an entity in its own right.

Given the harmonious relationship which Abbott enjoyed with both his Minister and the Permanent Secretary his views may probably be taken as an accurate reflection of those held by the government of the day. Abbott was hopeful that the future would turn out well. In practical terms, he believed that the Territory could to be seen to be able to 'pay its running expenses', and believed, with Buchanan, that the annual 'staggering deficit' that was charged against the Territory did not accurately reflect the Territory's true position. Buchanan had recommended that:

\[
\textit{it seems to me that it might be possible for the amounts which represent the deficits \([\text{cumulative past debt}]\) caused by the inability of the Northern Territory to earn sufficient money to meet such interest amounts to be}
\]

\(^{28}\) NTAR 1936/37, p.17.
\(^{29}\) NTAR 1937/38, pp.10,16.
shown in a separate account and the Territory placed in a position where it can earn revenue to meet working expenses.\textsuperscript{30}

Abbott demonstrated that, as presented, the financial position was misleading. The current deficit included interest on monies expended after federal takeover as well as the money paid to acquire it, but he also showed that the great bulk of the debt represented expenditure on the railway:

When the Northern Territory was taken over by the Commonwealth from South Australia, the public debt amounted to was £3,931,086, of which £3,144,869 was railway expenditure and £786,217 was Territorial expenditure.\textsuperscript{31}

Using the figures from the Payne Committee Report,\textsuperscript{32} he argued that expenditure on railway extension had amounted to £4,229,001, raised through Loan Funds, while the actual expenditure on the Territory was only a fraction of that amount. Indicatively, the 1935-36 account showed total debt charged against the Territory as £816,132, but working costs, interest and Sinking Funds, proper to only the railways, had amounted to £557,250. A further amount of £19,194, charged directly against the Territory, was incurred by the Postmaster General's department. Direct Territory costs amounted to only £239,688 – a fraction of the total. Thus he argued that the direct cost to Treasury had been misrepresented for many years. Abbott was confident that if figures were presented properly the Territory might be seen to be what it was - 'a working proposition':

As has been shown previously, the annual production figures are moving up towards three quarters of a million. The actual working expenses of the Northern Territory, exclusive of railways, over which the Administration has no control, are in the vicinity of a quarter of a million.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} NTAR 1936/37, p.17.  
\textsuperscript{31} NTAR 1936/37, p.17.  
\textsuperscript{32} Payne Committee, pp. 9-11.  
\textsuperscript{33} NTAR 1936/37, p.17.
Abbott believed that the more improbable follies of the past were reversible and it was now time to recognise the Territory as a true member of the Commonwealth of Australia, and that it was quite capable of making positive contributions to the nation's economy.

15.2.1 Report of the Payne Committee
On 1 March 1937 the Commonwealth Government appointed this committee to 'inquire into and report upon the resources of the Northern Territory, particularly in regard to the future of grazing and raising of stock'. Its brief was to deal 'principally with the policy to be adopted regarding land administration'. The committee members were WL Payne, Chairman, of the Land Administration Court in Queensland, JW Fletcher, a Queensland pastoralist and pastoral agent, and WM McLean of the Queensland Land Department. 34

Their report was published in the same year, 1937, and presented the government with the choice of either perpetuating a state of 'stagnation' or providing 'special encouragement' by a radical 're-orientation of policy'. The committee suggested that this could be done 'without involving the Commonwealth in any material loss'. 35 Pastoralism was identified as the principal engine for future growth, and improved communication by road and rail, together with better water facilities, were necessary adjuncts. It emphasized, however, that much remained to be done by pastoralists themselves. 36 Not all of its recommendations, such as a diversification into sheep, stand up to modern scrutiny. 37 Nevertheless it did not understate the difficulties that lay in the path of full development, but it agreed with Abbott that if the Territory were to become a 'definite asset' 38 for the nation then government must offer greater incentives as well as make constructive improvement to tariffs and taxation. 39

Some of the recommendations were acted upon immediately - freight charges from Alice Springs to Adelaide were lowered by 20%, substantially reducing marketing costs per

34 NTAR 1936/37, pp. 6, 14.
35 Payne Committee, paras 36, 37, 38.
36 Payne Committee, pp. 51-53.
38 NTAR 1937/38, p. 7.
39 Payne Committee, pp. 6-7. See also NTAR 1937, p. 8.
head for Alice Springs pastoralists. While Abbott, using his authority to the full, pressed ahead with needed infrastructure wherever possible and looked to a future when the Northern Territory would be regarded, as he himself now saw it, 'as a normal portion of Australia':

efforts must now be directed towards steady and successful settlement ...
I am convinced I have every reason to feel hopeful about the future of the Territory. If a steady and continuous policy of development is adopted and maintained the next ten years will show remarkable and successful progress.40

As the year 1937 progressed so did optimism generally. Total Territory production from all sources - mining, pastoralism and agriculture - almost reached £1 000 000. Mining production increased by £102 850 and pastoral returns grew by £77 434.41 Notably agricultural production did not rate a mention.

15.2.2 Agriculture
The future of farming was not reassuring. Professor JA Prescott, Chief of Division of Soils, CSIR, visited Katherine in 1937 and has given a brief glimpse of the farming community:

The farming community in the Territory forms an interesting pioneering group; the majority of the farmers on the Katherine are Russians, emigres from Vladivostok and Harbin. The settlers visited on the peanut farms included five Chinese, ten Russians, eleven British, one Italian and one German.42

It may reasonably be assumed that these and all surviving growers, which would include those on the Daly, were now farmers in the real sense of the word. Some had brought their skills with them from previous lives, others had gained proficiency by absorption and hard experience, but all were radically under-capitalised for the business in which, for want of anything better, they found themselves engaged. Some thought had been

40 NTAR 1937/38, p. 17.
41 NTAR 1936/37, p. 10.
given to effect 'improvements which will admit rapid transport from grower to consumer', but those engaged principally in growing peanuts were now at the end of their tether.

A surviving letter, dated 28 January 1937, written by one of the experienced Katherine growers, George Lim, gives graphic details. Writing to Mair, who had replaced Allen as Superintendent of Agriculture, he said:

Dear Sir,

1937 peanuts crop prospect [sic] are hopeless. Now I am in a position to inform you my crop I planted including replanting, about 170 acre, all I got now is 35 acres oil nuts. Which is fair germination and about 25 large nuts which is only "Passible" and the remainder I have left alone not worth cultivation. Mr Nigel Bruse only have about 5 acres out of 130 acres including replanting, worse than mine. I having applied to the Administrator this mail for assistance to import new seeds, for next crop from Rhodesia same breed of seeds Mr Allen imported 3 years ago. Virginia bunch seeds.(for seeds purpose which are duty free). No use me carrying on with my own seeds which is to risky. My present crop not likely sufficient to cover my current expenses. If I can't get the new seeds it won't pay me to risk any more crop. In fact am just about fed up, as a poor crop on top of this one it is very hard for me to recover, I may have to abandon the industry all together. I am not given up hope all together but must have new seeds, that is of vital importance I offered to payment within two crop namely 1938,1939.I shall be pleased if you will support my application and interview Mr Giles the acting Administrator, you may enlighten him in this matter, as you have seen most of the crop when your last visit. Thanking you in anticapation hope to hear from you in due course. Yours faithfully, George Lim

Its import was ominous and may have been effectual in prompting some action. Mair was authorised to obtain and supply the seed and marketing responsibility for the crop was returned to government. Following a ministerial visit, during which McEwen met a deputation of growers, £500 was spent on seed purchased from the Queensland Peanut Board. This with new bags for the resulting crop was distributed to twelve growers. For many it was already too late and a large part of the crop remained unsold. The Territory's reputation for sound product was not so easily regained.

42 "Divisional Report (not for publication) of the Council for Scientific & Industrial Research, Division of Soils by The Chief of Division: Notes on a visit to the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory." National Archives of Australia, Series A9778, Item C4/3/52. Canberra, 1937.

43 "Letter from George Lim to Superintendent of Agriculture: re peanut seed." Katherine Museum. Katherine NT, 1937.
MC Goode, who had acted as Superintendent of Agriculture during Allen's leave of absence from 1924 to 1925, was now engaged in the private marketing of peanuts in Queensland. In 1939 he had made inquiry of Mair for Territory peanuts. Mair replied weakly on 18 April 1939:

Your letter has arrived at an opportune time owing to the difficulty being experienced in marketing Northern Territory peanuts for some years owing to lack of markets ... From your own experience you will realise the difficulty experienced by Northern Territory settlers in regard to marketing.  

He went on to explain that only eight farmers on the Daly, seventeen on the Katherine and two others had planted peanuts that year, but he promised only that if he found any of suitable quality he would be 'prepared to sell at 1d less than Queensland pool price'. Shortly afterwards he resigned on personal grounds.

Meanwhile nineteen of the remaining growers struggled on and tried to diversify, planting Mauritius and soya beans and trialing a variety of other crops including tobacco, velvet beans, kaffir corn, feterita, broom millet, saccaline, sesame, castor oil plant and cow peas. The Botanic Gardens promised to provide control plots for these trials. Some farmers also wanted to experiment with cotton but were dissuaded by high freight rates and quarantine restrictions prohibiting the movement of cotton to southern states and overseas. Nonetheless, during the dry season they supplied Darwin with limited amounts of tomatoes, cabbages, sweet potatoes and swede turnips, lettuce, carrots, bananas, mandarins, oranges, lemons, pineapple and paw paw. During the 'wet' they supplied the town with a wider variety, which included luffa gourds, cucumber, melons, pumpkin, Chinese cabbage, amaranth, spinach, egg fruit, cassava and yams. Mangoes and custard apples were also produced as Abbott made every attempt to organise better

---

45 NTAR 1938/39, p. 11.
47 NTAR 1938/39, p. 15.
48 NTAR 1938/39, p. 11.
marketing in Darwin and improve logistics. Unfortunately, however, for most farmers
their financial position was too precarious and their debt to local stores and other
creditors became insurmountable. As Abbott reluctantly admitted, 'it would appear to be
most difficult to keep the growers going.'

15.2.3 Pastoralism
In 1938 pastoralism had a particularly good year. Total offtake approximated 100 000
head. The Queensland and Adelaide markets took over 57 000 and 18 000 respectively
and the Wyndham Meat Works of West Australia absorbed over 20 000, while 3 052
head went for the local trade.

Table 29
The distribution & number of stock - (a)1938 & (b)1939
(a) Totals by district and class 1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
<th>Donkeys</th>
<th>Mules</th>
<th>Camels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwin &amp; Gulf</td>
<td>205 101</td>
<td>12 571</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>6 702</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria River</td>
<td>337 217</td>
<td>6 086</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 929</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly Tableland</td>
<td>269 312</td>
<td>7 056</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>3 736</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>82 642</td>
<td>7 478</td>
<td>29 250</td>
<td>7 060</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89 422</td>
<td>33 191</td>
<td>20 901</td>
<td>19 427</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>1 323</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Overall total by class 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
<th>Donkeys</th>
<th>Mules</th>
<th>Camels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>891 640</td>
<td>31 662</td>
<td>26 856</td>
<td>17 894</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>1 301</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived and Sourced: Northern Territory Administrators' Reports (1937-1939).

The number of cattle walked eastward into Queensland, westward to the Wyndham
meatworks or trucked south by rail to the Adelaide and the South Australian markets was
now never less than 40 000 a year. The Territory's production for the year 1935-36 had
reached £737 926, of which over 50% could be attributed to pastoralism (Table 29 & 30).

After reading in the Singapore Times that the Commissioner to the Netherlands East
Indies wanted to buy Malayan cattle, Abbott noted in 1938 that Australia already was

49 NTAR 1938/39, pp. 11, 12, 15.
50 NTAR 1937/38, p. 5.
51 NTAR 1937/38, pp. 6, 7.
Table 30
Production Figures by Industry (1935-1936)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral</td>
<td>483 329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearshell</td>
<td>88 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>92 474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other minerals</td>
<td>35 375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo hides</td>
<td>23 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other production</td>
<td>4 637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>737 926</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


exporting between 60 000 and 70 000 live sheep to Malaya. He thought it reasonable to expect that at least some might be supplied from the Territory\(^{52}\) and he sent a government representative to Singapore to make inquiries. Indications were good, and on his return the representative was sent to arrange appropriate contracts with pastoralists. However he came back empty-handed:

I am not particularly keen to hurry forward this trade, for indications point to existing herds being so depleted and gradually becoming of such inferior quality, that it will not be possible to cope with an export of many in excess of 200 reasonable quality bullocks monthly. For many years there has not been a satisfactory market available, and particularly does this apply to the smaller holdings in the north, where owners have become so apathetic as to lose all interest in their herds, which have in consequence so deteriorated that it would be difficult to dispose of them locally, and, to include many of them in an overseas shipment might prove disastrous to the trade.\(^{53}\)

This indicated the seriously rundown nature of the northern portion of the pastoral industry. It was trade from further south that was buoyant, with fats able to fetch twice or even four times more than the stores walked overland from other states, and cattle from Alice Springs that were carried by rail to Adelaide increased to over 5 000 head in 1939.

\(^{52}\) NTAR 1937/38, p. 9.
\(^{53}\) NTAR 1936/37, p. 10.
Many station owners in the central region were thus able to extricate themselves from financial difficulties as their wool production also rose to £6 500.\textsuperscript{54}

15.2.4 Mining
In May 1937 the 'Aerial, Geological and Geophysical Survey Party' inspected part of the Territory for mining prospects and discussed future surveys with Abbot and the Director of Mines. Help was given to mining companies to find water, as well as by constructing government batteries and some associated public buildings. During Abbot's first year total subsidies to mining companies came to £11 911 and produced satisfying results (Tables 31 & Figure 13).

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Mining: employment figures (1939)}
\begin{tabular}{l|c}
\hline
Mineral & Men employed \\
\hline
Gold & 260 \\
Wolfram & 250 \\
Copper & 6 \\
Mica & 40 \\
Tin & 40 \\
Other Minerals & 4 \\
\hline
Total employed & 600 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{Sourced: Northern Territory Administrator's Report for 1938 - 1939.}

Returns from Tennant Creek gold operations reached £85 565, almost doubling Territory production, and the incentives offered also revived interest in the old Howley Mine by a Mt Isa Company.\textsuperscript{55} In the next year, two more government batteries had to be installed at Tennant Creek to cope with increased production. Mining Ordinances were revised to bring them in line with West Australian mining regulations, recognised to be the 'most satisfactory in the Commonwealth' and, following recommendations from AH Telfer, West Australian Under Secretary for Mines, a complete re-organization of the Mines Branch was planned.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} NTAR 1938/39, pp. 4, 5.
\textsuperscript{55} NTAR 1936/37, pp. 13, 14, 15.
\textsuperscript{56} NTAR 1937/38, p. 10.
Largely due to a fall in the price of wolfram, in 1939 the total value of mining production fell and there was a reduction in pearl shell and agricultural product, but offsetting this gold production rose by £22,586. Government diamond drilling also prompted growing interest in exploration of the Tanami and Pine Creek regions while individual prospectors were encouraged by assistance with the purchase of stores, tools and equipment, and companies and mining syndicates received subsidies for mining development and machinery. Charges were reduced at government batteries and more subsidies made
available for transport by road and rail. Assay and analysis was also improved and extended in the laboratory at Darwin.\textsuperscript{57}

As mining and pastoralism prospered all initiatives to maintain and improve farming production remained discouraging. The pearling industry was also in decline and its future in doubt, because not only were many beds worked out, but also there were complaints of too many Japanese boats.\textsuperscript{58} Over all, however, the Territory economy had greatly improved. Table 33 graphically illustrates the growth in mining alone.

\subsection*{15.2.5 Population}

To anyone who knows the Northern Territory, John McEwen's itinerary in 1939 on a ministerial visit would still daunt the best-equipped and most adventuresome traveller today. The record of his journey is eloquent not only of better communication within the Territory but of the importance that was then being given to accelerated development. Entering the Territory from Mt Isa, he travelled by car to Newcastle Waters and Alice Springs and thence via Tennant Creek to Wave Hill, Mistake Creek and Wyndham. He then reversed his track and journeyed on to Victoria Downs, then Katherine and onwards to Darwin. On arriving in Darwin he immediately took steps 'to implement many of the recommendations made by the Payne Committee', and amongst matters decided was an increase in surveyors employed and the purchase of more vehicles for the required fieldwork. A plan to appoint even more Field Officers from Queensland over the next five years was also approved.\textsuperscript{59}

The 1937-1938 Administrator's Report records an increase in population of 891 over the previous year. Europeans, 'Asiatics' and 'half-castes' reached 6704 and were more diffusely spread than before. The trend continued with an increase of 701 in the following year and of 501 in the year that war was declared, even though 129 Asiatics by then had left the Territory. The figures were significant for they indicated the beginnings of stability in the colonial community with 79 marriages recorded and 126 births registered at the same time. Though these estimates excluded Aboriginals, they were still

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{57} NTAR 1938/39, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{58} NTAR 1937/38, pp. 10, 11.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the highest since the federal government had been in control and many 'Asiatics' had now been granted Australian citizenship.  

15.2.6 Roads and stock routes
All construction and maintenance of roads, routes, bores and similar work was placed under the supervision of the Resident Engineer, DD Smith, at Alice Springs and he managed to make good headway. New road plant accelerated progress on the north-south road. Most of the route from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek was already cleared and graded, and creek crossings made permanent. Sixty miles (97 km) of the old track between Tennant Creek and Newcastle Waters had been relocated as far as Banka Banka Station. Between Katherine and Mataranka, survey work to relocate the old track had been completed and the new route grubbed and cleared for traffic. Relocation had also to be completed between Katherine and Adelaide River but the last leg of the route of seventy-six miles (122 km) between Adelaide River and Darwin was finished. Many secondary feeder roads and tracks suitable for vehicles had also been opened. Some 2500 miles (4023 km) in the Barldy and Victoria River districts were passable to vehicles to the West Australian border and a new road to Western Australia from the Alice had been pioneered.

The old Stock Routes remained of paramount importance, as the only rail connection capable of transporting stock to southern markets was still from Alice Springs to Adelaide. Many of the original facilities on the Stock Routes were badly run down and Abbott now gave impetus to their proper upgrade and maintenance. Between Birdum and the Alice three new bores had been completed and equipped. Many general repairs to the Murranji and Barkly Stock Routes were carried out, with new tanks and troughs constructed and a windmill erected at one bore on the Barkly to replace the stationary engine, which had previously cost £600 per annum to run. A new route was also begun from the Alice to the West Australian border via Napperby, the Tanami and the Granites to shorten the present route from Inverway to the railhead at Alice Springs by 480 miles.

60 NTAR 1938/39, p. 20.
61 NTAR 1938/39, pp.15, 16.
(772 km). This gave access to the railhead from the Kimberley, Wave Hill and Newcastle Waters.  

15.3  A national co-ordination of effort
Since 1935 government subsidy to pastoralists of 50% on the cost of bores constructed and transport for equipment and stud stock had been available. In 1938 the subsidy on bore construction was suspended pending review, but all transport subsidies continued. Up to 30 June 1939 the movement of some 300 tons of station supplies from the Alice Springs railhead had been coordinated with road transportation by the Resident Engineer, for onward delivery to various pastoral stations. Cost of this road transport to consignees varied with distance and the scheme was generally acknowledged to be 'working very satisfactorily'. Costs charged for the service were:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Cost per ton per mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>up to 100 miles</td>
<td>6 pence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 to 200 miles</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201 to 300 miles</td>
<td>4.5 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 300 miles</td>
<td>1 &quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An extension of this coordinated transport for all supply routes, whether by ship, road or rail, was under active examination, but any further extension of the railway was at present out of the question. As the Minister, J McEwen, said in a letter on 2 February 1939:

> the huge expenditure which the government must face in connection with defence ... [insures that] ... it would be quite impossible at present to give favourable consideration to any scheme of railway construction.  

15.3.1  Education
The state departments of Queensland and South Australia helped Abbott's administration in many ways, not least in the area of education. In 1939 there were primary public schools in Darwin, Parap, Pine Creek, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. In addition, there were two Roman Catholic private schools, one in Darwin and the other in

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62 NTAR 1938/39, p. 16.
63 NTAR 1938/39, pp. 16,17.
64 "Letter of 2 February 1939 from J McEwen in reply to IW Fletcher: re Fletcher's suggestions on future development." National Archives of Australia, Series A 659/1, Item 43/1/7032 pt 2. Canberra, 1939.
Alice Springs. Only 43% of children attending these schools were European. Child health was uniformly good. Average school attendance at 544 was the highest figure yet achieved. It was planned to build a new school at Katherine, and a kindergarten at Darwin was in process of being established. Children too far afield for regular schooling were catered for by correspondence schools in Darwin, Adelaide and Brisbane. Secondary education was not available in the Territory, as numbers were still insufficient to justify the cost of building. Secondary schooling was obtained interstate and scholarships were available. The record number of sixteen students had qualified for secondary education in 1939. Ten of these had passed the Queensland Scholarship Examination and six had passed the South Australian Qualifying Certificate. Their results compared 'very favourably indeed with results obtained in southern states'. Students who already held Northern Territory scholarships had all obtained 'excellent passes' in the Queensland Junior and Senior Examinations of 1938 and their scholarships were extended appropriately. Meanwhile it was hoped to trial a secondary class at Alice Springs Primary School, and this initiative was expected to 'yield good results and provide a foundation for the future establishment of a high school' in due course, 'when the population justifies it'.

15.3.2 Public library

Darwin Public Library was open even at night with the help of volunteers and there were several country branches. Books were regularly despatched by road, rail, air or steamer to a number of outlying communities. Their names are evocative, 34 Mile, Adelaide River, Burrundie, Pine Creek, Fergusson River, 191 Mile, Mataranka, Birdum, Katherine, Maranboy, Groote Eylandt, Roper Valley, Newry, Yirrkala Mission, Timber Creek, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. This service was appreciated, and between July 1938 and June 1939 the number of books on loan doubled from 1 466 to 2 850, with the number of borrowers increasing proportionately from 672 to 1 150. Advice and assistance was given by Kenneth Binns, Librarian of the National Library in Canberra,

65 NTAR 1938/39, p. 18.
66 NTAR 1938/39, p. 18.
who was also able to supply books with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Qantas Empire Airways, Burns Philp and the Commonwealth Railways among others helped make a success of this large and complex undertaking.\(^69\)

15.3.3 General amenity

Funds were also made readily available when it was seen that the Darwin Town Council, in 1937, was unable to raise sufficient revenue to provide proper services to its community. Since then the town had seen many improvements beyond the sealing of its streets and footpaths. Trees were planted, parks and reserves established and the water supply system augmented with water piped from the Manton Gorge. Water towers had been erected and contracts let for a fully reticulated town system. An increasing population had brought with it increased demand for electricity which was satisfied by the installation of new generating plant and the overhaul of the old power supply to cover the town to its fullest extent. The process of systematic development continued with twenty-five new government buildings being built, and the permanent offices provided by the banks had engendered a degree of optimism, so that citizens were now confident enough to build thirty-four new houses at considerable cost to themselves.\(^70\)

Consideration was given 'to the organization of tourist facilities at both Darwin and Alice Springs'. Existing hotels had been modernised during the previous twelve months and there was a new hotel rising on the Esplanade which was expected on completion to rival the 'famous hotels in Java and the East with a private swimming bath and modern innovations.' Alice Springs, as befitted a 'town attractively situated close to the MacDonnell Ranges' that was said to be 'rapidly becoming a popular tourist resort', was beginning to be ornamented with many flowering trees.\(^71\)

Conclusion

The three years under Abbott had seen much attention given to the detail that went far beyond the development of physical infrastructure. Police organisation, medical services and Aboriginal Affairs had all come under the eye of an all-seeing Administrator able to

\(^{69}\) NTAR 1938/39, p. 19.
\(^{70}\) NTAR 1938/39, pp. 26, 27.
delegate his authority. Regional identity and its concomitant of emergent local autonomy had been a long time coming, and for the growing number of Territorians it must have seemed that at last they had an administration prepared for the long haul. Three short years had witnessed more transformation than the previous fifty. Had World War II not intervened who knows how it might have ended?

That having been said, agriculture, always understood as the very engine of settlement, was in abeyance. Effectively it had been relegated to the 'too hard basket'. Nothing beyond lip service was paid to the needs of Territory farmers who, having abandoned their holdings, had no other option but to seek employment in Darwin's belated development.

71 NTAR 1938/39, pp. 27, 28.
Chapter 16

World War II and its wake
Chapter 16
World War II and its wake

Summary
Abbott's tenure continued throughout the war and his abilities as an administrator, coordinator and planner were fully engaged. CSIR involvement and the Farms organised by the Army both played their part in shaping events, and as the Territory emerged from war the first tentative steps were taken towards statehood and the end of a long colonial era.

16.1 Response to war
World War II began in Europe in 1939 and until December 1941 life continued with a fair degree of normality and with Abbott's firm hand on the tiller there was even some hope that agricultural settlement might be increased at Mataranka and Roper River. The rationale for this is not clear, for only eighty acres of peanuts were grown on the Katherine and Daly in 1939. A hundred and twenty acres of cotton were also grown with relative success, but the attempt to diversify into other field crops, such as Mauritius beans, failed. Although Katherine farmers had begun to grow vegetables to meet an anticipated demand, there was still only a few hundred acres under cultivation in the whole Territory. One farmer at Katherine had expanded his market gardening under spray irrigation, and as Abbott described:

The quality and variety of his produce are fully equal to the demands of the ordinary household and it was recently reported that cabbages up to 14 lbs in weight, turnips, beetroot, carrots, parsnips, English potatoes, lettuce and, tomatoes all of excellent quality.¹

Generally, however, most farmers found it much more profitable to work on defence construction in Darwin, and by mid-1942 there were only thirteen farmers left on the land - seven on the Katherine and five on the Daly.²

² NTAR 1939/40, p. 11; NTAR 1942, pp. 6, 7, 12.
The Botanic Gardens, while continuing to experiment with tobacco, now was principally engaged in producing seedlings and potted plants for distribution to Darwin residents as well as 'shade and ornamental trees for street planting'. Now that they had a better water supply the residents had begun to cultivate their own gardens and sought advice on growing shrubs and fruit trees from the Botanic's nursery. Before the war came in earnest the Gardens were also popular as a venue for 'Band concerts' and various picnic entertainments which were enthusiastically attended by both civilians and servicemen.

The Survey Department was at full stretch. Surveys were underway for auxiliary water supplies from Howard Springs, for the Naval Victualling Yard and Radar Stations as well as a road and pipeline from the planned Manton Dam. Further inland, work on stock routes and roads continued, and in May 1940 more country was surveyed for intended new settlements near Newcastle Waters, Helen Springs and Eva Downs. In all some 7 160 square miles (11 520 sq km) of survey work was well in hand.

The 1939 defence planners required adequate lines of communication between Alice Springs and the main Australian railways. At the beginning of the war, the road between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek was only in fair condition, and the Commanding Officer had to regard Darwin 'as an island' and realised that completion of the road was an absolute military necessity. As war progressed, a 'Main Roads Board', made up of teams from South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, worked jointly on construction and by 1943 the Stuart Highway, comprising one thousand miles (1 609 km) of bitumenised road, was completed to Alice Springs. A second military road, the Buchanan Highway, connected Mt Isa to Tennant Creek. Radical improvement to all forms of communication followed, with direct telephone communication from Darwin to Alice Springs and onwards to all capital cities. Civil aviation improved and there was a regular fortnightly mail and passenger service, flying between the Alice and Mt Doreen, the Granites, the Tanami, Gordon Downs,

3 NTAR 1939/40, p. 12.
4 NTAR 1942, pp. 6, 7.
Nicholson, Labelle, Wyndham, Carlton, Newry, Auvergne, Katherine, Willeroo, Victoria River Downs and Timber Creek.\(^6\)

On 7 December 1941 Japan declared war and within a few weeks the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and the islands of the Pacific were all under Japanese control so that the Territory found itself in the front line. The immediate plan to hold the line south of the town made it necessary to evacuate civilians. The War Cabinet took the decision on 12 December 1941, and Abbott demonstrated his abilities to the full in his coordination with civil and military authorities in carrying out the task. Within a week over, 750 of the 1 066 women and 969 children had been transported to the south by sea and more ships as well as aircraft were made available until evacuation was complete. The last ship left on 15 February 1942 and five days later the USS Trinity was torpedoed just outside Darwin harbour. The last plane carrying civilians left Darwin at midday on 18 February 1942 and the next day the remaining 70 women and children left by train. As they left, 188 Japanese naval aircraft bombed and strafed the town and harbour. Ten ships were sunk, at least 252 people died in the bombardment, and 14 allied aircraft were destroyed. The hospital, airfield, official buildings and private houses all were severely damaged. That night Abbott saw to it that all bank cash and securities, approximately £400,000, and all administrative staff and records were trucked southwards to safety.\(^7\) Many of the most historically valuable survey records, including the original field notebooks and diaries of Goyder and David Lindsay, reached the Alice on 1 March 1942. Finally Abbott ensured that a few members of the survey branch remained in Darwin to help the military and, by 28 February 1942, he was able say that the Army was in full control of the northern area in accordance with the battle plan. Abbott himself did not leave for the Alice until 2 March. From there he immediately saw to it that large numbers of cattle were mustered and driven to safety from as far west as the Kimberleys.

\(^5\) NTAR 1943/44, p. 5. Quoting from 1939 military appreciation by Lieutenant Colonel (later Major-General) HGH Robertson, DSO.

\(^6\) NTAR 1943/44, pp. 5, 6.

Peter Elder\(^8\) questions Abbott's leadership. He posits the view that Abbott's actions as Administrator were governed not by initiative but by the alternating roles that he played as either 'Colonial Governor' or 'countryman'. He believes that in neither role was he able to demonstrate empathy with, or indeed to understand the needs of the people of the Northern Territory. Elder contends that Abbott lacked the communication skills necessary to an Administrator.\(^9\) This is not tenable. As Bev Phelts argues, Abbott's initiative, leadership qualities and empathy are clearly demonstrated in his frequent clashes with the Defence authorities on matters affecting the people.\(^10\)

Abbott's ability during and in the years following the evacuation of the north, which involved both humans and animals, was done during the wet season. Supplies had to be delivered over a vast area, including auxiliary portable pumps to pump water should there be no wind to power windmills en route.\(^11\) In the scale of world catastrophe, the evacuation was a small event. Nonetheless, without the improvements in communication - the roads, the stock routes, the watering facilities and the integration of transport systems - carried out during the previous three years under his all-seeing eye, it might have become yet another tragedy in history. Inevitably there was an initial overlap of specific responsibility between civil and military authority, but by February 1943 good working arrangements were in place. The 'Inland Transport Service' was run by Abbott's civil administration to maintain 'essential supplies to settlers', which had to be taken as far as Halls Creek in Western Australia. The round trip from Alice Springs was often as much as 1 390 miles (2 237 km), adding to very heavy demands on transport.\(^12\) Amongst other things, 'emergency food depots' were set up throughout and within a year the Inland Transport Service's trucks had traveled 112 337 miles (180 750 km) and carried tons of essential goods.\(^13\) Soon this service became integral to the

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\(^8\) Peter Elder, "Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott: Countryman or Colonial Governor?" PhD, Northern Territory University, 1998.

\(^9\) Elder, pp. 397-398.


\(^11\) NTAR 1942, pp. 1-5; NTAR 1942/43, pp. 3, 4.

\(^12\) NTAR 1942/43, pp. 5, 9.

\(^13\) NTAR 1943/44, p. 3.
continuing development of the Territory and it pioneered the use of that ever-familiar icon, the 'road train'.

16.1.1 CSIR become involved
When Mair resigned as Superintendent of Agriculture it was intended that the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) would take over the supervision of Territory agriculture. Later, as the war progressed, the army established its own farms in the 'Top End' to supply the troops.

Before the Army Farms were organised, JA Prescott of CSIR advised the Inspector General of Army Medical Services that a group of settlers on the Katherine River, in touch with him, 'could well be organised for vegetable production' for the troops. These farmers, he said, were able and anxious to do something for the war effort. 14 Concurrent with this, Major Sir Stanton Hicks, Director of Army Catering, recently returned from the Top End, discussed matters with Prescott. 15 Hicks wrote at length to CSIR's Sir David Rivett 'to conjure up before you the picture'. He viewed the Army's intention of establishing farms with alarm - due to Army supply staff's 'apathy and expediency' which he had found 'somewhat exhausting'. He asked for Rivett's help:

At Adelaide River, N.T. Army has purchased some 100 acres of river bank previously used, I believe, for peanut growing, as a farm for growing vegetables for troops. This followed on a report of mine concerning need for a fresh vegetable supplement to the ration of troops in the area; but, owing to circumstances inseparable it would appear, from large overgrown bureaucratic organisations, the scheme was begun badly. 16

He had little belief in the army's potential for agriculture:

15 JA Prescott. "Letter of 7 June 1941 from Prescott to Sir David Rivett, CEO CSIR." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.
16 "Letter of 10 June 1941: requesting CSIR support in the matter of vegetable supply for the Army in NT." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.
I wish to inform you that I am reporting to Army that under no circumstances should the Military Board accept any scientific or relative technical responsibility for running such a farm. 17

In his opinion, the task of supplying the army with vegetables could and should be done by local farmers:

the matter of fresh vegetable supply from local growing assumes more importance than one of expediency - it becomes national in the farseeing sense. If we but take advantage of the momentum now gained, we may carry Darwin and the N.T. out of the slough of despond in which it stagnates, and one of the cardinal needs is to prove (a) that it can (sic) be done, and (b) that anyone (sic) can do it. 18

He hoped, therefore, that Rivett might be able to suggest a 'scientific adviser' from CSIR, sufficiently practical, who would also have the necessary 'active aggressive approach' to be able to overcome expected obstacles. 19

CSIR sought to find a suitable man, while the Army remained determined to have its way. On 4 July 1941, from the Department of Pharmacology and Human Physiology of the University of Adelaide, Hicks appraised Rivett that as far as the military were concerned Army Farms were already a fait accompli. He now advised another tack, CSIR to act as a 'scientific fifth column' by lending scientific oversight to the project. He believed that without this the Army operation would 'be damnably difficult to get anything out of'. Colourfully, he pointed out that it currently took the Army longer to unload a coastal steamer than it had taken Hitler to capture Crete, and he fancied that without CSIR the Army Farms would fall into the hands of some 'ex motor tyre dealer' or worse. If that were to happen, then the troops would have to grow their own vegetables 'in their spare time using water from the camp drainage'. 20

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17 "Letter of 10 June 1941 from Sir C Stanton Hicks to Sir David Rivett: requesting CSIR support in the matter of vegetable supply for the Army in NT." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.
18 "Letter of 10 June 1941 from Sir C Stanton Hicks to Sir David Rivett.
19 "Letter of 10 June 1941 from Sir C Stanton Hicks to Sir David Rivett."
20 "Letter of 4/7/1941 from Hicks to Rivett: re Army farms with enclosure of report to QMH 7th Military District." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.

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On the credit side, Hicks admitted that after interviewing the officer appointed to manage the Army farm he found him surprisingly suitable. Not only was he capable of undertaking the task, but his men had volunteered to come with him from the regiment. They respected him and all were experienced farm workers. Hicks advised Rivett that because of this he had told the Quarter Master General of the 7th Military District that, insofar as the appointment was concerned, he was now satisfied. He had underlined in his report, however, the necessity of **unloading all scientific responsibility** (sic) upon the Council for Scientific Research.\(^{21}\)

Rivett replied by return that he had not received any official request for CSIR support, nevertheless, he undertook to 'get hold of someone' that would be able to 'apply a measure of scientific common sense to the [army farm] activities'.\(^{22}\) HKC Mair, who had been ineffectual as superintendent of Territory agriculture in the years immediately before the war, was given the rank of captain and became the first scientific adviser to the project under CSIR auspices.\(^{23}\) He had obtained the job by default and was never the first choice as he did not to fit the criteria. Dickson of CSIR was not particularly impressed, describing him as 'by nature given to a rather pessimistic outlook'.\(^{24}\) This appointment, however, initiated a long scientific investigation by CSIR (later to become the CSIRO) into Territory agriculture.

### 16.1.2 Army Farms

It is seldom appreciated just how few acres of vegetables are needed to supply a population of reasonable size. BT Dickson, CSIR Chief of Division of Plant Industry, estimated in 1941 that no more than 100 acres would be required for the 8 000 military

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\(^{21}\) "Letter of 4/7/1941 from Hicks to Rivett: re Army farms with enclosure of report to QMH 7th Military District."

\(^{22}\) "Letter of 15 July 1941 from Rivett to Hicks: re CSIRO support." National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 1941.

\(^{23}\) "Letter of 6 August 1941 from Deputy CEO CSIR to BT Dickson." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941. Also "Letter of 23 September 1941 from Mair to Dr AEV Richardson"; "Letter of 6 August 1941 from Deputy CEO CSIR to JL Schofield"; "Letter from Dickson to Richardson"; "Letter from Schofield to Richardson"; "Extract of correspondence of 19 September 1941 from Hicks to Rivett." All in National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.

\(^{24}\) "Letter of 24 June 1941 from BT Dickson to Rivett." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B 30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941.
personnel then stationed in the Territory. At times there were up to 40,000 men whose needs were adequately met by less than 500 acres, and these acres also produced tropical fruit, eggs, poultry meat (chickens and ducks) and even some honey. A few local farmers supplied the army for a time as well with pig meat, poultry, eggs, vegetables and fruit but their support was small for they had neither machinery and fertilizer nor labour, sufficient to compete with the army.

It has been said that the attempt by the Army to provide vegetables for the troops stationed in the Territory had proved something. GAR Nelson of CSIR reported in August 1945 after visiting Army Farms:

In conclusion the Army Farm Group should be congratulated on the successful and efficient manner in which it has established its farms and shown that vegetables can be grown in the Northern Territory in sufficient quantity to maintain a high level of health in a large body of troops. It has shown very clearly that in the post-war period sufficient vegetables and fruits can be produced locally to supply Darwin and other centres in the Territory.

This was no discovery. It had already been proven. Only lack of capital and logistics had prevented 'sufficient vegetables and fruits' from being 'produced locally to supply Darwin'. The monopoly established by the Army Farm Group saw to it that commercial farming production, small though it had been but capable of expansion, declined even further.

25 "Letter of 20 June 1941 from BT Dickson to CEO Sir David Rivett: re supply of vegetables to army personnel in Northern Territory." National Archives of Australia, Series A 9778, Item B30/3/1A. Canberra, 1941, p. I.
26 "Inspection Report on Australian Farm Coy. AASC Northern Territory, August 1943." Australian War Memorial, AWM 54, 33/7/5. Canberra, 1943. See also "Report on meat supply in Northern Territory and all aspects." Australian War Memorial, AWM 917/816, Attachments L & M. Canberra, 1943; "Report submitted as an outline of the basis upon which operations of the present Army Farm section in the Northern Territory can be extended to assure supplies of certain fresh vegetables and fruits for a force of 40,000 men." Australian War Memorial. Canberra, 1942; EN Hutton, "CSIR (Plant and Industry Division): Report on vegetable production problems observed on Army Farms in the Northern Territory 1944." Australian War Memorial. Canberra, 1944.
That the Army Farms succeeded was largely due to Lieutenant Campbell, the appointee who had so impressed Hicks. Later as Major Campbell, he was in charge of the Northern Territory's entire Army Farm Group. The failure of a postwar government to appoint him Superintendent of Agriculture when he applied may have been an important factor in the slow recovery of civilian agriculture. His story is interesting. He had been a Queensland farmer between the wars and in the First World War, as a naval commander, he had been decorated for his work in submarines in dangerous RAN operations in the Black Sea. On the outbreak of the Second War he rejoined the Navy but was only placed in command of a desk. Not keen on this idea, he resigned to join the Army as a private soldier. Promoted to Sergeant Major, he was posted with his regiment to the Northern Territory and selected to run the first Army Farm at Adelaide River.

After Campbell's Northern Territory tour of duty, he was seconded to the civil government in Borneo. While there, the Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Department of Post War Reconstruction, in 1946 offered him permanent employment in the Northern Territory and Campbell applied directly to the new Territory Administrator, AR Driver, for a position. Driver endorsed his application, remarking that 'he is a damn fine type', and forwarded it to Canberra with two other glowing references from senior officials. 28 Canberra, however, advised that there was no 'created position in the branch to which Major Campbell could be considered'. Undeterred, Driver passed his particulars and recommendations direct to CSIR, 29 telling Campbell at the time that:

I have nobody at present in any appointment dealing with agriculture, and I will not be creating any until such time as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research are firm in their recommendations of agriculture ... I do not anticipate this until two years time ... I am

28 LA Campbell. "Letter of 4 September 1946 from LA Campbell to the Administrator Northern Territory (with attachments)." National Archives of Australia, CRS F1/0, Item 1952/632, CA 8618, Darwin, 1946.
29 "Letter of 30 October 1946 from Administrator Northern Territory to CEO CSIR." National Archives of Australia, , CRS F1/0, Item 1952/632, CA 8618, Darwin, 1946.
The matter dragged on. CSIR may not have been particularly keen in taking on someone outside its organisation, even though:

The Experimental Farm at Katherine was his [Campbell's] idea in the first place and he founded it under great difficulty and with tremendous opposition from the army ... and it was his idea that the farm could be carried on in the post-war period by the Civil Authority ... I attended a Conference at Melbourne with him in January 1945 when the present scheme of CSIR taking over was formed.31

Representations from the Territory to the Department of the Interior to obtain his services continued well into 1948, until presumably it was too late.32

This was doubly unfortunate. During the war local farmers could have been as easily organised by him, and could have provided the nation not only with a cheaper solution but have laid the foundation of future prosperity, as Hicks had envisaged.33 Territory farmers, secure in their own self worth, would then have been fully able to take advantage of later CSIRO postwar technical assistance. During the critical immediate postwar period they would have been able to speak with authority and to 'act as a medium for the exchange of viewpoints between the farmers and the administration.'34 Pastoralists had been doing this for a long time, but understandably the farmers lacked confidence. Even as late as 1960, the Forster Committee found that Territory farmers still had no means of conducting a useful dialogue with government and strongly

30 "Letter of 30 October 1946 from Administrator of the Northern Territory to Major LA Campbell." National Archives of Australia, CRS F1/0, Item 1952/632, CA 8618, Department of Transport and Regional Services Central Office. Darwin, 1946.
31 "Correspondence of 10 October 1946 to the Government Secretary: re Major LA Campbell." National Archives of Australia, CRS F1/0, Item 1952/632, CA 8618. Darwin, 1946.
32 See relative correspondence concerning this matter. National Archives of Australia, CRS F1/0, Item 1952/632, CA 8618.
33 "Letter of 10 June 1941 from Sir C Stanton Hicks to Sir David Rivett: requesting CSIR support in the matter of vegetable supply for the Army in NT."
recommended that the administration 'initiate steps' to encourage the necessary process.  

16.1.3 Pastoralism and CSIR

As war intensified so pastoralism prospered. A steady demand for cattle brought with it good prices. After 1943 cattle numbers actually dropped, but throughout the period a steady offtake of 150 000 head per annum met all interstate export demand and the relatively high rate of local consumption. Lessees were able to make good profits and improved the infrastructure of their holdings. The Army ran veterinary and stock control, while the civil authority remained responsible for registration of brands and maintenance of stock routes.

Originally an impractical proposal had been made for meatworks to be built by the civil authority at five widely dispersed centres. The Army had added further complications to the issue by demanding a four-week reserve of some 2 200 head, either on the hoof or on hooks, to be held at each of these centres. This was attempted but as there was no immediate practical solution to the problem of refrigeration and the cattle were being held in unsuitable holding paddocks, the resultant 'rapid loss of condition' soon gave rise to 'adverse criticism'. On 9 November 1942 a joint conference between the military and CSIR, which Abbott attended, was held in Melbourne to formulate a better strategy. It decided to locate one central abattoir at Manbulloo on the Katherine, and CSIR were directed to select a suitable site for an irrigated holding paddock to maintain cattle in good condition.

The Darwin Meatworks were not to be re-opened; the dispersed meatworks were closed. Manbulloo Abattoir was built at a cost of approximately £70 000. It had a capacity for 700 beasts per week and was able to provide fresh meat daily.

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35 "Recommendations from the Report of the Committee to enquire into the prospects of Agriculture in the Northern Territory of 29/10/1960 (Confidential until released by Minister for the Territories)", XVII: 2, p.1.
37 "Letter of 7/11/1942 from LB Bull to Deputy CEO CSIR: re army request to attend meeting to discuss provision of meat supply for troops." And "Memorandum of 12 November 1942 from Colonel McDonald to Professor Richardson CSIR: covering attached conference minutes." National Archives of Australia, Series A9778, Item A30/5/152A. Canberra, 1942.
for up to 50 000 persons. From 1942 to 1946 Manbulloo processed an average of 21 204 fat cattle annually.38

16.2 Indigenous population during the war
In 1941 the number of people of Aboriginal descent was estimated at 14 500. This represented almost 20% of the nation's total indigenous population and was only exceeded by that of Western Australia with 26 116.39 (Table 32).

In that same year, the Director of Native Affairs prepared a policy paper, which had been accepted by the minister of the time, but war had prevented its implementation. During the war the Army employed over 1 000 Aboriginals on their farms and in various other work.40 It was expected that whatever indigenous postwar policy was to be adopted would 'involve considerable expenditure'. On demobilization, when army employment ceased, it was decided that depots and settlements must be established in various parts of the Territory and that it would be necessary to set up a system of oversight with patrol districts and patrol officers.41

Table 32
Aboriginal Population of Australia by State (1941)
(Including half castes)

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Sourced and derived: NTAR 1944-45 - republished in the Year-Book for 1942-43 (p. 315).

38 NTAR 1946, p.6. (LHA Giles, Acting).
39 NTAR 1944-45, p. 4. Abbott here was quoting the Year-Book for 1942-43 (p. 315).
41 NTAR 1944-45, p. 4.
Peter Read’s compilation of oral history on the period from an Aboriginal perspective, indicates that many Aboriginal people found that the war had been a transforming experience for them. Aboriginal people classified as half-castes already had full citizens’ rights. They had the vote and received the basic wage - ‘the Native Affairs Branch does not control them in any way’ and in general, said Abbott, they were ‘good, decent, citizens’. For the remaining 12 050 (Table 33), as Abbott described it, there were three groups with specific interest - the ethnologists, the missionaries and the government. The latter had the prime responsibility of ensuring proper treatment and access to health and welfare care. By 1945 there were ten Aboriginal mission stations in the Northern Territory. These were Port Keats, Bathurst Island, Arltunga (Catholic), Milingimbi, Croker Island and Yirrkala (Methodist), Groote Eylandt, Oenpelli, Roper River (Church of England), and Hermannsberg (Lutheran).

Table 33
Estimated distribution of Aboriginals 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arnhem Land Reserve</th>
<th>4 000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Australia</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission stations</td>
<td>3 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged and infirm maintained by government</td>
<td>1 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed by Army or on stations etc</td>
<td>3 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 050</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures do not include those classified as half-castes.

Sourced and derived: NTAR 1944-45.

A postscript, however, is perhaps necessary. Syd Kyle-Little, a Patrol Officer, had joined the Native Affairs Branch in Darwin in 1945 as a cadet. Over the next few years he carried out a number of patrols, mainly on foot, in Arnhem Land. Senior officers often viewed the special rapport and empathy Kyle-Little developed with the Aboriginal with consternation. He advocated a gradual introduction to the cash economy without

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43 NTAR 1944-45, pp. 5-7.
detriment to indigenous culture. He founded Maningrida as an Aboriginal trading post. Believing that missionary work offered unique opportunities to improve Aboriginal welfare, he was nevertheless convinced that the primary aim of Christianisation did more harm than good, contributing little worthwhile. In a 1949 report, he concluded that:

"It is a misfortune that most missionaries who come into contact with the aborigines in this sector of the Northern Territory are people who have apparently led a solitary, self reliant, individualistic, religious life, and who are therefore specially handicapped in their endeavours to realise and understand the aborigine's mentality. Most missionaries I have come in contact with are fine people, but I consider their great mistake in the handling of the aborigines and in attending to native welfare lies in the fact that religion is always uppermost in their minds."

16.3 Response to the peace
On 20 July 1945 a conference was held under the auspices of the Commonwealth Land Settlement Committee with BT Dickson of CSIR present, during which the 'allocation to ex-service personnel' of the Army Farms had been discussed. Nothing much came of that particular item, but these discussions provided an initial forum on CSIR's likely attitude to planning 'the future requirements in the Territory for fundamental agricultural and pastoral research'.

A memorandum next reached CSIR on 27 April 1945 to inform them of 'a sub-committee to undertake certain work, including the preparation of a programme of resources surveys and a report on potential economic development'. This had followed preliminary discussions with CSIR's Prescott of the Waite Institute on previous Territory soil survey work and on proposals for a possible future programme for CSIR. Cabinet wanted to know what had been done, what needed to be done and details of maps and aerial photography that CSIR might require to carry out future soil surveys in order to:

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45 "Correspondence relating to discussions on War Services Settlement in the Northern Territory." National Archives of Australia, Series A9778, Item C30/3/110. Canberra, 1945.
give added support to your proposed programme when the recommendations for resources surveys are put before Cabinet. I am sure that you will agree that when dealing with a practically unsurveyed area as vast as the Territory it is essential that we correlate all survey work in order that the limited numbers of technical men who are available for topographical surveys and mapping can be used to the best advantage. 46

The demands already being placed on CSIR were heavy. In the North, its activities currently included specialist investigations into anomalies of radio propagation and ongoing agricultural work associated with the services, and preliminary investigation for the Ord River project. Nonetheless, in its reply the Council expressed willingness to proceed with whatever the government should request. It reminded Cabinet, however, that 'the future extent of CSIR's programme' depended entirely upon the extent to which the Commonwealth was prepared to commit resources but, without precise information of what government wanted, it put forward some tentative suggestions:

The council is unable to estimate with any precision the total staff likely to be employed in Darwin ... a permanent unit of at least 12 to 15 staff would require to be accommodated at the outset ... these numbers would increase substantially with the establishment of scientific laboratories in the area ... therefore ... the Interdepartmental Committee should, in planning the development ... make provision for the above requirements.

In principle, Cabinet approved CSIR's broad memorandum of intent. Within a few days the Commonwealth Disposal Commission was instructed to transfer the Army's Experimental Farm at Katherine to CSIR for £706 15s 0d. No direct instructions having been given to the Property Manager for the disposal of the men's sleeping quarters, recreation hut and implement shed, he intimated that these matters might be 'dealt with in direct negotiation with our Darwin Office.' 48 Thus began CSIR's (later CSIRO) long postwar association with Territory agriculture.

46 "Memorandum of 27 April from Chairman, Inter-departmental Committee on Darwin to Secy., CSIR." National Archives of Australia, Series 9778A, Item C30/3/37. Canberra, 1945.
47 "Memorandum of 6 June 1945 from CSIR to the Secy., Prime Minister's Department", pp.1-4.
The government moved as quickly as possible to return things to a peacetime setting. As early as October 1945, HV Johnson, Minister for the Interior, and the Secretary of his Department, JA Carrodus, toured the Territory with the Administrator in company with officers of the Department of Information. They were joined by the Commissioner for Railways at Katherine and had further discussions with him at the end of their tour later at Darwin. The clear intention was to get the Territory's civil administration up and running quickly.

In the July, Abbott had returned to Darwin and by September 1945 most of his key administrative staff had joined him. The Sub-Treasury and Accounts Branch, post, telegraph and telephone services were the first to return and were allocated temporary accommodation. The military relinquished all control of civilian services by 30 July 1946. Soon a semblance of normality returned, with the Commonwealth Department of Health running not only Darwin Hospital but also the hospitals at Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine. Stock and veterinary services resumed and public schools in Darwin, Pine Creek and Katherine re-opened with a subsidized bus service bringing outlying children to school. The Chamber of Commerce was re-established and the banks reopened. The Army News closed and Darwin's Northern Standard resumed publication from its former premises, with plant taken over from the Army. Abbott in his final report in the last year of the war was hopeful and believed that the future lay 'within the scope of practical planning'. Indicative of a general optimism, he quoted the observations of Nelson T Johnson, the United States Minister to Australia, who had traveled through the Territory in 1944 and had subsequently written an influential article for the South West Pacific, concluding that 'This is Australia's land of opportunity.'

The National Security (Emergency Control) Regulations were repealed on 28 February 1946, and many new arrivals augmented returning evacuees. Former residents found that their old homes or business premises no longer existed, which posed an

49 NTAR 1946, p. 3. (LHA Giles Acting).
50 NTAR 1946, pp. 4, 5. (LHA Giles Acting).
51 NTAR 1946, p. 3.
additional problem for the hard-pressed administration. The *Darwin Lands Act of 1945* provided a temporary solution. It enabled the Commonwealth to resume title of privately owned lands in Darwin and its suburbs so that some rational allocation could be made for the 3 100 civilians clamouring for accommodation. Single administrative officers were quartered in accommodation built for them before the war and rental, which was never high, adjusted as all baths, stoves, coppers and fittings had been 'liberated' by the military. Some families had to be housed in the ex-Royal Australian Air Force hospital huts at Nightcliff. A vigorous community soon emerged with a committee liaising with local departmental representatives to allocate accommodation and to provide essential services, such as sanitation, water, and electricity. Due to their shocking condition, prewar married quarters were made rent-free and the occupants paid 5s per week only for power and water. The community thrived and a regular private bus service was soon up and running between the new settlement and Darwin. 52

On 14 April 1946, Prime Minister JB Chifley and his staff stopped at Darwin, en route for London. Qantas Empire Air Service to London via Darwin and Singapore was resumed in the same month and plans were well underway for the Australian Broadcasting Commission to take over the military's broadcasting station that had operated from Darwin throughout the war. 53 Soon afterwards Abbott, who had been Administrator now for twelve years, left the Territory on sick leave, one month prior to the official date for his retirement. 54 Before leaving he wrote:

As I have written before, with peace prospects lighting up the horizon, the Northern Territory can take stock. The Territory emerges from the war with assets far outweighing the debits. It has suffered, its civilians were evacuated for long years, Darwin as a town ceased to exist and over 50% of its buildings and dwellings were destroyed. But these can be re-built. Against this the Territory has aerodromes which rank with the best in Australia and it has hundreds of miles of broad highways. It has had secure markets for its cattle and its pastoral lessees are free of financial difficulties. Its needs have and are being carefully studied and I am certain that if the recommendations which have been made in the past few years, which include the advent of the railway, and a good

52 NTAR 1946, pp. 4, 5. (LHA Giles Acting).
53 NTAR 1946, p. 3. (LHA Giles Acting).
54 NTAR 1946, pp. 1. (LHA Giles Acting).
progressive land policy - if these are implemented - the success of the Northern Territory is assured.\textsuperscript{55}

He worried that lessons learned might be forgotten in the euphoria of peace. He was convinced that 'the main deterrent to progress of the Northern Territory has been expediency\textsuperscript{56} and he stressed the importance of continuing to leave sufficient autonomy of action with the Administrator. Buchanan had pointed out the need for local autonomy in 1925 and the Payne Committee of 1937 had also made that recommendation:

\begin{quote}
The authority of the Administrator should not be unduly circumscribed. He is the man on the spot and the people look to him for decisions. He should, we think, be entrusted with power to give decisions on most matters without reference to headquarters.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Abbott emphasised that:

\begin{quote}
The position of the Administrator often becomes very difficult as the Government of the day rightly holds him responsible for any happenings in the Northern Territory, but it appears to me to be the case sometimes that the Administrator has responsibility without power.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

In his view, the Administrator must be permitted to develop working relationships, not only with the central government, but also with the people. To this end he had advocated a Northern Territory Legislative Council in his earlier reports. He now reiterated his words, and added that this was no longer an option but an imperative:

\textsuperscript{55} NTAR 1944/45, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{56} NTAR 1942/43, p.10.
\textsuperscript{58} NTAR 1942/43, p. 11.
The very foundation of democracy is self-government and it would appear to me that the Northern Territory is one of the very few portions of the British Empire without a degree of self-government.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{Table 34}
\textbf{Northern Territory Population and Dwellings by Police District, 30 June 1947}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Occupied</th>
<th>Unoccupied</th>
<th>Built</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide River</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>2078</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony's Lagoon</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borroloola</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock's Creek</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly River</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin (a)</td>
<td>1688</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>2538</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finke River</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harts Range</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatches Creek</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Nash</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranboy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mataranka</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle Waters</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parap</td>
<td>2108</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>3005</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Creek</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankine River</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roper River</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber Creek</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave Hill</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migratory</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7378</td>
<td>3490</td>
<td>10868</td>
<td>2705</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Population and dwellings within boundaries of Darwin Town only.

\textit{Note:} these figures are exclusive of full-blood Aboriginals, which were recorded in the Year Book for 1942-43, p. 315, at some 10 000.

\textit{Sourced:} Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The figures (Tables 34 \& 35) demonstrate the economic position reached by 1946. The population, exclusive of full-blood Aboriginals, was approaching 11 000 and, despite evacuation, had grown by some 150% over the period. It was now more widely

\textsuperscript{59} NTAR 1944/45, p. 7.
distributed throughout the Territory than ever before. Mining had been maintained at a more or less steady rate, the pastoral industry had improved its production, but farming did not even rate a mention.⁶⁰

Table 35
Value of cattle, mining and other production exported from the Northern Territory for year ending 30 June 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cattle exports</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>South Australia</th>
<th>Western Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£625 590</td>
<td>£433 498</td>
<td>£108 626</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mining</th>
<th>Gold</th>
<th>Other minerals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£68 928</td>
<td>£97 993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Kangaroo skins</th>
<th>Wool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£2 612</td>
<td>£12 288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total exports   £1 142 776

* average store price realised at auction
# average fat

Sourced and derived: Northern Territory Administrator's Report 1945/46.

Conclusion
The Territory received many benefits from the war, not the least of which was a real consciousness of its existence. This was reflected in greater attention being given by government to improving political structures and the establishment of a semi-democratic administration. In affirmation of Abbott's view,⁶¹ a Territory legislature of seven official members was to be appointed by the Governor-General, with six elected members and the Administrator as its President of Council. Naturally, there was a hitch when the introduction of this model produced a lengthy hiatus and caused many local decisions that might have proved advantageous, if taken timeously, to be postponed.

⁶⁰ NTAR 1946, p. 5 (LHA Giles Acting).
until March 1948 when the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act* of 1947 ultimately took effect.  

That there was no reference to the farming sector in the Administrator’s report is significant and underlines the danger so prophetically identified by Prescott, Hicks and Rivett of the CSIR in 1941. They clearly understood that army farms would inevitably compete with local farmers, who if suitably organised and advised would be able to produce all that the Army might require. Their vision had proved to be correct. Local private farming enterprise, never strong and now denied a ready market by the Army Farms’ monopoly, had become insignificant. Thus by the end of the war government perceived its one option to be an expanded role for federal intervention in the guise of CSIRO. This is not to disparage that institution, but its dominance in effect tended to undermine and overshadow the relevance of the Territory department. Had all else been equal, a resuscitated Northern Territory Department of Agriculture, no longer operating in a vacuum might have worked hand in hand with experienced farmers to develop a sustainable Territory industry and capitalised on the demonstrated value of the Aboriginal population.

Nonetheless, great expectations were embraced for the Northern Territory. Science and technology were now to be enlisted in comprehensive efforts to implement strategies to direct future public funding. Sound preparatory analyses, scientific research and monitoring were to underwrite all planning. In scope and extent this approach was to eclipse all previous effort. Government, it seemed, would take the long-term view and at last, after almost 100 years, the Territory might emerge from its long status as a colony on the periphery of the Australian psyche.

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61 NTAR 1943-44 and 1944/45.
Chapter 17

Conclusion
Chapter 17
Conclusion

The shortcomings of colonial administration throughout the Territory's history at times were mirrored in other jurisdictions. The need to attract settlers and capital for development often relied on the encouragement of speculation to the detriment of more localised skills that lacked only sufficient seed capital for successful establishment. Similarly the dead hand of racism too often had played its part in circumscribing more rapid development. Territory racism often extended to all who were not of British or northern European descent, and even though Chinese and Aborigines had demonstrated a capacity to contribute significantly to the agricultural economy, their activities were ignored at best and ultimately the administration actively discouraged them.

By and large other regions managed to overcome all this in time. The colonial Territory was never able to rise above administrative deficiencies. Territory history is fraught with disappointment. Time and time again those who might well have succeeded in establishing themselves had the government shown a minimum understanding of their needs abandoned the struggle. The inability to establish a self-sustaining population in the Northern Territory is indicative of a failure in colonisation. Major social and political change in Britain was the catalyst that drove nineteenth century migration patterns. Nearly fifteen million persons left the United Kingdom between 1815 and 1898. Of these, 67 per cent went to the U.S.A., 15 per cent to British North America (Canada) and 12 per cent to Australasia.\(^1\) Australia had greater difficulty in attracting these migrants because of distance and until the 1850s emigration figures demonstrate that Canada, the U.S.A. and South Africa were by far the preferred destinations. Later, improvement in communications made Australasia the second most popular destination after North America.\(^2\)

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2 Prentis, p.27. There is a wide range of more recent research, much of it to be found in articles in the Australian Economic History Review or Historical Studies.
Table 36
Emigration from the United Kingdom to Australia (1788-1900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1788-20</td>
<td>700 (approx.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821-30</td>
<td>8,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-40</td>
<td>67,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841-50</td>
<td>114,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851-60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-70</td>
<td>497,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871-80</td>
<td>214,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-90</td>
<td>176,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1900</td>
<td>339,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,328,863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In just over 100 years, approximately one and a half million Britons came to Australia. Figures in (Table 36) show that the greatest number arrived between 1850 and 1900, which were the critical years for Northern Territory development, yet no real inducement by way of assisted passage was ever offered to potential migrants to the Northern Territory.

Reasons for migration
The catalysts for migration from Europe to 'new countries' were largely economic. The technical advances of the Industrial Revolution were accompanied by social disruption. Prentis has shown that in Scotland alone the population increased by 80 per cent, and that between 1801 and 1851 this was accompanied by huge demographic change. In 1801 over 60 per cent of Scots lived in rural areas and only 40 per cent were urbanised, but by 1871 this pattern had completely reversed. Dislocation and relocation were accompanied by social problems - poor health, bad housing, unequal educational opportunity, poverty and crime. Sheer pressure of numbers caused the average number of occupants per house to increase from 5.46 to 7.8, so that:

The skilled and unskilled workers were finding the fundamental activities of home and neighbourhood, work and play, worship and
schooling undergoing an uncontrollable change ... Character and industry seemed no longer a guarantee of a stable and secure living.  

These decaying conditions were a commonplace throughout Europe and the only hope for those whose life had been thus shattered lay in emigration. It is recorded that between 1879 and 1893, even from such a small country as Norway, over one-quarter of a million migrated, thirty thousand in 1882.  

Assisted immigrants
In New South Wales, excluding convicts, some 3,500 emigrants from Britain had been assisted between 1831 and 1837, a high proportion of these being women from reformatories and workhouses, but by 1850 the emphasis changed to assist skilled artisans and agricultural workers from the lower middle and working classes. Later, a combination of groups, both government and private, in all colonies began a systematic programme of colonisation to procure the type of migrant required for progressive development. The intention was to encourage the practice where:

colonists should themselves choose emigrants in England (sic!) and bring them to the colony, receiving from the colonial Government a bounty equal or nearly equal to the cost of the passage.  

The principal factors which drew migrants to the eastern colonies were subsidised passages and cheap land - Queensland offered free grants, and the gold rush of the 1850s brought some 140,000 aspirants from England alone.  The assisted immigration programs sponsored by independent voluntary groups in both Britain and Australia were less successful than schemes conducted in co-operation with colonial governments and the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission in Britain. Of the assisted immigrants who came to eastern Australia from 1832 to 1850, approximately 30,000 arrived at Port Phillip Bay (now Melbourne) and most of the others disembarked at Sydney.  

3 Prentis, pp. 23-25.  
5 Prentis, p.60.  
7 Prentis, p. 69.
Of the one and a half million migrants from Britain to come to Australia it has been estimated that some two thirds were assisted. Figures for unassisted migration in the years prior to 1900 are not definitive, but most of the unassisted were artisans and people of limited capital, comprising a goodly cross section of contemporary British society. A Scottish newspaper of the time commented on their circumstance:

The middle stratum of society has been stirred ... some of our best workmen [are leaving] ... well-behaved and energetic young men ... of the most respectable class and first-class tradesmen from the country.  

High proportions of these migrants were literate and, according to Prentis, many brought their families. Until 1900, 'selection', 'nomination' and 'land order' were the principal methods of assistance. Colonial emigration agents brought out some 50 per cent under selection. Nomination was favoured mainly by New South Wales and Victoria, and required relatives or friends in the colony to contribute. The greater proportion of immigration to Queensland was assisted by land order. Prentis has calculated that between 1860 and 1919 Queensland invested nearly £5 million on immigration. The comparative figures for Victoria and New South Wales were less at £800 000 and £1.4 million respectively.

By the 1880s the institutions and way of life in the eastern colonies mirrored those of the mother country. By that time the Australian colonies were well abreast, even in industrial manufacture. Comparative figures for the rate of build up of manufacturing industry in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland are indicative (Table 37).

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8 Prentis, pp. 77-79. It is not irrelevant also to note that a high proportion were men, especially young, unmarried men; See FK Crowley. Colonial Australia 1875-1900. Vol. 3, A Documentary History of Australia. West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980. Crowley has calculated the masculinity rate of the unassisted entering New South Wales in the 1860s and 1870s at 160.6, and of the Victoria-bound in the 1860s at 214.4. Prentis also notes that, 'As far as age composition, masculinity rate and marital status are concerned, the Scots were quite similar to the English and quite different from the Irish'. In Victoria from 1850 to 1870 only one-tenth of the Irish were married as opposed to a quarter of the English and Scots. Only one-fifth arrived in families compared with three-fifths of the English and Scots, and about three-quarters of the Irish were in the seventeen to thirty-one years age bracket compared to one-half of the British. There were a very high proportion of young Irish spinsters.

9 According to Prentis' research, eighty-two per cent of Scots adults could read and write, compared with seventy per cent of the English. Only forty-two per cent of the Irish were literate and most were single.

10 Prentis, p.69, quoting from Crowley pp. 63-71.
Table 37
Estimated Workforce: Australian Manufacturing 1860-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>17853</td>
<td>33182</td>
<td>50250</td>
<td>57000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>19075</td>
<td>40331</td>
<td>58639</td>
<td>60000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3344</td>
<td>5595</td>
<td>16002</td>
<td>29000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Prentis from GJR Linge, 'The Forging of an Industrial Nation: Manufacturing in Australia 1788-1913', in JM Powell and M Williams (eds), Australian Space Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives, Melbourne 1975, pp. 159-60, 173.

Similarly, with the notable exception of the Northern Territory, colleges and institutions to encourage the science and practice of agriculture had been founded at an early stage in all colonies to investigate, develop and foster best farming practice specific to their regions.

Though South Australia's approach to migration had been rather different from that of the colonies of the eastern seaboard, it nevertheless had established itself with remarkable rapidity. At proclamation in 1836 its immigrant population was estimated at 546 persons, and within eight short years had grown to 17366. Seven years later the official census of 1851 recorded 63700, and by 1878 the population exceeded a quarter of a million. Not all of this stemmed directly from overseas immigration or natural increase; some was intercolonial. In a very short time South Australia successfully established itself with most of the supporting instruments, financial and institutional, of a 'modern society,' and achieved representative government in much the same time frame. In all colonies achievement had been accomplished within the constructive framework of developing local and regional autonomy. In the Territory matters had been different.

In the Northern Territory the process of colonization that South Australia adopted was quite singularly different. The annexation was completed without any systematic planning and, furthermore, South Australia by attempting to manage from a distance with no provision of real authority for the man on the spot had sought to do what no other colonizing authority had succeeded in doing. This effectively circumscribed
development of requisite regional autonomy that might have permitted decisions based on local realities.

The federal government may have had better intentions, but a combination of circumstances dogged its every succeeding administration until that of Abbott between 1935 and 1945. Always on the periphery of Australian consciousness and managed from a distant centre, the Territory's realities were never understood properly. All subsequent failure stemmed from policies and decisions made in this context and were often irrelevant. There was never any mechanism in place to rectify mistakes, because distant governments sought always to retain control within their own hands and effectively 'grasped more than their hands could hold'.

During the South Australian years Finniss, with no autonomy, was unable to exercise proper control over his subordinates. Parsons might have done so if he had chosen to take control, but essentially he proved incapable of objective judgement. Dashwood and Herbert perhaps had the capability, but were given no power of independent action and were, in any case, circumscribed always by the determination of the South Australian government to withdraw.

Gilruth, the first Commonwealth Administrator, fully expected to have sufficient executive authority. In the event, his was a classic example of a capable administrator undermined by the circumstances of rule from afar and he was effectively relegated to the position of a junior public servant. In the aftermath of the Darwin mutiny, Staniforth Smith was permitted temporary autonomy by a 'shell-shocked' government, but refused to continue because government still delayed placing sufficient autonomy in the Territory's hands. Urquhart, who in other circumstances might have been able to take effective action, was inhibited by financial constraints but still managed to delegate sufficient authority to his Superintendent so that the Cinderella of Territory agriculture was able to show some promise. Weddell, his successor, for whatever reason, did not handle his responsibilities well, and it was only ultimately during

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11 Arthur Bryant. *Pepys and the Revolution*, London: Collins, 1979, p.76. A quotation from Viscount Halifax, an 18th century English statesman, known as 'the trimmer' by his contemporaries because of his practice of 'trimming' or balancing between factions during the highly confused political period, when the Stuart King James II was ousted from the throne and replaced by William of Orange in 1688. He was a survivor and wrote a famous political pamphlet, *The Character of a Trimmer* (written 1684, published 1688), which describes the virtues of a middle course in politics.
Abbott's tenure that a proper degree of autonomy was able to flourish. This, and the intervention of a war, ensured that available funding was used to advantage. For the first time the Territory made some tentative advance.

The figures shown (Table 38) demonstrate the economic position reached by 1946. Population, without counting the full-blood Aboriginal people, had tripled, but relative to other regions remained small, mining had been maintained at a more or less steady rate, the pastoral industry had improved its production, but farming did not even rate a mention.\(^{12}\)

**Table 38**

**Northern Territory Population and Dwellings by Police District, 30 June 1947** *(exclusive of full-blood Aboriginals)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Occupied</th>
<th>Unoccupied</th>
<th>Being Built</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide River</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>1,185</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>2,078</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony's Lagoon</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borroloola</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock's Creek</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly River</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin (a)</td>
<td>1,668</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>2,538</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finke River</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harts Range</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatches Creek</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Nash</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maranboy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mataranka</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle Waters</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parap</td>
<td>2,108</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>3,005</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Creek</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankine River</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roper River</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber Creek</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave Hill</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migratory</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total          | 7,378 | 3,490   | 10,868  | 2,705    | 34         | 22          | 2,761 |

(a) Population and dwellings within boundaries of Darwin Town only.

*Note the number of full-blood Aboriginals recorded in the Year Book for 1942-43 (page 315) was some 10,000.

**Sourced:** Australian Bureau of Statistics

\(^{12}\) NTAR 1946, p.5 (LHA Giles Acting).
In 1978 the Territory achieved 'self-government', with powers similar to other Australian states. Though still lacking full autonomy, the long colonial era may be said to have passed. Writing in 1938, Abbott had noted that the Payne Committee of 1937 considered that the Territory had a 'very definite future'. While loath to put a figure on potential population, it had said that only 'the population supporting capacity' would limit it. Tentatively they thought that by 1947 it would sustain a white population of some 15,000 and that within another 25 years it might reach 45,000.

Since achieving self-government the Territory has experienced an economic expansion that is quite remarkable when compared with earlier standards. By the early 1990s Darwin's population already exceeded 75,000, while Alice Springs, with 950 at the beginning of the Second World War, accommodated 25,000 in addition to a growing number of tourists.

Table 39
Indicative percentage trends of population towards an 'urban' distribution postwar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>84.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>99.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sourced and derived: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The worldwide movement of people from rural to urban living, postwar, has been a continuing trend (Table 39). In the Northern Territory, however, the latest indications are that the drift may have steadied somewhat of late. By the year 2002 the rural population had fallen to 30 per cent of the Territory's total but, despite this, the value of primary production from agriculture, pastoralism and mining exceeded some $3

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13 NTAR 1937-38, p. 6.
14 Payne Report, pp. 81, 82.
130 000, and when fishing and tourism are included it exceeds $411 168 000. This trend might well have surprised the members of the Payne Committee, even more than the realisation that Territory residents had increased to almost 188 000 by 1997 and have continued to increase, now reaching 197 768 - of which approximately 51 000 are of Aboriginal descent.\textsuperscript{15}

Controversy has ever waxed and waned and still goes on regarding agricultural development in the Territory. In the interregnum prior to self-government many mistakes, for the old familiar reasons, continued to be made. Nonetheless, from an industry without hope and virtually moribund in 1946, agricultural production is now measured in thousands of tons, instead of a few hundreds, and values are now reckoned in millions. Most of this has been within the last ten to fifteen years. This is shown graphically below, where the value of fruit and vegetable production in the Territory has increased from 30 million dollars in 1992 to almost 90 million in 2001 (Figure 14).

\textbf{Figure 14}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{axis}[
    title={Value of Fruit & Vegetable Industry, 1992 to 2001},
    xlabel={Year},
    ylabel={Value ($\text{million}$)},
    xtick={1992,...,2001},
    ytick={10,...,90},
    ymajorgrids=true,
    xmajorgrids=true,
    legend style={at={(0.5,0.95)},anchor=north},
    legend entries={Fruit, Vegetables},
]
\addplot[mark=*, color=black] coordinates {
};
\addplot[mark=x, color=black] coordinates {
};
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}


The value of field crops at nearly $7,000,000, on the other hand, was only 8 per cent of the farming sector total. The rise proportionally of fruit and vegetables is almost certainly attributable to the rapid increase in the availability of markets through development of refrigerated transport, and the Territory's seasonal advantage over other states, which enables important products, such as mangoes, to capture early or out of season interstate markets.

Production costs remain proportionately higher in the Territory than in most other states. Top End soils require greater fertiliser inputs due to lower levels of most nutrients. The delivered cost of fertiliser is much higher. Similarly weed and pest control cost more and, paradoxically, even though the annual monsoon provides good rain in the Top End more regularly than in many other regions of Australia, it is offset by extremely high evaporation rates. The water requirement for a crop in the Territory is often higher than elsewhere. Furthermore, though the amount of water available is less problematical than elsewhere in Australia, the cost of application is often relatively much higher because of higher pumping costs in the Northern Territory and subsidised water in other states. Though transportation now presents less of a problem than in the past, farming is still a very costly business in the Territory. Generally speaking, agronomic conditions, the physical nature of the soils and the climate still make it so.\(^{16}\)

Achievement since self-government, when contrasted with the years under colonial administration, is quite marked and in some measure provides further justification for the thesis contained in this work. Distance of itself was not the problem as had been demonstrated in other colonies. If progress was to be made, distance from the 'mother country' demanded local autonomy. This had been the essential element denied the Northern Territory by colonizing governments, out of touch with its people and blind to local realities.

\(^{16}\) Valerie Hristova, "Interim Report on economic potential for irrigated agriculture in monsoonal areas of the Northern Territory". Darwin: Department of Primary Industry & Fisheries, 2000.
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