

BEFORE SCHOOL

THE STORY OF THE CANBERRA PRE-SCHOOL CENTRES



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Introduction

BIRTH OF THE PLAN

It has been said that prior to 1927 Canberra somewhat resembled a construction camp, and it is understandable that many of the public servants first transferred to Canberra regarded the prospect with "feelings that ranged from disfavour to dismay".*

Catering for the needs of families transplanted from an urban environment to the sheep country that was being converted into a national capital, and adapting them to their new surroundings, make an absorbing sociological study.

Primary and secondary education were provided by the New South Wales Department of Education, the Commonwealth reimbursing the cost and providing buildings, equipment and transport for the children. This arrangement, in general, still holds for public education in the Territory, which now includes technical education. Tertiary education has developed to

the under-graduate level at the Canberra University College and the graduate level at the National University, now established in Canberra.

The Department of Health provides health services, and with the Department of the Interior, makes grants to certain voluntary organizations engaged in social, educational and cultural activities. Among these organizations is the Mothercraft Society, which was begun in 1926 by a group of community-minded women. This Society supervised the care of mothers and babies from the ante-natal stage to the end of the pre-school period, and it was to it that people turned when they felt more should be done for the pre-school child.

For five years, from 1941 onward, small bodies, ranging from Y.W.C.A. discussion circles to Mothers' Clubs at Infants' Schools, pressed for more provision for this age group.

Meanwhile the population was constantly increasing, both by natural increase and by the steady influx of young families. For instance, in one block of 350 pre-fabricated houses, a canvass by a local committee revealed that there were 275 children under 6 years. The present birthrate is 42 per 1,000 population, compared with Sydney's 22 per 1,000.

To the social problems arising from the transplantation of population and a high natural birth-rate is now added that of assimilating increasing numbers of New Australians.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A NURSERY SCHOOL

Prior to 1940, plans of the Department of the Interior for the development programme included the building of nursery schools, and preliminary designs for these were prepared. Owing to the outbreak of war, however, their construction was deferred.

Impetus to the move for pre-school facilities was given in 1942 when two trained kindergarten-ers, resident in Canberra, voluntarily began two small pre-school units, one at the Griffith Mothercraft Centre, and the other at the Duntroon Royal Military College.

The then Governor-General's wife, Her Excellency Lady Gowrie, gave wholehearted support to these early activities, and in 1943 a pre-school sub-committee of the Mothercraft Society was established as an independent voluntary organization called the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society.

As a result of negotiations with the Department of the Interior a disused building in the old hospital at Acton was converted into a nursery school. Standards regarding space, staffing, equipment, programme and diet, as used by The Lady Gowrie Child Centres in the States, were generally adopted.

THE PRE-SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The administration of the Nursery School was considered as part of the Canberra education system, but differed from that of the primary and secondary schools in that there was a Pre-School Advisory Committee created to discuss and advise regarding trends and policy for the Nursery School and any future extensions in the pre-school field.

This committee is chaired by an officer of the Department of the Interior and comprises representatives of the Mothercraft Society, the Nursery Kindergarten Society, the Infant Schools and the Department of Health, with the Headmistress of the Canberra Nursery School and the Pre-School Officer.

At all stages the administration has enlisted the help of specialists, among whom have been the Supervisor of Infant Schools of the New South Wales Education Department, the Principal of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College and the first Principal of the Canberra Nursery School.

By 1944, when the Nursery School was functioning, it soon became apparent that its capacity was inadequate to meet the pressing demands for pre-school education in Canberra.

EARLY PLANNING AND EXTENSION OF SERVICE

An immediate extension of facilities according to the pattern of the Nursery School was impossible, because of current shortages of trained teachers, materials and manpower.

The Pre-School Advisory Committee accordingly asked that the late Dr. Vera Scantlebury Brown, then Director of the Maternal, Infant and Pre-School Section of the Victorian Health Department, and Miss G. E. Pendred, then Field Officer of the Victorian Nursery Kindergarten Extension Board, be invited to advise on future development.

Their suggestions were realistically conceived in terms of the times and the community. At the invitation of the Minister for the Interior, Miss Pendred drew up further detailed plans.

Her recommendations were that a Pre-School Officer be appointed to work within the Civic Administration Branch of the Department of the Interior; that the type of child care given be based on community needs with community education as its foundation; and that voluntary help be used as much as possible in the establishment of centres.

During eight years since the opening of the Nursery School in 1944, four distinct types of pre-school work have been explored in Canberra. They are reviewed here in the order in which they were developed.

* C. S. Daley, in "Handbook for Canberra," 1939.

The Nursery School

The Acton Nursery School caters for 92 children aged from three to five years. As applications always exceed capacity, selection is made by allocating a quota (based on the child population) to each district within the city area. Eighty-six places are filled in this way, and the remaining six by children who merit special consideration for admission. All children attend for five days a week. Special buses transport them to and from the school.

partment of the Interior, and the non-professional staff, consisting of a secretary, a cook and a janitor, is recruited locally. Children pay 3s. a week towards the cost of meals. The Parents and Friends' Association holds regular meetings at the School and raises funds for extra equipment.

HEALTH

Before admission all children are examined by a medical officer of the Department of Health.



LONG PERIODS OF OUTDOOR PLAY ARE A FEATURE OF THE DAILY ROUTINE

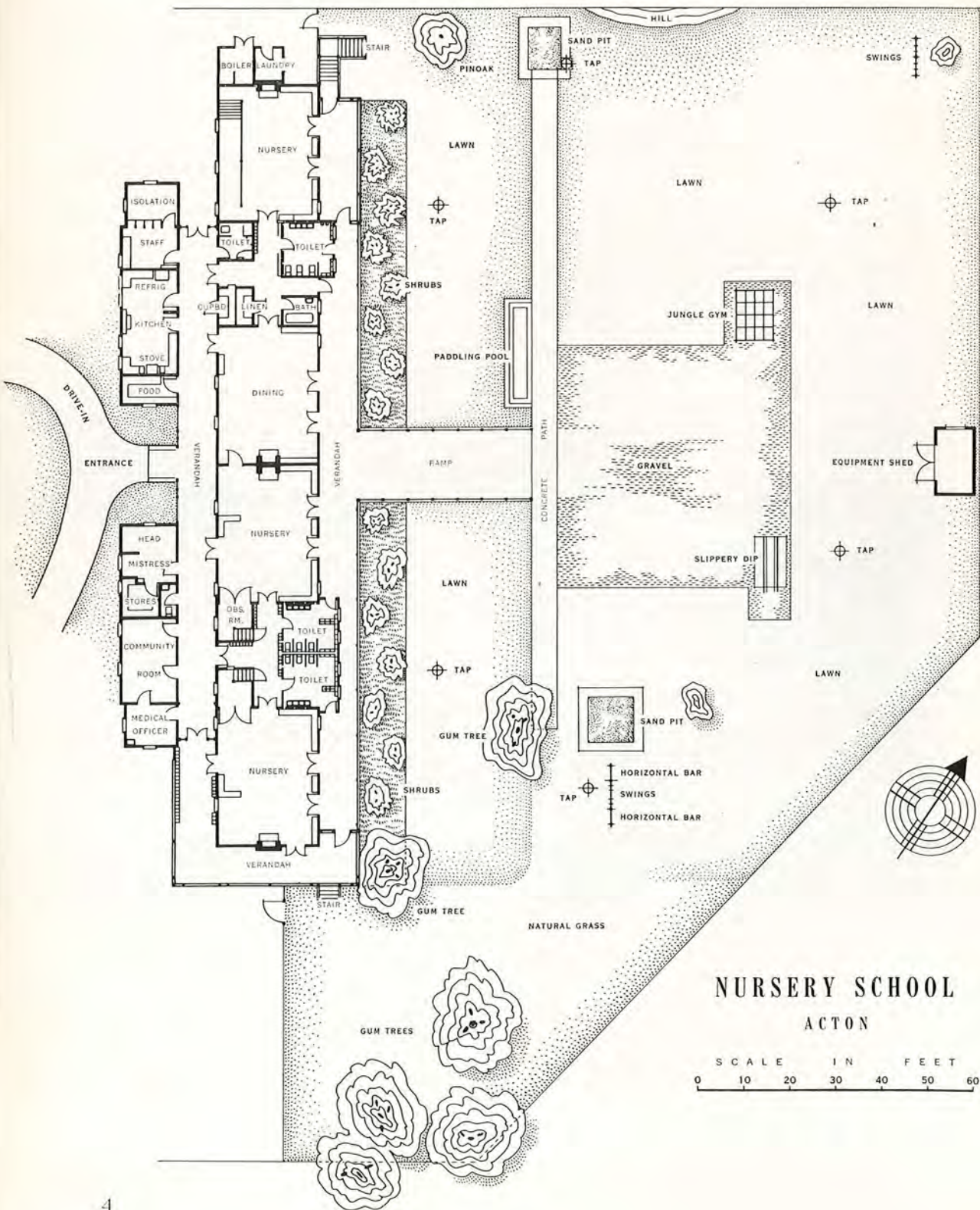
STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION

The Department of the Interior is responsible for all expenditure and the employment of staff. The professional staff, consisting of a headmistress and five trained assistants, is provided by the Education Department of New South Wales, salaries being reimbursed annually by the De-

This officer also visits the school to review the health of children already enrolled and advises parents when medical attention is needed.

PROGRAMMES AND FACILITIES

The building consists of three well-equipped nurseries, a medical room, dining room, community room, kitchen, laundry and vegetable store. On a long, sunny verandah the children



NURSERY SCHOOL ACTON

SCALE IN FEET
0 10 20 30 40 50 60



WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF EQUIPMENT CHILDREN EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN MANY WAYS

enjoy creative work such as brush and finger-painting, dough and clay modelling, free cutting and pasting.

In the extensive garden are swings and sand heaps, a climbing frame, slippery slide and wading pool. Bicycles, barrows and building blocks are housed in a shed in the garden.

The children are organized into three groups, each having its own nursery and in the charge of two teachers. The daily programme lasts from 9.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and provides for outdoor and indoor play, music, language and creative periods, toilet routines, mid-morning orange juice, a well-balanced mid-day meal, sleep period and afternoon milk.

PARENT-TEACHER CONTACTS

Mothers come to the school on a roster basis to help with the preparation of the orange juice and mid-day meal. One day a month is set aside for parents who wish to discuss their children's progress with teachers. Any interested persons may visit the school on Wednesday mornings.

The community room contains a lending lib-



THE COMMUNITY ROOM IS USED FOR PARENT AND STAFF MEETINGS

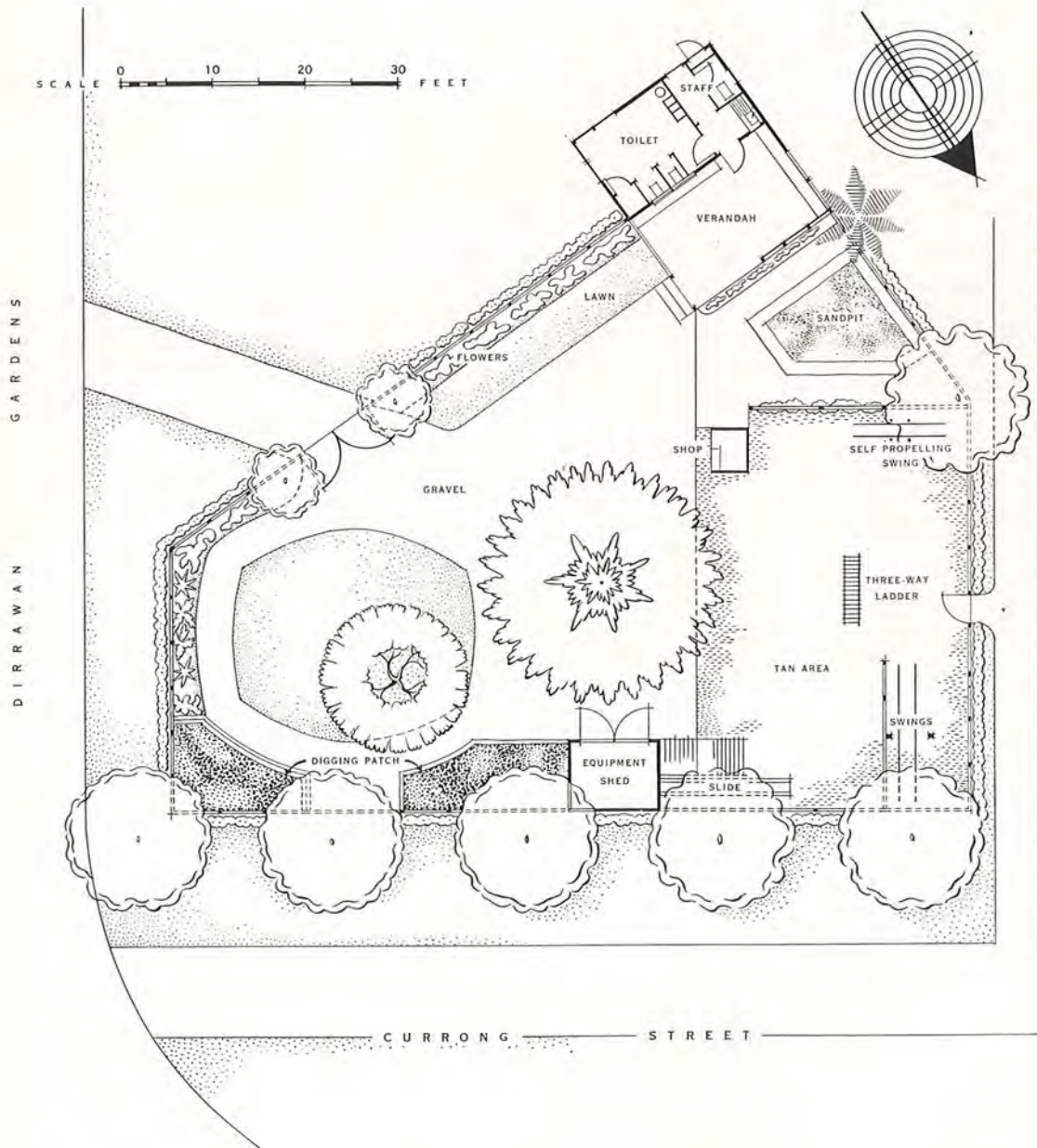
rary of books for parents (chiefly on extended loan from the National Library), magazines and children's books. Parents' News Sheets are always available, and the notice-boards are kept posted with helpful advice and information.

THE CHILDREN ARE DELIGHTED WHEN THEIR MOTHERS COME TO SCHOOL TO SERVE THE DINNER



Neighbourhood Play Centres

THE FIRST PLAY CENTRE AT REID



MOTHERS ACCOMPANY CHILDREN
TO THE CENTRE EACH MORNING



Even before the opening of the Acton Nursery School, discussions were taking place on the question of extending the pre-school programme to include a larger number of children; and following the principles laid down in Miss Pendred's plan, a play centre was established in the suburb of Reid and formally opened in November, 1945.

Consideration of the economic and climatic conditions of the community suggested three hours of enriched outdoor play, with active participation by parents as part of a vital parent-teacher programme. Accordingly, a site in a reserve, in the centre of the residential area, was chosen in collaboration with parents. The Department of the Interior made the site available, built a wash-block and verandah, and provided the material for an outdoor playground, a large part of which was erected voluntarily by the fathers in the district. This first building was designed simply to provide toilet and

washing facilities for children and teacher, and shelter during bad weather; plans allowed for extension later into a complete nursery school, if necessary.

The play area was zoned for different types of activity—tan bark area for swings, three-way climbing ladder, movable trestles and planks, and a gravel area for wheel toys. A large toy storage shed was built with a flat roof surrounded by wire mesh, and steps leading up to a slippery slide. Big double doors enabled the whole of the front to be opened so that, after heavy outdoor equipment had been put out for use, the shed, equipped with child-sized furniture, could be used as a playhouse.

A small wooden "shop", with counter and shelves, made another centre of activity.

THE TOY STORAGE SHED
BECOMES A PLAYHOUSE





TEACHER AND MOTHER-HELPER
SERVE THE MID-MORNING ORANGE

THE PART PLAYED BY THE PARENTS

With the Pre-School Officer as an ex-officio member, a local committee of parents worked continuously, in co-operation with the Department of the Interior, in the establishment of the Reid Centre. The whole project proved an interesting and valuable experiment and resulted in the adoption by the Department of a similar policy for further development, with parent participation as an integral part of the programme.

Groups of eighteen children now attend the Centre daily, under the supervision of a trained pre-school teacher, who is assisted by one mother-helper each day. On a roster basis mothers take turns at spending a morning at the Centre preparing the mid-morning fruit and drinks of water, and assisting the teacher with the children's

programme when required. In preparation for this, voluntary helpers attend a short series of discussions on the play centre programme, led by the Pre-School Officer.

Opportunity is given for mothers to become acquainted with the interests and needs of young children other than their own. Informal discussions may take place on wise guidance of behaviour problems, when incidents are seen by both mother and teacher. Further opportunity is given by group discussions on matters of interest to parents, usually those connected with some aspect of family life. These may be based on films from the Film Division of the National Library.

As the idea of such an informal play programme was new and its success or otherwise could not



EXPERIENCE ON THE PLANKS
GIVES CONFIDENCE TO TACKLE
THE HIGHER CLIMBING FRAME

be definitely forecast without some experience, provision was made for the Reid Play Centre to be expanded later into a nursery school if it was felt desirable. However, this proposal has now been abandoned, and arrangements made for it to be altered to conform to the design of the more recent play centres.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The pattern of the Reid Centre proved to be so suited to Canberra's needs that subsequent development has been along these lines rather than along that of the Nursery School.

Special factors in Canberra which influenced this type of neighbourhood development were a low housing density, a birthrate of 25 per 1,000 (approx. estimated static rate), and a town plan which provides for neighbourhoods of approx. 750-1,000 homes. Moreover, the relatively moderate demands on resources and materials for this type of service, in comparison with a fully-equipped nursery school, has enabled more rapid development, so that within six years eight neighbourhood play centres have been established, with two more under construction. This means that within a year or two practically every suburb in Canberra will have this type of service.

The procedure followed in establishing a neighbourhood play centre usually has its beginnings in an interested local group of parents. A working committee is set up, prepared to raise funds and help make equipment. An application for registration, accompanied by a copy of the constitution of the committee, is submitted to the Pre-School

Advisory Committee for recommendation to the Department of the Interior. In the development of these services the Pre-School Officer plays an important part in advising local committees and acting as a liaison between the community groups and the Department of the Interior, in the selection of sites, the planning of buildings and play areas, and the designing of equipment. When a centre is established, this officer is responsible for its general organization and the direction of staff. The local parents' committee is encouraged to continue its active support of the centre and is drawn upon for voluntary help of all kinds, including a roster of mothers to assist in the daily programme.

The constitution of each local play centre group provides that the group send a representative to the Council of the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society. In this way information can be exchanged and matters of general policy discussed, thus providing a valuable link between the centres. Through the Council also matters concerning the play centres can be referred to the Pre-School Advisory Committee for discussion and advice.

CHOICE OF SITE

For the Neighbourhood Play Centre a simple type of building has been designed as a guide, and is being used with minor adaptations in each case. The play garden is designed not only to suit the individual site, but also to fit into the overall plan of the garden city. In most cases a site is chosen in a reserve area and designed as a part of it.

BANNISTER GARDENS PLAY CENTRE

A TYPICAL PLAY CENTRE SITE. NOTE PROXIMITY TO THE SETTLED AREA





TURNER PLAY CENTRE

THE PLAYROOM OPENING ON TO THE TERRACE PROVIDES SHELTER

In the neighbourhood unit no child should have to walk more than half a mile to the centre. This enables the size of the group to be kept small, and the total enrolment, even when spaced attendance is used, at a desirable maximum.

The play centre is planned as a whole—garden and building together. A terrace adjacent to the building at floor level makes the one simply an extension of the other. The major factors considered when choosing a site are shelter from prevailing winds (in Canberra, westerly and north-westerly); orientation of the building to ensure maximum sunshine while children are playing; the dangers of main traffic streets to children



TURNER PLAY CENTRE

TOILET FACILITIES ARE EASILY ACCESSIBLE

BANNISTER GARDENS PLAY CENTRE

ON SUNNY DAYS MANY ACTIVITIES ARE ENJOYED ON THE TERRACE



MONARO PLAY CENTRE

THE WADING POOL STILL
PROVIDES FUN EVEN
WHEN SUMMER IS OVER

walking to and from the centre; and proximity of the site to the children's homes.

STANDARD BUILDING

The standard building is very simple in form. A small playroom (30 ft. x 16 ft.) with folding doors opening on to a terrace provides shelter during bad weather, space for quiet activities and for rhythmic movement to music. One end of the room is fitted with a stainless steel sink, water-heater and built-in cupboards, for the preparation of mid-morning fruit. There is a small bathroom with two toilets (and space for a third if required), a trough with four taps, a footwash, wall space for towels, provision for children's coat-hooks, a small entry hall, and teachers' toilet and changing-room. Average overall measurement is approximately 800 square feet.

Other features of this simple plan are the built-in cupboards reaching to the ceiling to reduce dusting to a minimum, low movable shelving units for blocks, toys and books, which can be moved to divide the room into small bays, and observation window between playroom and bathroom, the latter being accessible from both playroom and playground. The whole centre is easy to supervise and maintain and easily adaptable to a flexible programme.

PLANNING THE OUTDOOR PLAY AREA

A programme of enriched outdoor play calls for a carefully-planned playground which will provide opportunities for vigorous large muscle activity, quiet individual activities and imaginative play, and the pure enjoyment of running in space, of sitting in sunshine or splashing in water, of shuffling through autumn leaves, or making treasured collections of nuts and pebbles and little twigs.

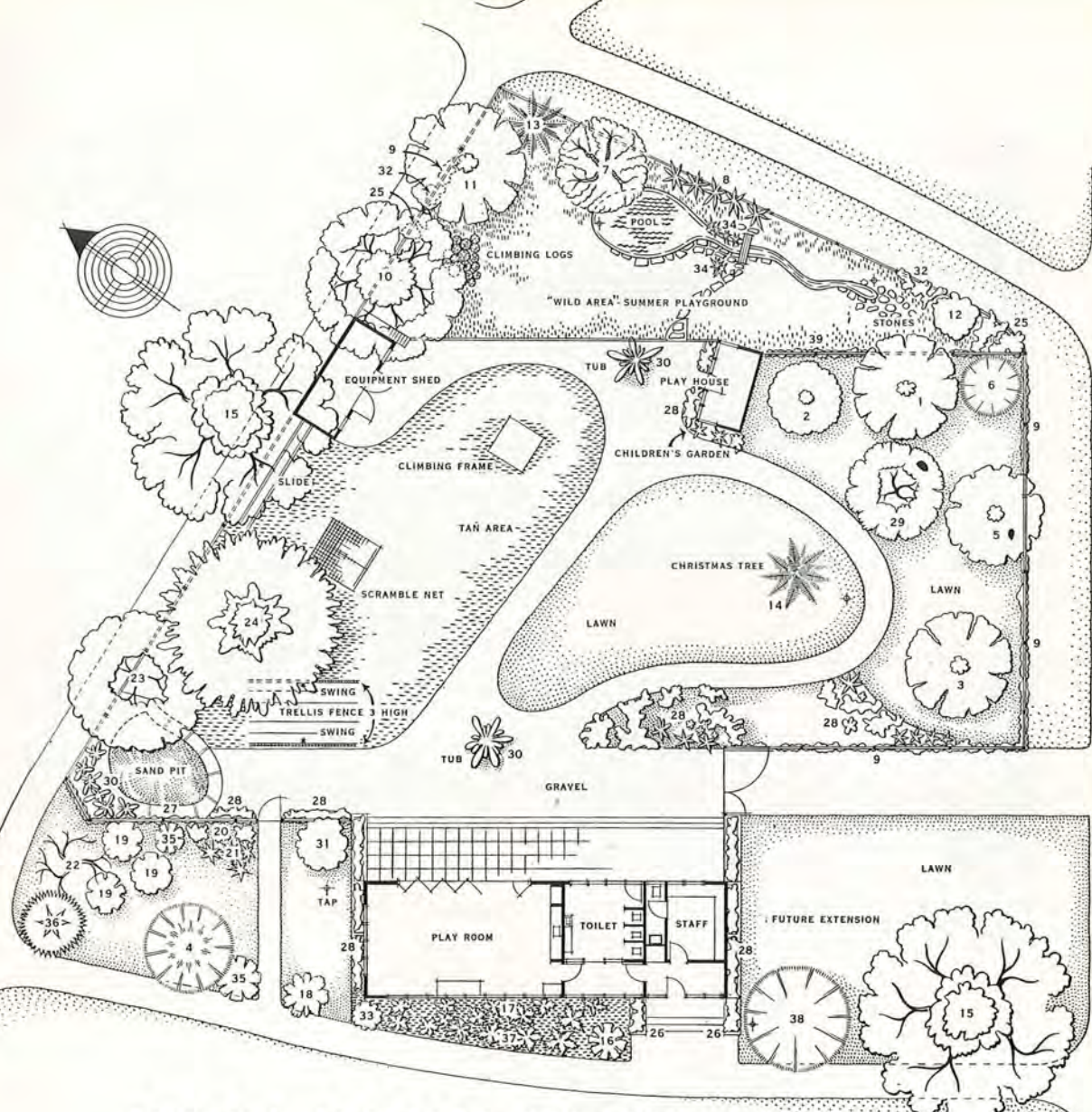


Two hundred square feet per child is regarded as a desirable outdoor play space.

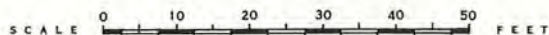
Essential requirements include a fairly level tan bark area with adequate under-surface drains and a thick layer of ashes or well-rolled, coarse gravel beneath the tan to ensure quick drying, a hard-surface area with paths of well-rolled gravel for wheel toys, a lawn and flower garden with shade trees for summer enjoyment and a sandpit close to the terrace where "new" and shy children can be easily supervised. The tan bark surface is suitable for swings and climbing equipment as well as movable trestles and planks.

A toy shed large enough to store all movable equipment, including the valuable "junk" which is collected but not necessarily used every day, is built close to the tan area where most of the heavy equipment will be used. In some centres it has a flat roof which forms the platform for a slippery slide. A small storage seat beside the sand-pit holds sand toys.

A separate playhouse with strong child-size furniture for house play is set in another spot, so that centres of activity are well spaced over the



THROSBY CRESCENT PRE-SCHOOL PLAY CENTRE GRIFFITH



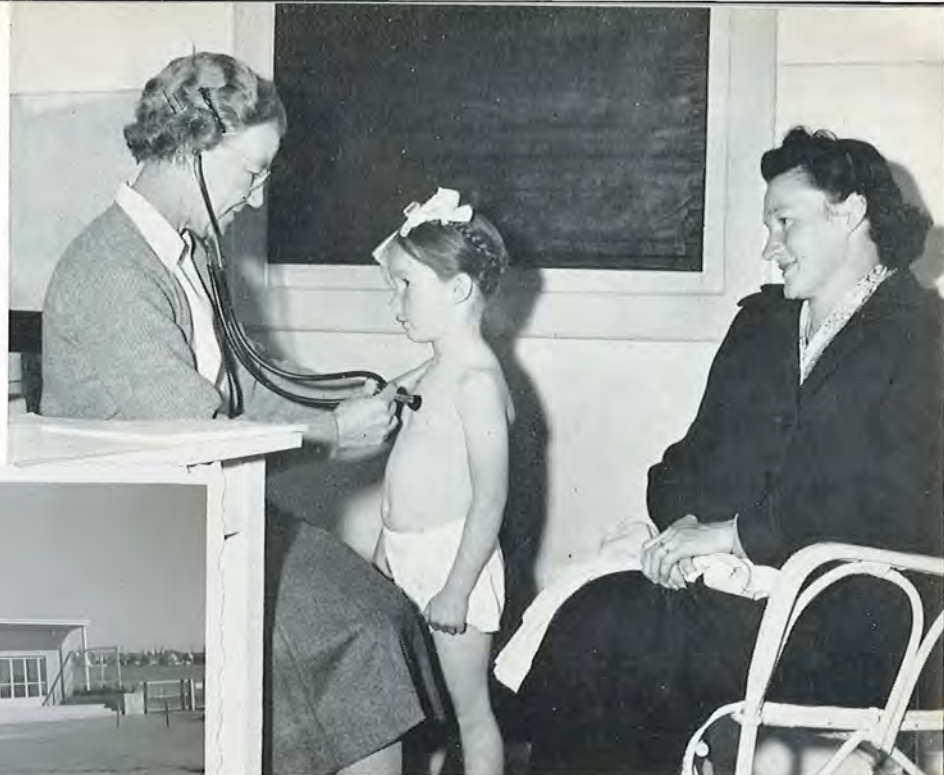
KEY TO PLANTING

1 BOX ELDER	11 ARGYLE APPLE	21 FORSYTHIA	31 BUDDLEIA
2 PAGODA TREE	12 SHEOAK	22 COOTAMUNDRA WATTLE	32 LOMATIA
3 ASH	13 BLACK CYPRESS PINE	23 DESERT ASH	33 MINT BUSH
4 HAWTHORN	14 CANADIAN SPRUCE	24 LONDON PLANE	34 IRIS
5 CHINESE ELM	15 TURKEY OAK	25 TI-TREE	35 POMEGRANATE
6 INCENSE CEDAR	16 LILAC CHASTE BUSH	26 LAVENDER OR ROSEMARY	36 COLORADO FIR
7 WEEPING WILLOW	17 COTONEASTER	27 CLIMBING HONEYSUCKLE	37 COTONEASTER
8 BAMBOO	18 AMUR MAPLE	28 HERBACEOUS ANNUALS	38 LOQUAT
9 BOTTLE BRUSH	19 FLOWERING PLUM	29 SILVER BIRCH	39 VINE
10 WHITE GUM	20 FLOWERING QUINCE	30 LAURUSTINUS	

LAWN GRASS (N.Z. BROWN TOP AND CHEWINGS FESCUE)

"WILD AREA" (N.Z. BROWN TOP AND WHITE CLOVER)

**MEDICAL
EXAMINATION
CHILDREN ARE EXAMINED
BEFORE ENROLMENT**



local opportunities for paddling and natural water-play.

Planting is part of the play garden plan and is considered from three points of view: utility, to provide windbreaks and shade in summer; decorative value, particularly to provide colour contrasts and dramatic seasonal changes; and interest to the children, through sweet-smelling flowers, native trees and shrubs bearing nuts, cones and seed-pods.

**THE DAILY PROGRAMME IN A
PLAY CENTRE**



The programme is primarily an outdoor one, providing free play of the children's own choice. Supervision by the teacher covers inspection of each child on arrival as a health check, routine situations of toilet, washing, rest time, drinks of water and the mid-morning snack of orange quarters, and the guidance of individual children during all these situations.

Emphasis is on long periods of uninterrupted play, outdoors when possible; routines are not stressed, the children being expected to care for their own toilet needs with a minimum of adult supervision.

THE HEALTH SUPERVISION PLAN

Health supervision aims at assessing the progress of each child by regular examination, so that conditions which need special treatment may be detected early. Children are examined before enrolment, and at yearly intervals thereafter. They are also taken to the Mothercraft Centre to be weighed and measured every six months.

A programme of dental care for pre-school children is being carried out by the School Dental Officer; a tuberculosis survey was recently conducted by the Department of Health, and immunization against diphtheria is available and encouraged.

**MEDICAL
EXAMINATION**
CHILDREN ARE EXAMINED
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area. It faces the sun and has large, low windows so that "busy young housewives" are not losing the benefit of the sunshine as they work.

A shallow wading-pool is set apart, if space allows, in an extra "summer playground" where the grass can be allowed to grow long, and there are plenty of trees for shade. This provision is important in an inland city like Canberra, where there are few local opportunities for paddling and natural water-play.

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THE DAILY PROGRAMME IN A PLAY CENTRE

The play centre programme provides for a daily enrolment of 30 children of 3-5 years under the supervision of one trained pre-school teacher, with one untrained assistant and one mother-helper.

Spaced attendance allows for easy adjustment to the new experiences of group play and for reducing the risk of undue fatigue in "new" children. Children attend twice a week at first, then three times a week, and later every day. By the age of four years daily attendance is desirable. Children come for three hours from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.



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The Occasional Care Centre

BACKGROUND

During the latter years of the war the Canberra Community began to express concern at the continued hardships imposed on mothers of young families because of war-time restrictions on the delivery of goods, the lack of domestic help even for emergencies and the curtailment of the lying-in period following confinement because of an overcrowded hospital and staff shortages. In 1944 representatives of voluntary organizations concerned in these matters met and pressed for the establishment of rest centres and creches at the shopping centres. The Minister for the Interior approved the proposals and referred them for consideration in the overall plan which was then being developed.

As a result, it was recommended that in planning the new Mothercraft Centre at Civic Centre

(one of the three main shopping centres in Canberra), an occasional care centre should be included and housed in the same building.

THE BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT

After discussion with the Mothercraft Society, a building was designed and built at Civic Centre. It included, in addition to a mothercraft centre, an occasional care centre and an upstairs two-bedroomed flat for two mothercraft sisters.

The Department of Health, which delegates responsibility and allocates funds to the Mothercraft Society for the supervision of the mothercraft programme in the Australian Capital Territory, equipped the mothercraft section of the building, while the equipment in the occasional care section was supplied by the Department of the Interior.

CHILD WELFARE CENTRE

WITH BOTH SERVICES IN ONE BUILDING, MOTHERS CAN LEAVE TODDLERS UNDER TRAINED CARE WHILE VISITING THE MOTHERCRAFT SISTER





THE OUTDOOR PLAY AREA AT THE OCCASIONAL CARE CENTRE

SUPERVISION AND OPERATION

The Department of the Interior supplies one pre-school teacher who has had some extra mothercraft training, and provides the supervisory service of the Pre-School Officer.

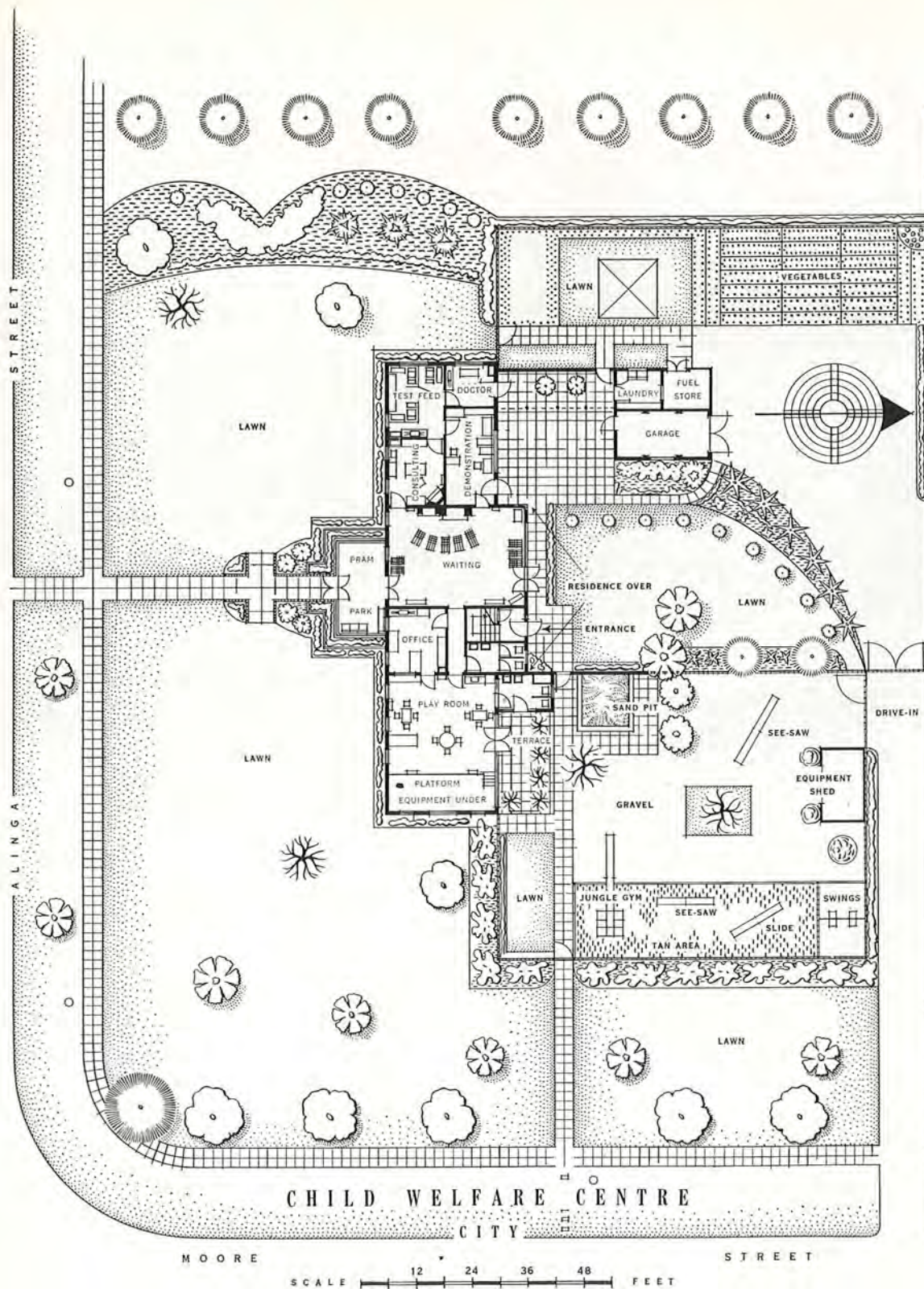
The Mothercraft Society employs an untrained assistant, and provides "home-making care" through a special small committee, known as the Occasional Care Centre Advisory Committee.

The Centre is open on all week days except statutory holidays, and two weeks at Christmas. Its services are free to mothers and children, but the Mothercraft Society encourages voluntary contributions.

There are two sessions daily from 8.30 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. for children of three to five years, and from 1.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. for children of from 18 months to three years.

It was felt when this programme was planned that it would be unsatisfactory to have children within a wider age range, i.e. from one to five years, attending at once; for this reason the age range was divided. In an emergency, however, no child is turned away, and on those occasions when children from the two different age groups have attended together, experience has shown that the children's play and their adjustment to the Centre have been hampered.

From the point of view of service to parents, this is an obvious weakness. Consideration is being given by the Occasional Care Centre Advisory Committee to the possible addition of a second playroom so that children of more widely-different ages may attend at the same time while playing separately. Only in this way can the service be made really adequate.



A SHORT FLIGHT OF STAIRS
LEADS TO A RAISED AREA
RESERVED FOR DOLL PLAY

PROGRAMME

When children and teachers see each other only occasionally as in centres of this nature, the "time-table" or programme needs to be especially free and easy, so that each child can settle in at his own rate. Staff members need to be particularly placid and friendly, in order to create that relaxed atmosphere in which a strange child can be encouraged to become interested in activities, and through them to adjust easily and happily to a new situation.

All the activities one finds in a typical nursery school or play centre are included—the indoor and outdoor free play, the art, nature, story and music experiences, and, last but not least, the homely and reassuring one of eating a snack of fruit at some time during the sessions.

Maximum enrolment for the morning sessions is 15, and for the afternoon sessions 12. Regular attendance of more than two sessions a week is not recommended for children under three years.

The location of the Occasional Care Centre near airways offices and a motor coach terminal



is convenient for travellers. Mothers with babies and little children are invited by the Mothercraft Society to use a quiet room for feeding the baby, and simple kitchen facilities are available for heating meals.

Experience since the Centre was opened at the beginning of 1948 has shown convincingly that this is a service of real value to parents and children.

INDOOR ACTIVITY AT THE OCCASIONAL CARE CENTRE



The Pre-School Mobile Unit



CHILDREN WELCOME THE ARRIVAL OF THE PANEL VAN

Planned for the whole of the Australian Capital Territory, the pre-school programme has now extended beyond the care of the city's children to those in areas around Canberra. A mobile unit takes play equipment and library books in a motor van to districts where the number of children does not warrant the provision of an established neighbourhood play centre.

This Mobile Unit has been operating for only two years, under the supervision of a trained and experienced pre-school teacher, who also drives the van. The programme is therefore still in an experimental stage. Its development has pre-

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN CHOOSE BOOKS FROM THE FOLDING CASE



WHEN THE WEEKLY VISIT
IS OVER, OLDER BROTHERS
AND SISTERS LIKE TO HELP

sented many problems but it is already apparent that the scheme has great possibilities and a definite value.

PROGRAMME

The programme planned is a three-fold one, providing guidance to parents, a lending library of children's books, and organized playgroups for children. The library also includes books and magazines on child welfare for the interest of parents.

Group enrolments vary from six to fifteen. Fifteen three- to four-year-olds has been found to be a satisfactory maximum enrolment for one teacher, and even then she has been unable to carry out the three aspects of the programme while devoting her time primarily to the play-group. As parent contacts are considered to be of first importance, especially since they are made



only once a week, a second teacher has now been appointed, and it is felt that this has already strengthened the work considerably, allowing for individual parent discussions and some home visiting.

DISTRICTS SERVED

To date seven districts are served: three rural areas, a small community at the Mount Stromlo Observatory, another at Harman Naval Station, and two small temporary housing areas where no permanent pre-school facilities have been established.

PAINT AND PUZZLES UNDER THE TREES

LEGEND

MOBILE UNIT



ROADS



RAILWAYS



HEIGHTS



HOMESTEADS



STATE

OF

NEW

SOUTH

WALES

STATE

OF

NEW

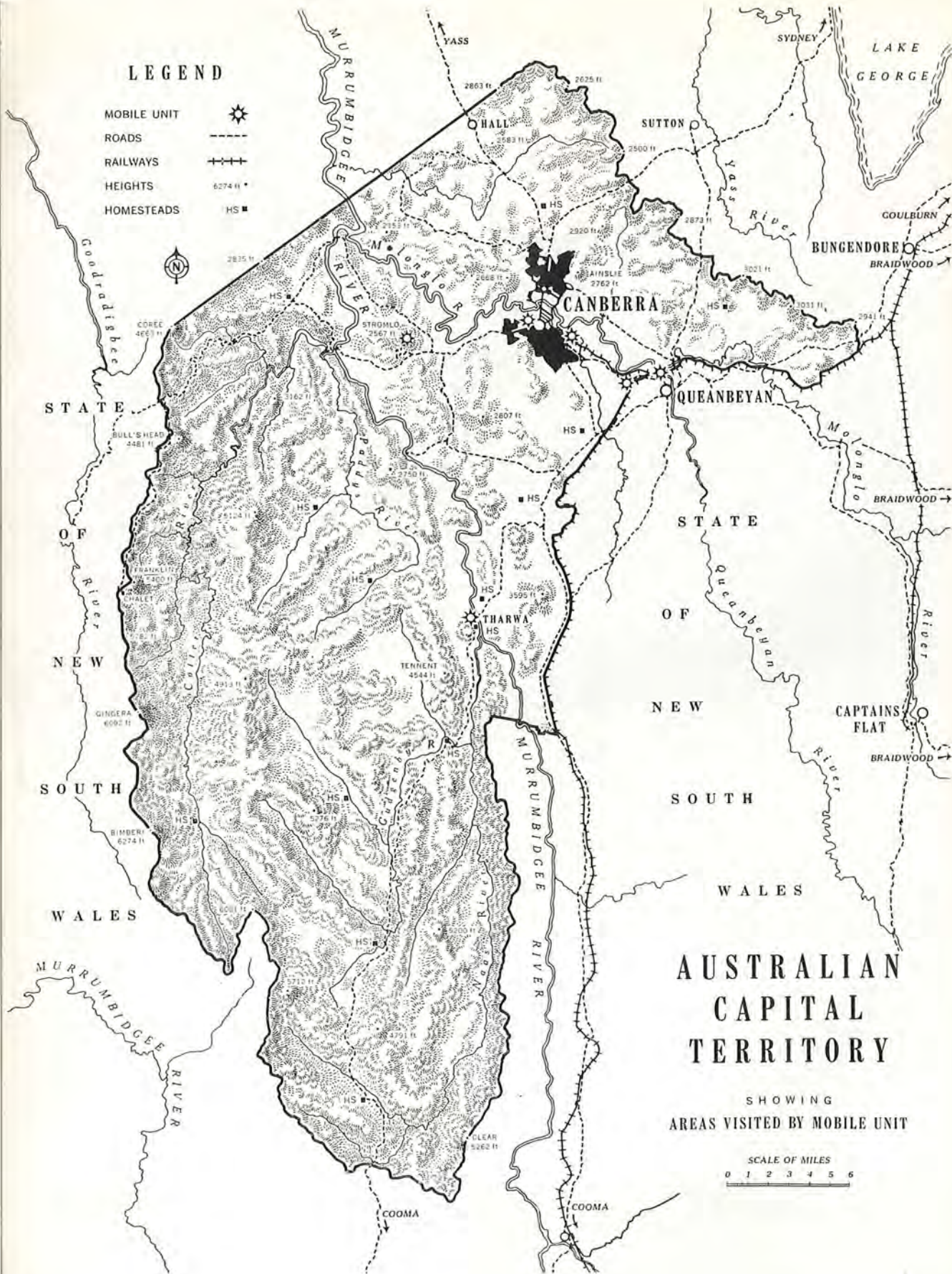
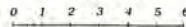
SOUTH

WALES

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SHOWING
AREAS VISITED BY MOBILE UNIT

SCALE OF MILES



MANY NEW AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN
ARE MAKING THEIR FIRST CONTACT
WITH AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN
AT THE PRE-SCHOOL CENTRES

Half-day visits are made to each of these districts once a week, and in all approximately 100 families are concerned.

SICK CHILDREN

One half-day each week is also spent in the Children's Ward of the Canberra Community Hospital, to which the teachers take materials and equipment for the occupation of young patients. The pre-school staff has the co-operation of the matron and hospital staff, and works in conjunction with a hospital auxiliary which provides some voluntary helpers each week.

NEWCOMERS TO A NEW LAND

A group of children of newcomers to Australia is attending a playgroup at one of the play centres on two afternoons each week. Earlier plans to take the Mobile Unit to these children were abandoned in favour of bringing the children to an established group, so that they and their



parents could have ordinary contacts with their neighbours.

Other such children scattered throughout the community enrol at play centres or the Nursery School in the usual way.

YOUNG PATIENTS IN THE CANBERRA COMMUNITY HOSPITAL BECOME
ABSORBED IN OCCUPATIONS PROVIDED BY THEIR WEEKLY VISITORS



Administration of the Pre-School Programme

The Canberra pre-school programme is the responsibility of the Australian Capital Territory Services Branch of the Department of the Interior and all staff members are employees of that Department. Appointments, salaries and conditions of employment are approved by the Public Service Board. The salaries and conditions are based very substantially on those applying to teachers of similar qualifications in the service of the New South Wales Department of Education.

STAFF

(1) The Pre-School Officer is responsible for the general development of the programme. She works with the voluntary committees and consults with town planners and architects when sites, buildings and play gardens are being planned. She supervises the centres when established, and gives a lead in the community education programme.

(2) The teacher in charge of each play centre is responsible for the management of the Centre, programme-planning, record-keeping, enrolment

of children and organization of the medical examinations. She attends each monthly meeting of the Centre's committee and presents a written report, a copy of which is then forwarded through the Pre-School Officer to the Department of the Interior.

(3) In addition an untrained assistant is also employed at those centres where more than 20 children are enrolled daily.

(4) Vacation periods for teachers and assistants are equal in length to those enjoyed by teachers in the service of the New South Wales Education Department.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

All trained staff members are qualified pre-school teachers who have completed a three-year course at an approved training college. The Commonwealth Government offers scholarships each year to girls resident in the Australian Capital Territory for training at any approved kindergarten training college. In 1951, however, two scholarships which could not be awarded to local girls, owing to the lack of qualified applicants, were awarded to girls who did not reside in the Territory. Holders of scholarships are under bond to return to work in Canberra on completion of their training, for a period of three years if required. The Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society also awards scholarships to girls enrolled at approved training colleges, on the understanding that upon graduation they will teach in Canberra, if required, for 12 months for each year of training they have received on scholarship. The scholarship awards ensure a nucleus of trained staff. In addition, other teachers are appointed as a result of applications invited through the press each year. Teachers who have graduated from approved training colleges in England and New Zealand as well as in Australian States make a special contribution to the work in Canberra because of the wide variety of their experiences in other places.



THE TEACHER RECORDS FACTS WHICH
HELP HER UNDERSTAND THE CHILD

The Pre-School Programme as a Community Service

While its essentials are those of any programme planned for the care of young children—community education, developmental supervision of the children, and group experience—the Canberra plan has been designed to meet its special needs.

The same type of programme would not necessarily meet the needs of all communities. For example, the Canberra community, enjoying full employment, a high standard of living and good health services, is not in the same need for a service of full-day child care as is an industrial suburb of a large city.

Community education is considered the foundation of any pre-school programme, and its scope should be wider than parent education. Its aim should be to develop a community which will be alive to the needs of children and be prepared to take steps to meet them. It should stimulate the interest of government authorities, town planners and architects, manufacturers and retailers, so that cities and towns may be developed as good places for children to live in; houses planned with child-rearing in mind, and good home equipment, clothing and food easily obtainable. This involves the education of parents, teachers, nurses, everyone in the community directly responsible for the care of children.

Depending on community approval and community participation, a pre-school programme must make a positive and continuing effort to interpret its principles to that community. People should understand what is being done, and feel convinced that it is important.

In Canberra, discussion groups, lectures, films, displays and exhibitions, publicity in the press and on the air, libraries, magazine articles and pamphlets have all been used as part of such a plan. Specialists in such subjects as nutrition, health, child management and home nursing have contributed. The plan has also included an exhibition of children's clothing, a Parents' Bulletin roneoed each month and widely circulated and the distribution of Parents' News

Sheets regularly published by the Australian Association for Pre-School Child Development. A short course of study in child care has also been conducted periodically in an effort to stimulate an interest in pre-school teaching among girls about to leave school. Enrolment has been entirely voluntary, and a high level of interest in the talks, films and visits to pre-school centres has been indicated by high average attendances.

Most effective of all has been the direct contact between parents and staff in the centres. Daily voluntary help from mothers is a part of the programme in all centres. In the neighbourhood play centres the mothers are also encouraged to take an active part in the daily educational programme, having been previously introduced to its purpose and content through a short course of lecture-discussions on child guidance and play centre programmes.

Parents who visit the Centre to help may find opportunity at some time during the morning to discuss problems of child care informally with the teacher. The equipment provided and the programme planned are in themselves practical demonstrations of good child care, and very often a mother watches how a teacher manages situations which are very similar to those she meets at home. Other times are available in the total programme for home visits or unhurried discussions between parents and teachers about specific problems of child care.

A further valuable contact with the parents is made through the regular health examinations, when parent, doctor and teacher can consult together.

A link with the overall development of pre-school education in Australia is made through the affiliation of the Department of the Interior with the Australian Association for Pre-School Child Development. The Pre-School Officer is a member of the professional officers' sub-committee, and the Federal Officer of the Association acts as consultant when requested.

Conclusion

It can be seen, therefore, that the whole plan, while based on established ideas in child care, has been adapted to suit the needs of a community. The actual implementation of such a plan has broken new ground; it is, in fact, an experiment, and in some respects unique.

This booklet has told the story of the plan to date and the extent to which its purposes have been achieved.

The most striking development has been the evolution of the Neighbourhood Play Centre, both from the point of view of the programme provided and, administratively, as a co-operative effort between a government department and a local parent committee. Without voluntary effort this type of centre probably could not have been established; on the other hand, voluntary effort is stimulated and kept alive by the knowledge that educational standards, financial support

and ready interest are assured by government authority.

The success of the Canberra plan is demonstrated in the pre-school centres themselves. A visit to the Nursery School or to any neighbourhood play centre in Canberra would reveal happy groups of young children learning to live and play together in a healthy, friendly atmosphere, and under the guidance of trained teachers working in close co-operation with parents, the concern of all being to secure the fullest possible development of each child.

The keynote of these centres, for the individual child and for the group, is purposeful activity. At an early and impressionable age the child learns to adjust himself for satisfactory and purposeful living in a community—and it is on such foundations that a well-adjusted adult community is built.

Produced by the News and Information Bureau for the Canberra Nursery School and Pre-School Advisory Committee, Department of the Interior, Canberra. Much of the material has been taken from a report prepared by Miss R. C. Combes, who was the first Pre-School Officer in Canberra, 1945-1949.

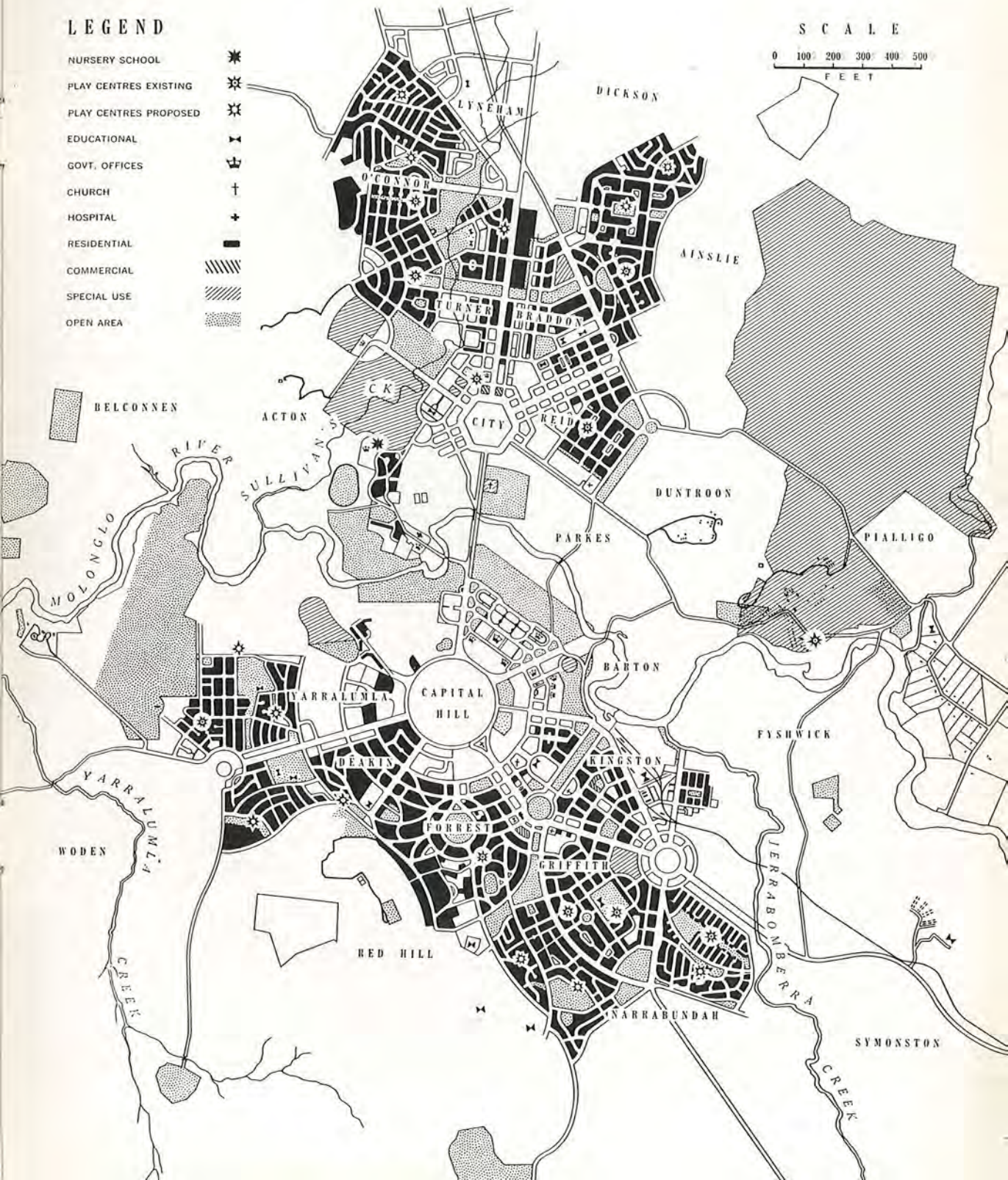
CANBERRA PLAN

LEGEND

- NURSERY SCHOOL * (with dot)
- PLAY CENTRES EXISTING * (with dot)
- PLAY CENTRES PROPOSED * (with dot)
- EDUCATIONAL * (with dot)
- GOVT. OFFICES * (with dot)
- CHURCH * (with dot)
- HOSPITAL * (with dot)
- RESIDENTIAL * (with dot)
- COMMERCIAL * (with dot)
- SPECIAL USE * (with dot)
- OPEN AREA * (with dot)

SCALE

0 100 200 300 400 500
FEET





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