



Archives ACT

Finding Aid

Researching house history

Introduction

Origins of ACT housing

The housing stock of the ACT has different origins from those of other places in Australia. Public housing in the ACT was initially built by the Commonwealth Government to provide accommodation for the public servants coming to the national capital, not for those people who could not afford to provide it for themselves. The housing supplied included hostels for the builders and public servants and hotels to relieve accommodation pressures¹. Blocks of flats were also constructed², the ABC flats (Allawah, Bega and Currong Courts) were completed in 1959 and decommissioned in 2003³. It was not until 1972 that the number of privately built dwellings surpassed the number built by the government.⁴

There were nine significant phases in the building and construction of the ACT:

Pre-1910	New South Wales Government
1911-1919	initial Commonwealth establishment

¹ Federal Capital Advisory Committee. *Construction of Canberra; first general report*. Melbourne, Government Printer, 1921. Federal Capital Advisory Committee. *Construction of Canberra; second general report*. Melbourne, Government Printer, 1922. Federal Capital Advisory Committee. *Construction of Canberra; final general report*. Melbourne, Government Printer, 1926. National Capital Planning and Development Committee, 32/14/1 Turner: erection of hostel in sec.42 (Havelock House); 32/15/1 Hotel Wellington – alterations and additions; 32/16 Hotel: Braddon; 32/17 Hotel: Griffith: Hume Circle: 32/18 Hotels: Kingston Hotel alterations; 32/1/1 Hotel Acton; 32/3/1 Barton House (Guest house); 32/3/2 New hostel: Barton (“Lawley House”); 32/4/1 Proposed temporary staff hostel, Braddon (north of Haig Park); Hostels: Braddon section 54; Reid section 9 (includes drawings and floor plans); 32/7 Hostels for artisans & other workmen – general file: 32/7/1 Works hostel: Ainslie (includes plans); 32/7/2 Capital Hill workmen’s camp; 32/7/5 “Riverview” workmen’s camp: establishment of (Rottenbury Hill, Barton); 32/7/4 Hostels for artisans and other workmen: Turner and Reid (includes floor plans); 32/7/5 Site for workmen’s hostel Capital Hill); 32.7.6 Hostel: Barton section 17 (includes floor plans); 32/11/1 Mulwala Hostell (Parkes); 32/12/1 Narellan Hostel (Reid); 32/13 Proposed Temperance Hotel & Secretariat “Hotel Brisbane”: Foskett, Alan *Canberra’s hostels, hotels and guest houses : a part of our heritage*. 4th ed. Campbell, ACT: A.Foskett, 2000. Foskett, Alan *Reid – house of fame: a history of one of Canberra’s most lived-in hostels 1947-1981*. Campbell, ACT: A.Foskett, 2000. Gugler, Ann *Canberra’s construction camps, early houses & selected documents*. Canberra: A.Gugler, 2001.

² National Capital Planning and Development Committee. 35/3/1 Section 55, Braddon: Flats; 35/3/7 Braddon: block 3 section 26 flats

³ Hutchison, Mary *If these walls could speak: Currong Apartments from construction to decommission 1958-2004*. Canberra: Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, 2005.

⁴ Wright, Bruce *Cornerstone of the Capital: a history of public housing in Canberra*. Canberra: ACT Housing, 2000.

1920-1924	Federal Capital Advisory Committee
1925-1929	Federal Capital Commission
1930-1935	the depression and the subsequent cessation of building activity ⁵
Subsequent phases	
1938-1957	National Capital Planning and Development Committee
1958-1989	National Capital Development Commission
1989-	ACT Government

Some of the records of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Federal Capital Commission and some of the records of the National Capital Development Commission are held by the National Archives of Australia. Use RecordSearch⁶ to locate the agency notes and records of the era prior to ACT Self Government in 1989. Other archives of the National Capital Development Commission are held by the ACT Government.

Block and section numbers

The block and section number is a key component in the names of many files. To locate the block and section number, go to the block and section maps at <http://www.actmap.act.gov.au/>

Aerial photographs

To put the house in context, aerial photographs can be a useful reference. The ACT Planning and Land Authority produces, updates and maintains many types of land information, including aerial photographs. Colour photographs are available from 1972 and a limited black and white coverage dating back to the early 1950s is available. Aerial photographs are available from the plan room at the Dickson Customer Service Centre.

http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/tools_resources/maps_land_survey/land_info/aerial_photos

Questions asked when researching a house history include:

- When was the house built?
- Who designed and built the house?
- Who were the earlier owners and occupiers?
- How did people live in the house?

When was the house built?

To assist in determining when the house was built find out the date of the establishment of the suburb. ACT suburbs were planned and built in stages. Check the list of gazettals of the suburbs to locate approximately when the

⁵ *On solid foundations: the building and construction of the Nation's Capital 1920 to 1950; a history of the pioneering efforts of those who built Canberra* by Alan Foskett, Phil Johnstone, David Andrew. Canberra: Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club, 2001.

⁶ National Archives of Australia RecordSearch <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/recordsearch.aspx>. Agencies are CA40 the Department of Labour and National Service and CA65, the Department of Housing

house was built. See the finding aids on *Conversion of NCDC suburb names* and the *Suburb gazettals* to work this out. Planning records also assist in determining when a house was built.⁷ Auctions are a feature of ACT land ownership. Check the auction records to see when the block was first leased.

Pictures of house styles by era are available on <http://www.canberrahouse.com/houses/> <http://www.canberrahouse.com/styles/> and

For heritage houses on the Australian National University campus, see <http://heritage.anu.edu.au/>

For a few houses information is available from the ACT Heritage Register http://www.tams.act.gov.au/live/heritage/act_heritage_register . The Register gives a location map and the block and section number which will enable further information to be found.

For those few houses built before the Commonwealth acquired the area of the former Yarrowlumla Shire that is now the ACT, use sources in New South Wales. These sources are

- State Records Authority of New South Wales http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/guides_857.asp
- Palerang Council <http://www.palerang.nsw.gov.au>
- New South Wales Department of Lands <http://www.six.nsw.gov.au/services.html>

Published local and family histories may also describe the house styles and when they were built of their particular area of interest.⁸ Annual reports of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, Federal Capital Commission and the National Capital Development Commission contain photographs of houses.⁹

⁷ National Capital Planning and Development Committee: 35/1/1 Ainslie: layout of additional residential sections; 35/1/2 Section 14 Ainslie subdivision – flats etc. (this file includes plans showing types of houses, location of trees etc.) 35/1/3 North Ainslie: (part zone 7) subdivisional development south of Majura Avenue; 35/1/5 Proposed house siting plans: Yarralumla sections 27,34,35 & 72, O'Connor sections 2 & 14, Ainslie sections 86,88 & 89, Narrabundah section 35 & 125; National Capital Development Commission. 76/316 Charnwood Section 111 (formerly 96 West) area for private enterprise housing; 76/183 Medium density housing – Turner – Block 3 section 45 prior to 1980; 76/156 Housing brief DD/H/75/48 100 houses:

⁸ For instance the following books include descriptions of houses and *The heritage of Reid* includes the Federal Capital Commission codes for some of the designs. Dutta, Shibu *The heritage of Reid*. Reid, ACT: Reid Residents Association, 2000. Knowles, Beth *The Cottage in the Parliamentary Triangle: a social history of the building known as Blundell's*. Canberra, Canberra & District Historical Society Inc., 1990. *Tharwa: a living history*. Canberra: ACT Schools Authority, 1989.

⁹ For instance: National Capital Development Commission. *25th annual report: report and financial statements for the year ending June 30 1982* page 23, section headed Major Private Enterprise Development.

Who designed and built the house?

The Federal Capital Advisory Committee extended the policy of conducting architectural competitions for important permanent official buildings to residential buildings and prominent architects. The winners in 1924 were Messers Oakley, Parkes and Scarborough of Melbourne; second place Mr Neville Hampson of Sydney and third place Messers Grainger, Little, Barlow and Hawkins of Melbourne, 40 houses were built.¹⁰

Many of Australia's architects designed the houses of the ACT. For information on some of them see

<http://www.canberrahouse.com/architects/>

Some houses were imported from Tocumwal air force base in the 1940s and placed at O'Connor and Ainslie¹¹. See the Tocumwal Archive

<http://thetocumwalarchive.photoaccess.org.au/>

Records on specific types of houses,¹² house construction,¹³ evaluation of the house types¹⁴ and contractors¹⁵ are available.

Who were the earlier owners?

The ACT uses a leasehold system for land ownership. To find out who were the earlier lessees a search of Crown Leases and Certificates of Title at the Registrar-General's Office is necessary. An alternative is to check the auction sales that were held at the Albert Hall and advertised in the press.¹⁶

The land titles register is only available through the Land Titles branch of the

¹⁰ Federal Capital Advisory Committee. *Construction of Canberra: final report*. Melbourne, Government Printer, 1926. page 19

¹¹ A3070 Minutes of Meetings of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (1944-1949)

¹² National Capital Planning and Development Committee. 35/2 "Beaufort" houses

¹³ National Capital Planning and Development Committee. 35/4 Brick veneer houses; 35/7/1 Concrete houses - erection of 100 in Turner & O'Connor (includes house plans of types A-E and a locality map); 35/7/2 Monocrete houses; 35/7/2A O'Connor - section 50 monocrete houses; 35/8/6 Deakin: sections 28, 31 & 32, 24, 34.

¹⁴ Housing review 1961: 400 series designs for and on behalf of the National Capital Development Commission by the Department of Works, Canberra. This report analyses 13 house designs erected in Downer and makes recommendations on continuance or cessation of use of the designs.

¹⁵ National Capital Planning and Development Committee. 35/7/3 Civil & Civic Contractors Pty Ltd housing scheme (1 folio); 35/8/2 Deakin - development proposals (includes a mention of A.V. Jennings contract)

¹⁶ National Capital Planning and Development Committee. 35/8/3 Subdivision: Deakin: sections 9 & 10

Registrar-General's Office. A search of the land titles register provides access to Crown Leases, Certificates of Title, Instruments, Deposited Plans and Sublease Plans, Unit Plans and Check Searches. All searches are available for a determined fee. There are three methods available to clients to conduct a search of the land titles register. These methods include:

- on-line access (only available to clients who subscribe to the service)
- access via a data broker (organisations who provide on-line and phone based search services for land titles, business names and other government data)
- visiting the counter at 255 Canberra Avenue, Fyshwick

For more details <http://www.rgo.act.gov.au/landtitles/index.html>

For full details on searching the land titles

<http://www.rgo.act.gov.au/landtitles/landtitles3.html>

Three Canberra house histories, one in the suburb of Ainslie, Griffith and Campbell are described on *Our house: histories of Australian homes*

<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/ourhouse/act.html>

How did people live in the house?

Where did the government services such as water, sewage, power or heating come from? Power came from the Kingston Power Station and water from the Cotter Dam and subsequent reservoirs and sewerage went to the Weston Treatment Plant.¹⁷ In the early days the power source for heating and cooking was wood fires. The wood was supplied through the Forestry and Timber Bureau (and its successors) to government buildings, businesses and private dwellings.¹⁸

¹⁷ For more information see the ActewAGL education website
<http://www.actewagl.com.au/Education/default.aspx>

¹⁸ Forestry & Timber Bureau. 111 parts 1 and 2 Firewood supplies to Commonwealth establishments. Department of the Interior. Forestry Section Firewood supplies to Commonwealth establishments. 111

Hyperlinks accessed 1 July 2008.