

Archival Sources for the A.C.T. Government School System

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Having held senior positions in the ACT government school system in the 1970s and 1980s, I can provide information on its organisation and history during that period. My archival knowledge is very limited but I can identify half a dozen archival sources for those interested in the history of education over those two decades.

From 1913 until the early 1970s, the New South Wales Department of Education supplied teachers and curriculum services for ACT government schools. Consequently, records of daily school activities and personnel for that period are retained in New South Wales. Until recent years, the Department of Education had a very helpful history section from which information on individual schools could be obtained. However, when I last contacted the Department, that section had been disbanded. Access to records is probably still possible either by contacting the Department's headquarters or the office of the Archives of New South Wales. I am aware that access to personnel records is very restricted by privacy legislation.

Prior to the 1970s, the Commonwealth Government provided buildings for ACT government schools and, from the 1950s, preschools and their teachers. These were provided by the Department of the Interior until the late 1960s and then by the Department of Education and Science. Incidentally, the names of administering authorities, such as the Department of the Interior, varied over time and I will use the name which is most significant for government school history.

Agitation for an independent education authority for the ACT began in the mid-1960s and led to an announcement in July 1972 by the Minister for Education and Science, Malcolm Fraser, that the Commonwealth would assume responsibility for the staffing of ACT schools. Legislation had previously been passed in 1972 to establish the Commonwealth Teaching Service (known widely as the CTS) to provide teachers, mainly to the Northern Territory and the ACT. The Office of the Commissioner of the CTS was located with the Commonwealth Department in the MLC Tower at Woden.

Most Commonwealth records for the pre-1974 period are held by the Australian National Archives. They are stored at Mitchell but are available at fairly short notice in the reading room in East Block in the

Parliamentary Triangle. Remember that Commonwealth records are not available for thirty years after files are closed. This means that some files containing records for more than thirty years ago may not be available if the file extends into the restricted thirty-year period. CTS records are held by the Australian National Archives. It still holds some school records of the pre-1974 period, mainly about school buildings, but transferred most to the ACT Schools Authority. These, along with later records, are stored in the ACT Department of Education's Warehouse at Fyshwick. A useful source concerning schools before 1974 is Lyall Gillespie's book, *Early Education and Schools in the Canberra Region*.

The Interim ACT Schools Authority's governing body first met in October 1973 and administered most aspects of government schools and preschools from the beginning of 1974. Its Office, often referred to as the Schools Office, was housed briefly at the MLC Tower at Woden, then for a short time in the Wales Centre in Civic and for the rest of the 1970s and 1980s at Macarthur House at Lyneham. In 1974, when it took over most functions previously provided by the New South Wales Department, it had only a small staff, including seconded teachers, and for a year or so, there was minimal documentation of its processes and transactions. It gradually took over remnant functions, such as Year 12 certification, to be overseen by the ACT Schools Accrediting Agency. The Commonwealth Department of Education continued to administer the 1937 Education Ordinance, to provide building and planning services, in liaison with the National Capital Development Commission, and to handle legislation. In 1972, it had established the Canberra Teaching Resources Centre, in what is now the School of Art, and this was transferred to the Schools Authority in 1974.

The Schools Authority Ordinance 1976 came into effect at the beginning of 1977. Strictly the term 'ACT Schools Authority' referred to the statutory governing body which had initially been called the Council. To confuse matters, the term 'ACT Schools Authority' was also applied to the government school system as a whole. The Authority's first report to the Commonwealth Parliament covered the first six months of 1977 although it included a brief summary of the period of the Interim Authority. Annual reports then covered the period up to self-government. The papers of the Authority (or Council), which usually met twice a month, are a rich source of its history.

The organisational structure of the Schools Authority's Office changed a number of times before self-government and I can provide more details in question time if anyone needs to know. Initially there were Curriculum,

Operations and Student Services Branches. When planning and building functions were transferred from the Commonwealth Department in late 1977, the four branches were titled Curriculum, Operations, Planning and Facilities. The Teaching Resources Centre was moved to Griffith in 1978 and in 1979 was renamed the O'Connell Education Centre. The Schools Authority was represented on the CTS Commissioner's Advisory Committee which met about five times a year from 1974. In 1979, the Northern Territory established its own Teaching Service. The Office of the CTS Commissioner was abolished in 1981 and its main component was transferred to the Schools Authority. It became the ACT Teaching Service under self-government at the end of the 1980s.

In June 1985, the Schools Authority was reduced from fifteen to nine members. About this time, in preparation for self-government, the Authority was transferred from the Education to the Territories Portfolio for Commonwealth budgeting and similar matters. In September 1987, the Authority of nine members was disbanded and its powers were transferred to the Chief Education Officer. Following the granting of self-government, in May 1989, the Schools Authority became the ACT Department of Education, with various appendages to that name over the intervening years. The Schools Authority's records, held at the Fyshwick Warehouse, are readily accessible for the period up to the introduction of self-government in 1989. They contain, for example, the file of the Liaison Committee which prepared for the Interim Schools Authority in 1972 and 1973. The library of the Department's Centre for Teaching and Learning, previously the O'Connell Education Centre, also has an archival collection at its Stirling site. For example, it has one of the now rare copies of the Currie Report of 1967, *Report on an Independent Education Authority for the Australian Capital Territory*. It also has *Annual Reports* for the Schools Authority and Department of Education.

Another archival source for ACT education is the records of the teachers' union, known in turn as the Commonwealth Teachers' Federation, the ACT Teachers' Federation and the Australian Education Union (ACT Branch). These are held in the Noel Butlin Archives, the reading room being located at the Menzies Library in the Australian National University. A day's notice is usually required for access. Because the union was represented on the Authority, the Authority meeting papers are also available from this archival source. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations and the Canberra Preschool Society were also represented on the Authority. I do not know where their records are kept but they could be valuable for a person researching the school system.

Some schools, especially the older ones, have their own archives. I am aware of such collections at Telopea Park School and Canberra High School. Because Geoff Burkhardt has written a history of Ainslie Primary School and John Cope one of Lyneham High School, I suspect several other schools also have archives.

I'm not sure the extent to which the word 'archival' applies, but those researching the ACT government school system should not ignore oral history as a source as many of the key players over the last thirty to forty years are still accessible. For example, a year or so ago, I interviewed four pioneers of the ACT government school system, Cath Blakers, Phil Hughes, Richard Campbell and Mick March and deposited copies of the interviews with the Australian National Library, the ACT Archives, the Canberra & District Historical Society, the ACT Department of Education Archives and its Centre for Teaching and Learning. I have not checked but some of these and others may have been interviewed for the National Library's Oral History collection.

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