



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra 1926-31

At its meeting of 22 September 2016 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra was eligible for registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

The Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra records 1,300 miles of journeys by George Jefferis and John Whelen around the Federal Capital Territory and beyond between 1926 and 1932. The journeys are documented in three separate volumes, and in addition to a wide-ranging written record these contain hundreds of historic photographs and other illustrations including watercolours (Swain 2013: 35). The Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra provides a unique record of Canberra and the ACT at a critical time in its historic and civic development. The volumes are free of bureaucratic constraints, covering a wide range of interests (Swain 2013: 37). They are an invaluable record of the natural environment of Canberra and the country surrounding the Capital at a time when there was little urban development as well as a record of the development that had already begun in the Capital. The volumes are a primary source on the environment, natural features, rural properties and personalities in the ACT in the late 1920s and early 1930s. They are evocative of a different way of life and a landscape now much changed (Clarke 2015).

The Canberra and District Historical Society acquired the volumes in August 1986. A Mr Peter Henderson of Sussex, England, mailed the volumes to Australian friend Mrs June Lindsay of Fraser, ACT, who subsequently passed them on to the Society. It is not known how or why Mr Henderson acquired the volumes, although the Canberra and District Historical Society contacted John Whelen, who tried to ascertain this information, to no avail. Mr Whelen was aware of the Canberra and District Historical Society's acquisition and posed no objections.

George Jefferis was born in Canterbury, England, in 1921. As a youth he attended a charitable school for the poor, and later migrated to Australia in 1925. In 1926 he was employed at the Hotel Canberra as a porter and waiter. He was an actor with the Artists' Society (Canberra), a competent painter (as the volumes demonstrate), purportedly difficult to get along with, and apparently the first man in the Federal Capital Territory to be granted a decree for the dissolution of marriage. He instigated divorce proceedings against his wife in 1934, as she refused to join him in Australia (Swain 2013: 36).

John Arnold Whelen was born in Cardiff, Wales on 26 February 1914. He and his mother arrived in Canberra in 1929, where John worked for a time as a waiter at the Officers' Mess at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and as a waiter and porter at the Hotel Canberra from 1929 to 1941. He served in World War II and married Elizabeth Ann Donald McClure at St John's Church in Canberra in 1943 (Price 1996).

Price (1996) and Swain (2013) both observe that Jefferis and Whelen were largely self-educated men. John was a founding member of the Canberra and District Historical Society, and served two terms as president. He was friends with Professor Manning Clarke, and assembled a dictionary of Australian biography, collecting material on 41,803 people. His library contained around 3,600 books, and the National Library of Australia holds this bibliography.

Most of the photographs within the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra are unique. They

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capture sites that no longer exist and people as they were living during the early years of the Federal Capital Territory. The authors' journeys were undertaken before many marked tracks were formed in the Territory (Scougall: N.D).

It is notable for the significance of the volumes that Jefferis and Whelen were not recording events, individuals, anecdotes, and surroundings through the eyes of early administrators, and were instead filling in gaps in Canberra's early community history, covering a time in Canberra's history when little, other than official records, was written. The volumes demonstrate Canberra's history through an alternative lens to the Commonwealth Government and its public servants, which many other sources from the era do (Scougall: N.D).

Jefferis and Whelen were employees of the Hotel Canberra. The hotel, built as the first hostel (Hostel No. 1), formed part of the early visual and social fabric of the developing city. It played a significant role in the Federal Capital Commission's building program in providing hostel accommodation for administrative staff and officials and their families who were transferred to Canberra for the opening of Parliament. It also provided residential accommodation for Members of Parliament during the formative years of Canberra. Among its more prominent residents was Labour Prime Minister James Scullin, who lived there with his wife, after his election in 1929 rather than incur the expense of running the Lodge during the Depression (ACT Heritage Council 1998).

As employees of the hotel, Jefferis and Whelen were exposed to the activity surrounding the establishment of Australia's new Capital. As discussed, the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra is more concerned with the little-known social and cultural history of the ACT rather than an official administrative account of the Capital, however there is nonetheless a strong tone of enthusiasm and pride for developments in the new Capital. This is particularly evident in Volume I, which documents the opening of Parliament House, notable visits to Canberra by dignitaries, and the ANZAC commemoration service at the Australian War Memorial.

Comparable sources

Mildenhall Photographic Collection

This is a collection held by the National Archives of Australia of more than 7,700 images on glass negatives. The photographs document the development of Canberra from the 1920s to the 1930s (NAA 2016). They were taken by Commonwealth public servant William James (Jack) Mildenhall, who, for a short time took the role of information officer for the Federal Capital Commission (FCC). In this publicity role for the FCC, Mildenhall's photos were largely focused on documenting the FCC's work and achievements in the Capital. The Mildenhall Photographic Collection highlights the significance of the photographic record within the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra, as the latter is a uniquely informal and personal, 'non-official' insight into the Canberra region.

The Canberra Community News

The Canberra Community News was a journal produced by the Council of the Canberra Social Service Association between 1925 and 1927, during which time the publisher changed to the Social Service Department, Federal Capital Commission. While this could be considered to be a similar primary source on life in the same era as the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra, it had a government agenda, was far less informal and idiosyncratic, and also represents another bureaucratic source of information.

Journals of Eilean Giblin

Perhaps a comparable source to the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra is the diary of Eilean Giblin, which has been added to the Papers of Lyndhurst Falkiner Giblin 1885-1965 (Eilean's husband), in the National Library of Australia. Again, however, the sources differ. Nolin notes that Giblin, who lived in Forrest, observes feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation (from the civic centre) during her time in Canberra (Clarke 2014). This cannot be said of any part of Jefferis and Whelen's observations, which are notably wistful and celebratory in tone, capturing their excitement in exploring and recording the most interesting aspects of the Capital. Further, unlike Giblin's journals, Jefferis and Whelen's volumes were solely concerned with the recording and documentation of the ACT.

Yarralumla Nursery Records

The Yarralumla Nursery records, originating from 1913, are listed on the ACT Heritage Register. These are highly

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significant as evidence of, and for their association with, the research undertaken which was vital in the creation of Canberra as a Garden City. The Nursery has played a significant role in the development of Canberra as the National Capital. It is as a direct result of the research undertaken at the Nursery that Canberra today has developed its unique character and identity as a Garden City with lakeside public amenity (ACT Heritage Council 2012).

While these records are comparable to the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra in terms of what they reveal about the early years of Canberra as the National Capital, they are, like the Mildnehall Collection and Canberra Community News, primary sources with a bias towards formal planning, government, and administration.

Family Papers of Robert Garran

The National Library of Australia holds the Family Papers of Robert Garran (1860-1957), which includes Garran's diaries, notebooks, and family correspondence, all of which capture information on the Capital during its formative years, including details on the Garrans' private and social life in the area. However, among many things, Garran is famous for his role in the Federation movement, and is generally recognised as the first public servant of the Government of Australia. Again, these records do not possess the same informality and absence of public service bias as found in the Jefferis and Whelen Historical Documentation of Canberra

DESCRIPTION

Jefferis wrote the majority of content within the volumes. He notes that he and Whelen hoped the journeys could be a prelude to others, and that these would secure some financial backing. While Whelen's son noted the volumes were compiled for amusement only, it is possible Jefferis intended at least one of the three volumes to be published manuscripts (Scougall, N.D.)

Volume I – 'The Opening Chapters'

This is 134 pages long, and was 'home' bound (by hand). It contains two progress maps, four colour paintings, and over 130 black and white photographs, with several newspaper clippings and advertisements in the collection. There is also one page of ticket stubs. As with Volumes II and III, Volume I is populated with margin notes that expand on the types accounts and descriptions, which lends the collection its charm and idiosyncratic qualities. Several watercolour illustrations are enclosed in the volume, including an impression of the environment around Uriarra Homestead (Image 1), and the Australian War Memorial (Image 2), all painted by Jefferis.

This volume contains chapters on the geological and Aboriginal history of the Canberra region, and general observations on the city from the time of the opening of Parliament in 1927. Jefferis refused to duplicate an account of nineteenth and early twentieth century history of the ACT up until 1927 as it had been covered in the following:

- *A brief history of Canberra* (Dr Frederick Watson 1927)
- *Canberra's First hundred years* (Frederick Robinson 1924)
- *Canberra - History of and Legends Relating to the Federal Capital Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia* (John Gale 1926)
- *Canberra* (W. Davis Wright 1923).

While Volume I carries similar themes throughout its chapters, it wants for a stronger element of internal cohesiveness as the chapters are not linked with fluent narrative. This lends the volume a degree of amateurishness, which, as Swain (2013) points out, is one of the strengths of the collection. Thus omitting the broader points of European settlement history in the ACT, Volume I includes 11 chapters:

1. Introductory (Geological and Aboriginal)

A two-page overview of Silurian and Devonian phases and subsequent shaping of the ACT's geological profile, and a two page profile of human migration to the Australian continent and Aboriginal occupation of the ACT and surrounding region.

2. Explanatory

The author states his intention to undertake expeditions around the Territory and record them, to collect insect and reptile specimens to send to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, and also record mammals, birds and fish and send (where collected) specimens to the Institute of Anatomy.

3. Zoological records

The records include two pages of scientific illustrations of some reptiles and arachnids, and a catalogue of the zoological records taken by Jefferis and Whelen.

4. Aviation

Photographs and accounts of famous aviators visiting Canberra, including Bert Hinkler, Bill Lancaster (including photos of the 'Red Rose' in the ACT), and Charles Kingsford Smith.

5. A new name on the map of the world

An account of the opening of Parliament House, including handwritten margin-notes that describe Nellie Melba swearing at the band during rehearsals. Hitherto unseen photos of the event are included, as are photographs of the Capitol Theatre, the building of St Christopher's School and Convent, and the Albert Hall.

6. Education and recreation

Describes the Albert Hall and Hotel Canberra, and includes a list of 'old' school buildings in the ACT, and a list of cultural organisations contributing to the social life of Canberra, providing a brief but rich snapshot of cultural life in Canberra at the time.

7. Outdoor sports

This section also provides insight into cultural life in Canberra at the time, describing the popularity of keeping horses for leisure, and race meetings where there were wood-chopping contests, musical chairs (on horseback), flag racing, pony racing and hammer throwing. The section also highlights the rising popularity of bushwalking around the Capital, and the advantages of bush surroundings for fishing and swimming.

8. Hotels and tourist facilities

Describes and photographs the three hotels in Canberra circa 1925: Hotel Canberra, Hotel Ainslie (renamed Gorman House) and the Hotel Kurrajong.

9. The Australian War Memorial

Photographs and a description of the inauguration of the Australian War Memorial at Canberra, Anzac Day 1929.

10. Miscellaneous events

Some notes on Jervis Bay, notes and photographs recording the construction of St Andrew's Cathedral, and the visit of 235 cadets to Canberra from the Japanese Navy.

11. Statistics

Statistics on road lengths, bus route lengths, square mileage devoted to reserves, plantations, water catchments, number of omnibuses and horses in the ACT.

Volume II – 'The First Thousand Miles'

Volume III ('300 Miles') was finished prior to this collection. However, Jefferis, in his introduction to Volume II, says that he enjoyed compiling '300 Miles' so much that he and Whelen produced another collection documenting an

additional 1,000 miles of journeying around the countryside surrounding the Nation's Capital. This ended up as Volume II, which is 67 pages long, contains two progress maps, 116 black and white photographs, and seven coloured paintings (Swain 2013).

The tone of the volume is curious and varied, and contains informal accounts and amusing anecdotes, occasionally changing to shorthand field note descriptions. The six chapters within this volume are as follows:

1. The Cotter Dam and its Surroundings (by Whelen)

As the title suggests, this chapter provides a description of Cotter Dam, but also describes, photographs, and provides colour illustrations of local homesteads and vegetation, creating unique informal records of places such as Uriarra Homestead, the Uriarra Mothstone, and the vegetation of the area as it existed at the time. Colour illustrations also show cleared pastoral landscapes of the era. An anecdote about the famous bushranger Ben Hall, raid on Collector Hotel, and subsequent death of Constable Nelson is also provided.

2. Account of the Ascent of Mt Coree

A short description of the climb and the natural surroundings, this chapter also makes mention of the insect samples collected by Whelen and Jefferis and donated to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CS and IR).

3. The Murrumbidgee River

Jefferis describes the issues of time, terrain and distance when cycling to the Murrumbidgee River from Canberra central. This chapter has 14 black and white photographs of the Murrumbidgee River at various points including Angle Crossing, Kambah Pool, and the Molonglo-Murrumbidgee Junction. The chapter also contains an interesting story about a Maori woman who facilitated journeys to Kambah Pool, who was said to be royalty among her people.

4. Lake George (by Whelen)

A brief history on Charles Throsby's exploration of Lake George, followed by a description of the Collector Hotel and its association with Ben Hall and the evidence of the raid still present at the place.

5. Miscellaneous (by Whelen)

Whelen describes his journeys up Mt Taylor, Long Gully Road, Western Creek, and Queanbeyan, and accompanies descriptions with several black and white photographs.

6. Zoological Records

Descriptions and paintings of bird, reptile, and mammal life encountered during Jefferis and Whelen's travels. While the black and white photographs were taken by Jefferis and/or Whelen, the paintings, in some circumstances, have been reproduced from exiting guidebooks as opposed to actual subject matter. However, there are four pages of drawings and descriptions of collected insect samples, presumably reproduced from the samples collected by the pair for the CS and IR.

Appendix

The appendix includes a record of journeys, including dates of reaching destinations, means of travel, mileage travelled, photograph numbers, weather, conditions, and wildlife encountered.

Volume III – 'Three Hundred Miles with Notebook and Camera'

This describes a four week trip on horseback from Canberra to Williamsdale, then to Orroral Valley to Cotter House in Cotter Gap, then to Rock Valley to the Cotter Dam and back to Canberra. Volume III documents what Jefferis and Whelen saw, who they met, who displayed memorable hospitality, and an incident where the duo was caught in a snowstorm. This is perhaps the most coherent and compelling volume, and in terms of what it reveals about the

remote areas of the ACT, the most significant. For example, it provides vivid and unique anecdotes, and animated descriptions of other important sites in the ACT with heritage significance, such as an Aboriginal burial site behind ‘the Old Sawmill’ at Tidbinbilla, Orroral Homestead, and, importantly, Congwarra, a pisé homestead, nominated to the ACT Heritage Register for which there is little information in the ACT historical body of literature. That it is the most engaging of the three volumes is perhaps not surprising, as it was the first planned, and the first written. See Image 3 for a photograph of Jefferis and Whelen setting out on their journey.

When examined with Volume I and Volume II, Volume III demonstrates an additional layer of significance. Volume I captures civic life and culture and the excitement within the burgeoning capital city. Volume II provides a hitherto unavailable account of the way Canberrans were engaging with the local surrounding landscape, and Volume III shows how elements of the more distant ACT still adhered to ways of life remnant of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century rural settlers. The volumes demonstrate varied cultures cohabitating the same small, newly established Territory.

Volume III is around 90 pages long, includes 11 colour paintings, 61 photographs, nine hand-coloured photographs and hand-drawn illustrations of insect specimens. It was written in three parts:

Part 1

1. Canberra – Williamsdale

Jefferis and Whelen journey to Williamsdale via Queanbeyan and Burra, describing London Bridge and eventual issues with their pack-horse, falling behind schedule, and knocking on farmstead doors at night in order to find shelter.

2. Williamsdale – Orroral

The duo camps at the Cuppacumbalong shearer’s kitchen, pick up ten days food supply, remedy issues with the back horse, and end up at Orroral Homestead, staying in the old school house.

3. Orroral – Cotter House

Describes how kangaroo and brumby tracks can mislead people away from mapped tracks; Fishloch yards, where there are rotten timbers (the old yards), and a remarkable granite builder in the shape of a fish (see image 4);

4. A Snowstorm and its Consequences

The pair departs Orroral Homestead, but their journey is curtailed by heavy snowfall, and they become lost, spend a night in the snow, and the next day have to turn back to Orroral Homestead, delaying their journey to Cotter House.

5. We Retreat to Rock Valley

With snow dangerously covering the tracks to Cotter House, the duo decides to retreat towards Tharwa, and go onwards to Tidbinbilla and Rock Valley. This chapter is brief but provides some insight into the community around the Rock Valley area. See Image 5 for a picture of Kaye’s Hut, a rare photograph of an in-tact slab hut in the ACT.

6. Rock Valley – Cotter Dam

Jefferis and Whelen arrive at Cotter House via Congwarra, and describe the latter place’s occupants, Mr and Mrs (‘Phib’) Flint. See Image 6 for a photograph of the Cotter River.

7. On the Road Home and After

A brief discussion of the difficulties encountered on the 300 mile journey.

Part 2

1. In New South Wales

This chapter recounts several local stories, one about a bushranger, one about a traveller's near-death experience on the Monaro Plains in the snow, one about a girl's near-drowning in the 'quick sands' of Burra Creek.

2. In the Federal Capital Territory

This chapter records some 'local history and yarns,' including an account of the Canberra bushfire of the 1930s.

3. "Well, I'll get on the Track"

This chapter provides a description of the stockmanship of Mr Oldfield of Cotter House, who had broken in brumbies, as well as a character description of 'Phib' Flint of Congwarra Homestead, and an account of Aboriginal burials at the 'Old Saw Mill' at Tidbinbilla.

Part 3

1. Derivation of Place-Names

As the title describes, the authors offer possible origin stories for ACT place names such as Orroral, Naas, the Cotter area, and Mt Tennent.

2. Animals and Birds

As the title suggests, descriptions of mammals and birds encountered on the journey, includes some colour illustrations.

3. Bush Pictures

Several verses of doggerel centring on local themes.

Appendix

An inventory of the supplies the pair packed on their journey.

Physical condition and integrity

The volumes are in good condition as of 2016. An ACT Heritage Grant had been issued to the Canberra and District Historical Society (the custodians of the volumes) in 2015, to restore the volumes with the aid of a paper conservator. These works replaced tissue paper, refastened bindings, and restored missing pages.



Image 1 Jerfferis' impression of the surrounds of Uriarra homestead



Image 2 Jefferis' painting of the war memorial



Image 3 Jefferis and Whelen set out on their 300 Mile journey



Image 4 Watercolour painting by Jefferis of the curious fish shaped rock near the 'Fishloch Yards' between Orroral Homestead and Cotter House.



Image 5 Jefferis' photograph of Kaye's Hut in the Tidbinbilla area



Image 6 The Cotter River, a photographic example of Jefferis and Whelen's documentation of the Canberra and ACT environment

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