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**TEN CHRISTMAS DAYS IN CANBERRA
A RETROSPECT - 1923-1932**

Could the last ten years have wrought such changes anywhere in the world as in Canberra? The whole character of the place, its people and their interests and institutions have changed. The change from beginning to end has been amazing, and even step by step, the differences were great enough each year for the ordinary community.

Ten years, a brief enough span even in Australian history, is yet sufficient to cover the essential years of Canberra's rise from a 'city of foundation stones' to Australian National Capital.

Let us look back over the Christmases of the last ten years and see how changes to the daily life of Canberra has been.

1923

We see first a Canberra that had differed little from the landscape paintings of the original site. Here and there are roads and features implanted upon the landscape by Mr Burley Griffin to ensure that his plans should endure. Not very long ago, the first work had been commenced on Parliament House. Far on the northern side lies a cluster of cottages put there by Mr Burley Griffin. They now form part of Braddon. Acton exists in the form of offices, weatherboard cottages the early buildings of the Hospital and Canberra House. The landscape is dotted with groups of camps.

The scene on Christmas Day is a very quiet one. The resident community is small and many of the workmen have homes elsewhere. Canberra is as deserted this Christmas as Sydney and Melbourne newspapers will



represent it in 1933 if their usual practice holds.

Left: Hawke family photograph taken on Stirling Ridge Yarralumla (former Westlake) in 1924. In the background are the tents of No 3 Sewer Camp in *The Gap* and behind them Westlake temporary portable cottages.

1924

But let us leaf forward another year. Canberra is about to start in earnest. The first land sales have just been held. Hotel Canberra has been opened. The camps have increased in size and number. Threading its way from Westridge (now Yarralumla) is a small gauge railway over which millions of bricks were taken to Eastlake (now Kingston), Ainslie or Capitol Hill. Over at Acton there is an expectant air. The Federal Capital Commission has just been appointed and with the New Year Mr JH Butters will be in charge. There is an exodus of workmen this Christmas and in Queanbeyan the shops are beginning to feel the effects of the rising activity in Canberra.

A new Canberra community is springing up and the first steps are being taken in friendly societies and kindred institutions. A Christmas tree or two are organised for the children and there are great hopes for the next succeeding years.

Below: Mildenhall photograph circa 1925 showing the Hotel Canberra far right bottom and Acton on the north side of the Molonglo River. The line of small cottages at the Acton cottages and to the right the rectangle is the nursery.



1925

The scene has changed rapidly. It has been a year of change indeed. The Federal Capital Commission has taken up its great construction task with a will. It has drawn its staff from many parts of Australia and its



SIR JOHN BUTTERS. C.M.G., M.B.E.

workmen represent every state. Work is being pushed ahead in every direction. Private enterprise has started too. Canberra has its own shops this Christmas, for the Eastlake (Kingston) shopping area is being developed and JB Young Ltd has opened its large store on the first business site purchased in Canberra and one or two other shops are open both at Eastlake and at Manuka. There is as yet no sign of activity at Civic Centre, but in the industrial area are two bakery buildings are being built and the offices of 'The Canberra Times' are being erected.

Left: John Butters, (later Sir) First Commissioner Federal Capital Commission 1925-1929.

But the most notable event affecting Christmas has been the creation of a new organisation in Canberra called the Canberra Social Service Association. It has much to do with ideals close to those of the Christmas season itself. It is concerned primarily with the welfare of the people in their leisure, but it offers the helping hand to every society in the growing settlement. There are more Christmas trees, more Christmas jollity this year than before. Queanbeyan is busier than ever before. The railways carry many away for Christmas, but there are many who spend their first Christmas in Canberra. It was very quiet - peace on earth indeed.

1926

What a year it has been. More employment still and in every direction the fabric of a city is branding the once peaceful valley. Whole suburbs have sprouted since last Christmas. Blandfordia is a group of houses with red and green roofs. Barton and Griffith are marked by 150 houses in varying stages of construction. The first house at Red Hill will shortly be completed for Mr WG Woodger. Away to the North, the Canberra Avenue

subdivision has sprung into existence. A pile of four million bricks that had been carried by miniature trains to just outside the 'Time's' buildings at Ainslie has been removed and is now forming the first houses in the new suburb of South Ainslie (Reid). Ainslie itself is beginning to fill out. Shop buildings are beginning to rise at Civic Centre. The industrial row looks businesslike (Mort St area). Two bakeries are in production. 'The Canberra Times' has been published for the last four months.

Christmas is as many-sided as the fast growing Canberra community. The Canberra Social Service Association has done good work. There are associations and societies of every kind, each having some little contribution to make to the growing Canberra spirit.



On the other side, there are reminders of the unsatisfactory conditions under which a large section of Canberra's population dwells - in tents, hutments, wooden tenements and community camps. Life there is rough. Christmas was marred by a fatal stabbing affray at No 1 Camp (No 1 Labourers Camp, Capitol Hill, Westlake). Three excursion trains carried an assorted cargo of humanity away to Christmas celebrations of varying degrees.

Left: Detail of No 1 Labourers Camp on Capitol Hill Westlake.

The Canberra Community felt more like a happy family at an At Home given by Mr and Mrs JH Butters at Hotel Kurrajong which had been opened shortly before.

A prophetic note is struck by the leading article of 'The Canberra Times' of December 23: 'The interest that Australia will display in Canberra will not wane. As the years pass 'Home for Christmas' will be synonymous with 'Home to Canberra' - and it will be a merry Christmas indeed.'

1927



Canberra is now the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth. This has been a year of great events. The first transfers of Departments from Melbourne (Printers were moved in 1926) have taken place, and Christmas is being celebrated in many new homes. But many are deserted, for Christmas has accentuated nostalgia that only time can cure, and many family ties are renewed in Melbourne.

Left: Tennis Court Ainslie built by Social Service Association. The area today is part of Braddon. The courts are no longer there but the cottage is.

The city of Canberra is now defined in suburbs, homes, streets, whops, and offices, but it also exists more than even in the Canberra community. The officers of the Commonwealth have been welcomed to Canberra by its citizens under the auspices of the Social Service Association. Life does not run quite so smoothly in the capital as in later years. Many amenities are still lacking and there is a good deal of grumbling, but that does not really amount to anything serious yet. There is a feeling that the Commission should give more attention to governing now that the major construction work is over.

The major construction programme is over. Christmas comes for many under a cloud. The peak of employment has passed. The Government has reduced the vote for Canberra by 250,000 pounds for the next six months. Many leave Canberra never to return. No less than 400 dismissal notices have been served. The total employment is 2,700 and there is a pessimistic forecast that 1,000 men will eventually be put off. This estimate five years later was fated to be merely optimism.

Christmas was marred by a motor fatality on the Yass Road at Ainslie when a car containing a party of tourists from Young, overturned and one man was killed.

Everything in Canberra is changing. Even the names originally set upon the city plan by Mr Burley Griffin are being erased in part. Suburbs and districts were given new nomenclature as Christmas approached, and streets, parks and gardens have been named. Canberra people now know where they live, even if five years later their visitors cannot find the streets.

Just before Christmas 'The Canberra Times' announced that early in the New Year, it would be published as a morning daily newspaper.

1928

More departments have been brought up from Melbourne and there is promise that Canberra is going on to assume its true role in Australian affairs. The year witnessed unaccustomed events in Canberra, all of which leave their impress on the Christmas celebration.

The failure of the Federal Capital Commission to respond to public needs has become very pronounced, and there has been demand for its abolition. Representation has been a live issue, and legislation has been passed to enable the people to elect one member of 'the commission'. Early in the New Year an election will be held. In September some of the residents in the Territory exercised the right to vote the first time in 20 years. The occasion was liquor pole which decided that the sale of liquor under private license should be introduced in the Territory. Characteristically the Commission applied its own idea of what should be, and introduced a sale of liquor under public control. The first liquor bars were opened on Christmas Eve.

It rained on Christmas Day, but it had been a good year for farmers all through. Indeed, it was the last good year that farmers and graziers were to enjoy for a long time.

1929

Canberra has been merely one centre in a world of change. The golden age of post-war prosperity has ended even while the peoples of the world knew not that they had been in it. In Australia the Government has fallen. In Canberra, the Federal Capital Commission is tottering to its doom. Sir John Butters has gone. His work in building the city will stand. In his place as an administrator others are found who will enhance civic peace and good order in the capital.

But there are much bigger things than the people of Canberra or the Australian people can control. The first blasts of terrible economic storm have already swept Australia. To those who ponder on public affairs the prospect after Christmas is not pleasing. It has some terrifying prospects.

Nevertheless, hope overcomes fears for the time being.

1930

Even the joy of Christmas has lost some of its appeal this year. Australia has passed through days of travail. There is not even a light in our darkness this Christmas. Drift and uncertainty have brought national peril. Overseas, the Imperial Conference has failed; at home, the public is prepared for sacrifice.

The full force of national misfortunes are nowhere more keenly felt than in Canberra. Nevertheless, there are still many who have not experienced to the full sufferings and troubles of depression.

Hopes of 1928 and 1929 for Canberra's future have been dashed. The capital was practically the first thing to suffer the call for economy. Yet, there has been some progress. Christmas Eve for instance, is marked by the opening of the new baths.

Many more people spend Christmas in Canberra than before, but in return for the fewer who leave the city over the holidays, there are fewer tourists coming in.

Christmas hopes are centred on an early solution to the depression.

1931

Depression has intensified its grip on everything. Canberra is obsessed with twenty two and half percent, reduction is everything. Things have been very bad in every walk of life. The national fabric has stood severe strains and compulsory readjustments have been made in all forms of everyday affairs.

Towards the end of the year, there has been an election and a new Government is about to come to Canberra. On Christmas Eve, Mr Lyons is engaged in choosing his Ministry. Great hopes are entertained for what the new Government will do, but there is recognition that our life are largely beyond the cure of Australia alone. We must do what we can, and wait.

The year has been marked by serious unemployment in Canberra. The Christmas season is marked by organised effort to provide Christmas cheer.

1932

Last Christmas was only 12 months ago, yet how short and how long the year has been. At last Canberra has taken an upwards turn. The Government has decided to resume transfers of Departments. The Taxation and Patents staffs will be here within a few months.

There is prospect of more employment and a turn in the general outlook encourages the belief that ere another year will have sped, ' things will be better.'

The depression has taught us many lessons. Goodwill means more now than ever before. It implies first understanding the other fellow's troubles.

Meanwhile, there has been an awakening concerning Canberra. While the material expansion of the city has been checked for three years, Nature has been busy adding touches of charm and beauty in her inimitable way. The people of Australia are coming to remember that Christmas is their own capital. The people of Canberra are now completely absorbed in it as their home. So, Christmas sees many visitors to the Capital and both visitor and resident find many compensations in a Canberra Christmas.

After all, in the present and the future, it is from here that authority sends out its Christmas message to the people, and it is here that the practise of the Christmas message must be infused into the national life and affairs of a virile people.