

RED HILL, WESTLAKE CAMPS

Emil Ronald (Ron) Baum was born at the Kinkora Private Hospital in Queanbeyan on 21st May 1930. His parents, Johannes and Annette (nee Kanter) Baum were Estonians who came to Australia in 1927 and 1929 respectively. Johannes along with a number of other Estonians probably worked for the private firm - Monolyte company whose camp was erected on the lower slopes of Red Hill. The company won the tender to erect 100 concrete cottages, however because of problems encountered it went broke and only 25 in the Canberra suburb of Griffith were completed. A fire in one of the camp Mess buildings in early 1928 closed the camp and by the early 1930s many of the Estonian workers left the district in search of work. The Baum family settled in Queensland where two more children were born and contact with Canberra was broken.

Because the Estonians were not British or Australian citizens at the time they lived in the FCT they are not recorded on the 1928 electoral roll and information about them and their role in Canberra's early history might have been lost except for a visit in 2007 by Ron Baum to Queanbeyan and the local historical museum where he obtained a copy of the museum's magazine, *Quinbean*. In it was an article by local historian, Marilyn Folger on the Kallas family. It mentioned his family. This in turn resulted in the meeting to which I was invited and shown a number of family photographs that Ron Baum has kindly allowed to be copied and reproduced in this article. (The photographs of the camps are postcards and are probably Mildenhall photographs.)

In a note to me as background to the Canberra Estonians and photographs Marilyn wrote: *Johannes Baum [Ron's father] and a group of Estonians worked on the building of the Federal Capital until the depression set in and then most worked their way north ending in Queensland by 1933... Charlie Pohla seems to have been an organizer for them and Monolyte features in the forwarding addresses for some. Many stayed at 15 Charles Street and at Ross Road in Queanbeyan. [Others had the address of Red Hill Camp; c/o Canberra PO and c/o Acton PO]*

Amongst the photographs that Ron brought to the meeting are a number showing the 1927 Red Hill Camps: the Westlake Red Hill Horse Camp, Monolyte and the new cubicle camp erected for the men of No 1, Capital Hill, Westlake.

THE RED HILL CAMPS

RED HILL PIPE LAYER'S CAMP 1913

The earliest reference to a Red Hill camp that I have found is that of the Pipe Layers' Camp established in 1913. This camp was situated at the base of Red Hill and may have housed the men who built the reservoir on the top of Red Hill around the same time. This camp had single and married men with families. This may have been a camp that consisted of self built humpies rather than canvas tents. The 1913 Census lists the

following people living at Red Hill. Only the name of the head of household is listed along with the number of males and females in each household: M Dawkins (2 males & 2 females); Mrs Hannaford – probably the Mess Caterer (1 male, 2 females); Geo McIntyre (1 male), S Prout (1 male), John Sims (1 male), Evan Wills (1 male). Total – 11 in the camp.

The 1916 electoral roll (vote for or against conscription) named the following living at Red Hill: DORMAN, Margaret Louisa & Fred William hd & labourer; EDWARDS, Arthur labourer; HILL, Edith & Gilbert hd & labourer; JONES, Evan B caretaker; SHIRE, William labourer; SIMS, James Aldwin labourer. The following year (1917) the electoral roll lists only the Dorman family and Arthur Edwards living at Red Hill. By 17th November 1917 there were 12 camp sites and all were vacant with the exception of Dorman [footnote Builders of Canberra 1909-1929 Gugler page 273 – this work details the names of others who had built humpies in the Red Hill Camp and included – Primmer, Sheedy, Sutcliffe, Webb, F Stephenson and D Maloney]



The above photograph shows Smith family humpy that the family used in the teen years of the last century. It is an example the humpies built in a number of the early camps. Photograph courtesy of Colin Smith.

RED HILL CAMPS 1923-1928

MONOLYTE

This camp was probably erected in 1925 and was removed in early 1928. It is probable that the camp cubicles were sold following the closure of the camp. They may have been bought by the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) and moved into the new Red Hill cubicle camp erected for the labourers from No 1, Capital Hill, Westlake. [footnote – The FCC commenced cubicle construction in 1926 and intended to gradually phase out the tents and replace them with small unlined cubicles constructed from second grade unseasoned Baltic pine.] The July 1927 Sanitation Report describes the Monolyte Camp as follows:

RED HILL CONTRACTOR'S CAMP (Monolyte Building Company)

Shortly to be demolished - two galvanised iron huts each with 10 cubicles, having accommodation for 2 men in each cubicle; rooms generally clean but lumber under floors. Mess Room and kitchen provided; sanitary blocks filthy.



Above Monolyte Camp in foreground. The cubicles on the slope off to the right of the Mess building are probably part of the new cubicle camp erected for the men of No 1. The building foreground left is the ablution block. Around 50 men lived in the cubicles and the Mess Caterers probably lived in rooms in the Mess buildings.

Conditions in the Monolyte Camp were not good and in a letter dated 26th April 1926 by the men of the camp listed a number of complaints:

We the undersigned call your attention to a few things that could be put right more especially the Winter months approaching and for the sake of decency and cleanliness.

1. Bath Room. Plug gone from bottom of bath. No window. No door on same. Very cold and draughty when bathing. No privacy and in a filthy state.

2. Copper taken away. No boiling water for washing, in use some other where in camp. No boiling water available.

3. No wash troughs. Taps there ready for use.

4. WC's in camp filthy state only three seats. Could do with 3 more. More especially since camp is larger than before.

5. Urinal only 1 tin and always running over – objectionable smell is caused...anywhere but healthy.

6. No lights in WC.

7. Also some precautions in Kitchen and Dining Hall for flies – simply swarming all over the meal.

The men who signed the letter were: A Mercer, E Smith, H Liebick, C Jenkins, L Poole, J Ross, RW Donald, S McDonald, M Chandler, P Roslumery, L Roots,...(?), AT Post, M Penn, J Hurley, FW Newbound, A Dleaney, WJ Simpson, R William, G Rambon, H Salor, A Strazzolusey, AC Ekman, F Miles, J Black, J Sands, Faisley (?), A Smart, Brown, P Brennan, W Galvin, DE Gellatly,... The Estonians who gave their address as Monolyte Camp were Peter Kosemikan, Johannes Remmert and Johannes Roots. Johannes Sang has the address Red Hill Camp. Adolf Pappie and Eduard Pillav have the address PO Canberra and Karl (Charlie) Pohla PO Acton. It is possible that these men also worked for

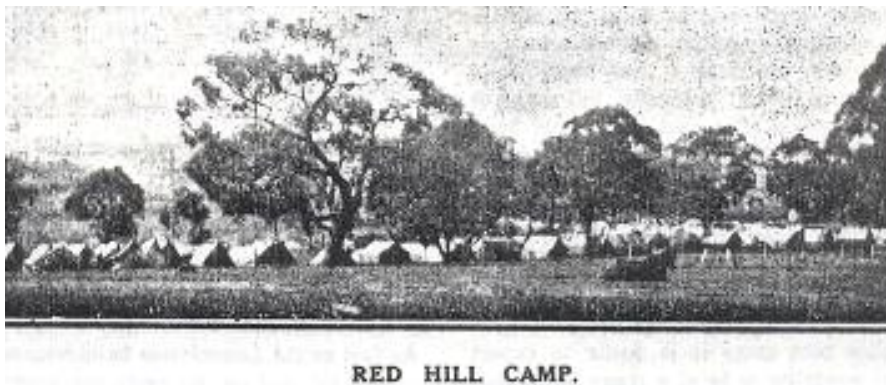
Monolyte and lived in the Monolyte Camp and/or the nearby Horse Camp where men could erect their own tents.

RED HILL MESS CAMP

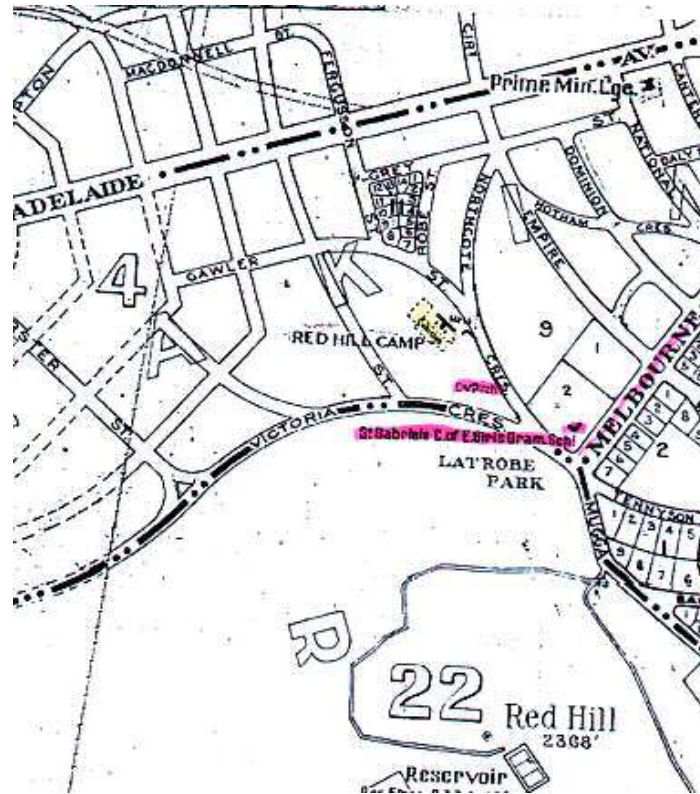
July 1927 Sanitation Report description of the Red Hill Mess Camp: *To be sewerred in 2 months. 80 tents of canvas and bag formation in regular lines. Earth channels for water taps only - clean but unsightly. Garbage bins generally covered. Kitchen and Mess Room provided; (kitchen utensils inside - clean.)*

Reference to this tent camp is found in a number of documents in Australian Archives that indicate that this camp was in situ by 1923 when a number of men signed a petition re the poor quality of the canvas in the tents. The men who signed the complaint were John McCarthy, Victor Samuels, WJ Edwards, W Bull, ER Peters, E Smith, R Chisholm, S Bonney, Flood, Eyles, HC Rogers and R Dall. By 1925 a list of camps (in relation to a meeting to form the Social Service Association) noted that 200 lived in the Red Hill Camp. By 30th July 1927 93 men lived at the Red Hill Mess [camp].

The following photograph of the Red Hill Camp was reproduced in the Christmas issue of the *Canberra Illustrated* and the photograph below that is one printed in the *Canberra Community News*. (1926) Note the neat orderly lines of tents.



Note the tree foreground left is the same gum tree as shown in top photograph on the left.



The above map is circa 1927 and shows the site of the Red Hill Camp (last cubicle camp?). Oral history placed the horse camp near the corner of Empire Circuit and Melbourne Avenue. During construction work on a house in Bedford Street a concrete slab was found. This slab was probably part of the camp marked in the 1927 map. Below is a contemporary map of the same area that shows the road changes that included Bedford St. Victoria Crescent (1927) is Stonehaven Crescent.



RED HILL HORSE CAMP

The exact year when the Horse Camp was established is not known but it was probably in situ by 1925 if not earlier. Oral history sited this camp near the corner of Melbourne Avenue and Empire Circuit and in 1927 it was moved to the extreme south west of Red Hill. The July 1927 Sanitation report described the camp as follows: *Unsewered. To be removed shortly to cubicles at Mugga Valley site. Rough tent formation camp in irregular layout and untidy; garbage bins uncovered generally; earth channels from water taps only; horse's pens and paddocks at rear of camp, manure in same accumulated. A considerable manure heap at rear of pens.* At this time 83 men lived in this camp.

Below detail of Baum family photograph - the Horse Camp. Note the line of lavatories along the creek line. The pan system was probably used rather than long drops.





The building in the distance was also photographed by Johannes Baum – see photograph below: This building was of interest and may have been an ablution block or a building erected to hold materials etc in preparation for a new building such as Church of England Girls Grammar School?



The above photograph was probably taken by Johannes Baum. I believe the subject may be the Red Hill Horse Camp.

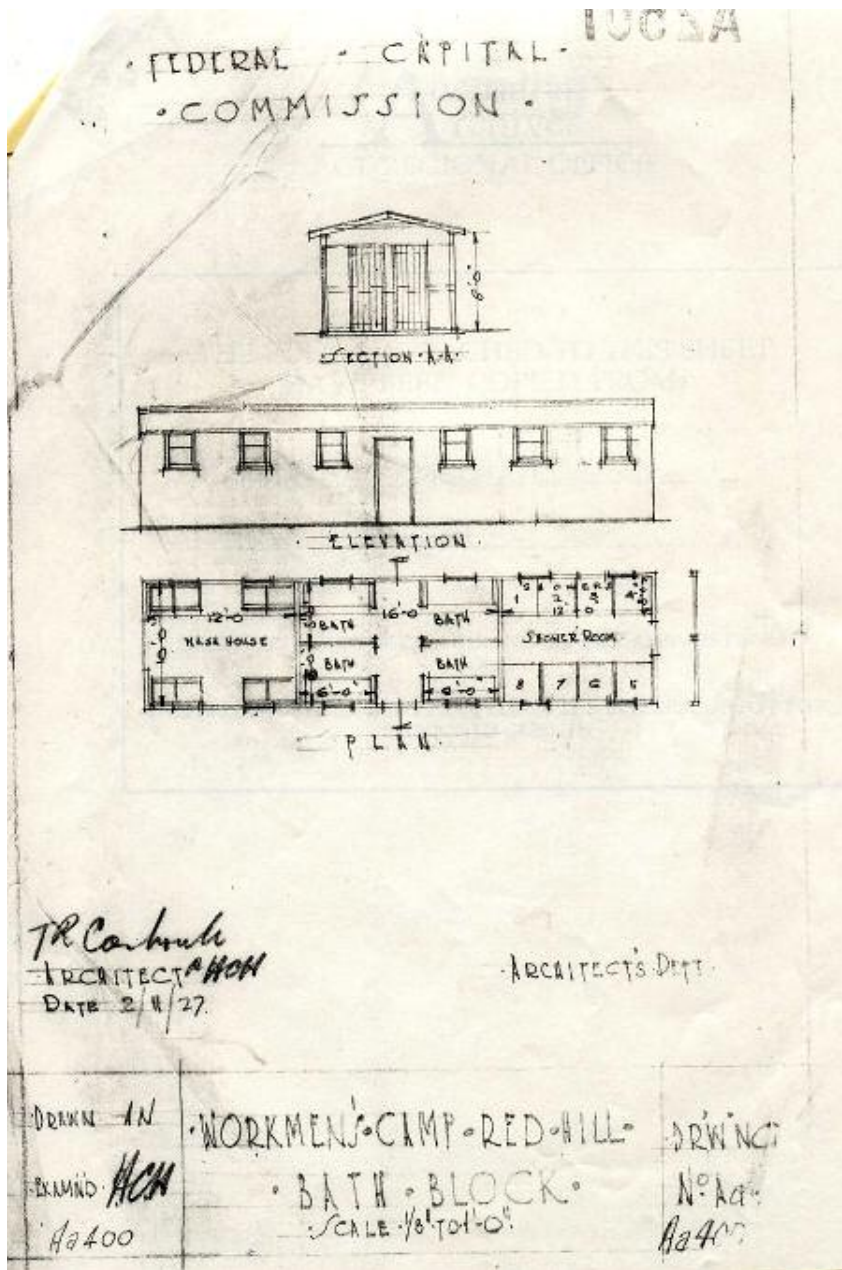


Charlie Phola on the left and Johannes Baum third from left wearing a black singlet. This photograph was probably taken in NSW following the departure of the men from Canberra, however, it shows the tent accommodation used. The tent in this photograph appears to be smaller than the standard tents provided by the FCC and rented to men. The following two photographs show tents at No 1 Labourers Camp, Capital Hill Westlake. The first is a 1924 Mildenhall photograph showing the Cook's Tents No 1.





Many of the tents had tin fire places added to them and some were constructed from hessian bag.



Plan for new Bath Block for Red Hill Camp 2.11.1927.

MEN AT WORK

The next series of photographs show the Estonian men working on concrete structures. There are no notes on the photographs that identify the sites where the men are working, however, I believe that it is a safe guess that the men were worked for the Monolyte company and were engaged in building the concrete houses erected in the Canberra suburb of Griffith. Note the box – FCC = Federal Capital Commission.

Harry Hamilton who was born in 1927 during the time his parents lived at Howie's Cottages, Westlake (site opposite Lotus Bay, Yarralumla), following his marriage lived in a monolyte cottage in Hann Street Griffith. He commented that during the process of building an extension one of the walls had to have an opening cut in it. The job was difficult because the walls were solid concrete that had embedded throughout it small river rock. The photographs show reinforcing being prepared in the wall areas as well as floors.

That this company experienced some difficulties with the authorities who may not have been too sure about concrete being used instead of brick is found in a Parliamentary Report dated 11th August 1926 had the following to say about the erection of the concrete cottages: *The Committee was unfavourably impressed with the prices at which the contract was let for the construction of solid wall houses by the Monolyte Construction Co. With solid concrete walls there is said to be always danger of damp penetration and condensation of moisture on the interior walls...that no difficulty had yet been experienced in the houses built by the Monolyte Co at Sunshine (Victoria) ...concrete houses ...1285 square feet of space were erected for 900 pounds whereas, at Canberra while the larger concrete houses are being built at a lower cost than similar brick homes, the smaller types having 1200 to 1300 square feet are costing 1225 pounds.*



On the way to or from work? The buildings on the left I believe are in Mugga Way, Red Hill and the men would pass this area on their way to work at Griffith. Below are photographs of the men at work.





Charlie Pohla rear wearing white shirt. The man squatting in foreground is Johannes Baum



FREE TIME

The following photographs from Ron Baum's album show leisure time activities.



The new Provisional Parliament House was a subject for the photographer and visits to the Cotter River



Annette Baum (nee Kanter) left and next to her is Johannes Baum. This photograph was taken on the pathway to the dam.



Below: Photograph 1927. View from the Hostel (Hotel Canberra) looking toward Parliament House

