

Yarralumla, Government House

Government House, Canberra, as the official residence of the Governor-General, is a complex building and is required to serve a multiplicity of functions. First and foremost, it is the place where the Governor-General carries out the formal and ceremonial duties associated with his constitutional role; but it is also the house of the Governor-General and his family; official guest house in which the Sovereign, visiting heads of state and other dignitaries are accommodated; and the place from which the Governor-General's personal and official staff work and operate.

Yarralumla – Government House, therefore, within the Parliamentary system in Australia, is as symbolically important as Parliament House itself.¹

The residence of the Governor General is more of the nature of a gentleman's country seat than of a palace.²

In November, 1908, after a great deal of effort by the Queanbeyan Federal Capital League, the Federal Parliament chose Yass-Canberra as the site of the Capital City of the new nation of Australia. Without delay, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher appointed surveyor Scrivener to determine the best site for the city and the catchment area for its water supply. On New Year's Day, 1911, the relevant legislation came into effect: nine hundred square miles of country was separated from the State of NSW to become the Australian Capital Territory.³ Scrivener chose an area of twelve square miles, situated on the Limestone Plains on either side of the Molonglo River, to be the actual site of the city – an area the local residents already called “Canberra”. Much of it belonged to the Campbell family.

Canberra was not a village: the dwellings of the white inhabitants were scattered over the lowlands of the Territory. The largest “station” properties – Cuppacumbalong, Duntroon, Yarralumla, Gungahleen,⁴ Gudgenby, Tuggeranong, Uriarra, Belconnen, and Lanyon – indeed resembled villages, where the owner lived like an English squire or Scots laird in the Big House surrounded by a cluster of

¹ NCDC, 1975.

² Ruth Lane Poole, *Australian Home Beautiful*, 2nd May, 1927, p. 15.

³ At first it was known variously as the Territory for the Seat of Government, the Federal Capital Territory, or the Australian Capital Territory. This last name was formally adopted for legal purposes in 1938.

⁴ *Sic*. The modern suburb is spelt “Gungahlin”.

employees' cottages, utility buildings, huts and sheds.⁵ The Territory included a couple of real villages: Hall to the north and Tharwa to the south-west. Queanbeyan was the commercial centre of the district, and although its residents had campaigned vigorously for the Canberra site, their town was not included in the Capital Territory. The nearest city was Goulburn, 100 kilometres away to the northeast, a distance easily managed by railway from Queanbeyan. The line continued to Sydney, the metropolis, less than a day's railway journey away.

Frederick Campbell's family came from Scotland, where aristocrats owned much of the land and leased out some of it to tenant farmers. In 1825 his grandfather Robert ("Merchant") Campbell had been granted 4,000 acres of land in the newly discovered Limestone Plains; by the 1840s he had more than doubled his holdings. Descended from the lairds of Ashfield from Duntroon Castle on the west coast of Scotland, the Campbells naturally sought to reproduce the Scots pattern in their new Duntroon on the Limestone Plains. From the later 1830s, when most large rural properties were being managed with very few permanent staff supplemented by casual labourers as the season demanded, Frederick's father Charles Campbell decided to secure a more stable workforce by encouraging immigrant families to settle on his estate. He provided them with plots of land on which to grow fruit and vegetables and to keep poultry and a cow; he built them a church and a school. Other major property owners in the district followed his example.⁶

Fred Campbell was one of the most active promoters of the Canberra site and President of the Queanbeyan Federal Capital League from May, 1901. As one of the largest property-owners in the district he was an appropriate leader; but he also had more than most to lose when the campaign succeeded – over 32,000 acres of land, including Yarralumla Station and Belconnen, nearly all of it destined to become the built-up part of the capital city. His cousin John Campbell owned 41,080 acres at Duntroon. This concentration of ownership in the designated city area suited the Commonwealth Government because it had only to deal with a few major landowners instead of a multitude of smaller ones.

⁵ G. Nesta Griffiths, *Some Southern Homes of New South Wales* (Sydney: Shepherd Press, 1954; facsimile edition with postscript by Caroline Simpson, Sydney: National Trust of Australia (NSW), 1976), chapter 6.

⁶ C.E.T. Newman (Frederick Campbell's son-in-law), *The Spirit of Wharf House: Campbell Enterprise from Calcutta to Canberra, 1788-1930* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961), 201-203.

On 1 January, 1911, life on Yarralumla Station continued as usual. The greatest New Year event in the district was to be held there the next day: the annual cricket match between Yarralumla and Queanbeyan. The match was always eagerly anticipated and enjoyed by the Campbells and their friends, their own employees and many other people from all over the district, whom Fred and his wife Christina entertained on a generous scale.

The Yarralumla team included their eldest son Charles (soon to celebrate his twenty-first birthday) and cousin Arthur, Everard Crace from Gungahleen, and one of the Rutledges, probably Thomas (aged twenty-two) or his brother Harry (twenty), from Gidleigh near Bungendore, as well as the rector of the local church, A.H. Champion, and his son Geoffrey. Fred's employees, however, always formed the basis of the team, and they competed strenuously for a place. Cricket practice began weeks beforehand on every fine Saturday, and after Christmas everyone – the family, the employees and their families – worked together for the occasion. This year the Queanbeyan team won by eight wickets and 72 runs – but as usual the match was played “in the best of spirits in spite of intense rivalry”.⁷ It was a great day out for both country and town.

A few weeks later, the grounds of Yarralumla were prepared for “Children's Day”, held every year on 26 January (then celebrated in NSW as Anniversary Day). On that day Christie Campbell entertained the children of the district with sports and games and party food, and always made it a happy event for the young.⁸ But there would not be many more occasions like these.

In the summer of 1913, not long before Lady Denman officially named the federal capital as “Canberra”, the Commonwealth Government gave Frederick and Christina Campbell five weeks' notice to leave Yarralumla, the 24,000 acre property Fred had built up over twenty years to be one of the finest pastoral stations in the country. He knew that eventually he must give up some of his land but he had never expected that he would have to part from his home. The notice came sooner than expected, the money offered in compensation was nowhere near the real value of the property, and Frederick fought hard and unsuccessfully for more adequate recompense. Speaking at a farewell function in Queanbeyan, Fred described leaving

⁷ *Queanbeyan Age*, 6 January, 1911.

⁸ Newman, 1961, 222; Vest Papers, Box 6.

Yarralumla as a “terrible wrench”. Had he seen what was coming, he would have endeavoured to induce the Commonwealth Government to fix their choice on Dalgety – or for that matter on Mount Kosiuszko!⁹

His daughter Kate gave vent to her feelings in a poem published in the magazine of her old school (Ascham):

The land they resume, and even presume
To use it ‘ere we can away;
Abandon our home and indef’nitely roam
Is all we can do till they pay.

Oh! Martyrs are we, as you all can see,
For the sake of the Federal City.
Look on it with joy as a new, useful toy,
To appreciate not is a pity.¹⁰

Fred’s employees also felt the loss:

I would imagine that it would be a sad moment when Mr. and Mrs. Campbell finally closed the doors of the lovely homestead behind them for the last time, but I am sure that for those of us who stayed on their going away was as sad for us for we said goodbye to a couple who had been friends to us all and whose advice and help when asked for was never refused but gladly given.¹¹

On 10 April all the stock was sold; the sale of the rural and household goods followed. “By the 5th May, the Estate of Yarralumla owned by Fred Campbell for so long was no more.” The old station overseer, Richard Vest, stayed on to look after the homestead as caretaker until his death in 1922. Meanwhile Fred and Christina accepted the invitation of their friend the Bishop of Goulburn to stay at his residence, “Bishopsthorpe”.

Fred Campbell was the first large property-owner resident in the Capital Territory to lose his land and home. The Crace family received notice of resumption of their property Gungahleen in north Canberra in 1914, but continued to live in the homestead until Everard Crace, the last “squire”, died in January, 1929. James Cunningham of Tuggeranong, another friend of the Campbells and another promoter of Canberra as the capital site, was the next to come under pressure. When his brother Andrew Cunningham died in 1914, James moved to Andrew’s property, Lanyon;

⁹ *Queanbeyan Age*, 14 October, 1913.

¹⁰ Kate Campbell, “The Federal Capital – A Lament from a Sufferer”, *Charivari*, September, 1912, 7-8.

¹¹ Douglas Vest, Vest Papers, Box 6, folder 5.

Tuggeranong was purchased by the Government in 1916. But by then the Great War had broken out and changed everything.

Preliminary works on the capital were well under way when the Great War began. Several major structures had already been completed; more were finished soon afterwards. Before the outbreak of war many unmarried workers from outside the Territory had already left the district to find employment elsewhere. When war was declared, local men who might otherwise have worked on the national capital project enlisted in the military forces. They came from every level of society and every part of the district, and represented nearly every family.

Those who joined the Australian forces as a great adventure lost enthusiasm as they came under fire in Turkey. Suddenly the adventure turned into tragedy and disaster. The losses from the district were heavy. Small wonder that progress on the federal capital lost momentum: the national focus was maintaining morale at home in the teeth of appalling tragedy and waste of life. Some of the young cricketers of Yarralumla were among the casualties. Andy Cunningham of Lanyon Station was wounded at Gallipoli, but recovered and went on to do heroic deeds in Palestine.¹² Arthur Champion was severely wounded at Gallipoli and died of his injuries. Thomas Rutledge of Gidleigh Station also served at Gallipoli and then in France. His younger brother, Harry, enlisted at the end of 1915, and was killed in action in Belgium in October, 1917.¹³

For some of the bereaved there was little consolation. Christina and Frederick Campbell received with dismay and disbelief the news that their pilot son Charles had been shot down and was missing in action.¹⁴ Christina was removed from the community who might have comforted her: their old friends and their employees at Yarralumla, who had known Charles from infancy. He had been such a favourite with the Yarralumla staff that they had given him a grand twenty-first birthday party in 1911. When Yarralumla was taken over by the Commonwealth Government Christina had lost her home. She could not visit that place full of memories of her son's happy childhood and youth. A few months after she had left Yarralumla, when the Campbells were living at Bishopsthorpe in Goulburn, a fire broke out which destroyed most of their household goods and personal possessions – more memories

¹² Horsfield, 2005, 141-154.

¹³ Information from Australian War Memorial Service Records.

¹⁴ The Vest Papers include a letter from one of Charles' fellow airmen giving an account of the incident, which he had witnessed.

destroyed. Charles left no widow to be cared for, no children to be cherished. Yarralumla Homestead now stood empty; it would be several years before it entered a new life as Government House.

The land on which the capital city of Australia would be built was not “virgin soil”. It had a long history of human occupation; it was resumed at a cost.

By the end of the war, work on the Federal Capital project had dragged to a standstill. At Yarralumla Station a few agisted sheep picked over the idle pastures; the homestead, vacated so hastily in April, 1913, and later sparsely furnished as a guest-house for official visitors, now stood empty. At the end of 1919, the Commonwealth subdivided about 24,000 unwanted Yarralumla acres south of the Cotter Road and leased the blocks to returned soldiers. “The blocks were small, between 1,000 and 1,350 acres,” one of the soldier’s daughters remarked, “the leases short and the conditions harsh.”¹⁵ In the depths of winter, on 21 June, 1920, the Prince of Wales visited the site and laid another foundation-stone on Capital Hill. “At the present moment,” he remarked, “Canberra consists chiefly of foundation stones,” and he went on to blame the War. No doubt his entourage laughed politely at his little joke and were relieved when they departed from the shelterless Limestone Plains for the next stage of his tour.

The longer the delay the more difficult it became to recommence, and the more entrenched the Commonwealth Government became in Melbourne. The people of the Canberra district became angry as work on the city ran down, drought took hold, bushfires flared and soldiers returned to unemployment. Again they took action, campaigned vigorously, stirred up in their favour the old rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne, and interested people far more influential than themselves to push for resumption of work on the Federal Capital City. How they succeeded is another story.

Early in 1921, seven months after the Prince of Wales visited the site, the Governor-General in Council approved of the appointment of a committee of five architectural and engineering experts, to inquire into and advise upon the works already executed and the data available, and to submit a scheme for progressive

¹⁵ Fionna Douglas and Marion Douglas, *Not Without My Corsets! Oral histories of the families who farmed soldier settler blocks in the Woden Valley from 1920 to 1963* (O’Connor, ACT: privately published, 1996), 11; *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 14, (1921), 986.

construction of the city, “with a view to enabling the Federal Parliament to meet, and the Central Administration of the Commonwealth Government to be carried on as early as practicable at Canberra”.¹⁶ In its first year the Federal Capital Advisory Committee made a decision that enabled the capital city to go forward.

The Committee submitted a scheme of construction involving an expenditure of approximately £2,000,000, the main principles of which – that owing to the necessity for economy, buildings and works of a monumental character be deferred, and that Parliament House and other Governmental buildings be of a provisional character – were adopted by the Government.¹⁷

Two million pounds, even in those days, was a very modest budget for building everything necessary for a Seat of Government; then, thanks to opponents of the federal capital project, even this amount was cut to half.¹⁸ No slack was left for lavishness or luxury, but the reduced sum still allowed for good, sound construction – no marble or gilding, but decent quality brick and tile. The outcome of this worthy parsimony could have been a rather stodgy, no-frills town; but Walter Griffin’s design and Thomas Weston’s tree plantings saved it from such a fate. The Committee explained that “provisional” meant “a class of building of rather better material than would be employed in a purely temporary structure, although not having the massive proportions or embellishment associated with a permanent monumental building”. The member for Kooyong, J.G. Latham, cynically observed that the word “provisional” meant “something cheap which would still last for ever.”

Even a pragmatic, provisional capital city was a massive undertaking. The FCAC had the Griffin design; the infrastructure and horticulture programmes were well under way; but a large number of buildings would now be needed. The Chief Architect began to draw plans. The most important building in the seat of government must be Parliament House, and its commencement would signal a definitive start to the long-delayed construction programme. The Minister for Works and Railways turned the first sod on 28 August, 1923.

¹⁶ Report on the Federal Capital Territory *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* 15 (1922), 947. The *Year Books* chronicle the progress of the Capital City in annual reports that include accounts of expenditure and revenue. See also Daley, 33-50; Gibbney, 1988, 60-61, and chapter 4, “Rebirth”.

¹⁷ Report on the Federal Capital Territory, *Year Book* 15 (1922), 947.

¹⁸ Harrison, 1995, 68.

On 30 January, 1924, as a pledge of commitment to establishing the Seat of the Australian Government in its own Territory, Federal Cabinet met in Canberra for the first time. They stayed at Yarralumla Homestead, which provided both a dignified chamber for the meeting and comfortable accommodation for the Ministers and their wives. Less important accompanying visitors were fitted somehow into less comfortable quarters. The Ministers inspected the works and retreated to Yarralumla, with its established flower-gardens, wide lawns and shady trees a haven from the dust and noise of building sites and a preview (for those with foresight and imagination) of the Garden City to come. Local families, including some former Campbell employees, supplied indoor and outdoor staff for the occasion, supervised by Ms Isabelle Southwell (connected to one of the earliest white-settler families in the district) as domestic manager and hostess.

John Smith Murdoch, Chief Architect and from 1925 Director-General of the Commonwealth Department of Works and Railways, deserves better recognition for his work in Canberra. Born in 1862 in Forres, north-east Scotland, he served his articles in architecture with the north Scotland firm of Matthews and Mackenzie, then worked at Inverness before moving to Glasgow where he was employed by the important firm Campbell Douglas and Sellars. He was therefore a contemporary of the more widely known Glasgow architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, but he migrated to Australia in 1884 before Mackintosh began his career. He worked for twenty years in the Queensland Department of Public Works, and therefore brought considerable experience as well as professional skill to the Works and Railways branch of Home Affairs when he joined the Commonwealth Public Service in Melbourne in 1904.¹⁹

He was responsible for designing most of Canberra's public buildings in the first stage of development: the Cotter pumping station and the Kingston power house (buildings of practical utility, pleasing proportions and solid construction); hostels and hotels to accommodate politicians and public servants as well as visitors, including Gorman House for single women, the Hotel Kurrajong (favoured by Labor politicians) and the remarkable Hotel Canberra with its pavilions radiating from a central core, set in gardens between tennis courts and croquet lawn, opposite the Golf

¹⁹ D. I. McDonald, "Murdoch, John Smith (1862 - 1945)," *ADB* 10, 621-622; David Rowe, "John Smith Murdoch and the Early Development of Canberra," *Fabrications*, June, 1995, 36; Daley, 83-84.

Links and adjacent to the elegant Albert Hall (another Murdoch design). His most important set of buildings, however, were the provisional Parliament House with its associated offices, East and West Blocks, and the transformation of old Yarralumla Homestead from the pleasant and comfortable headquarters of a large grazing property into appropriate – albeit “provisional” – accommodation for the Governor-General.

Canberra would have no palaces, but the Federal Capital Commission, which took over administration and construction of Canberra on 1 January, 1925, did provide two official residences for the Governor-General and the Prime Minister. Among the buildings under construction in Canberra at that time these residences were unique. They were not primarily offices or meeting rooms but domestic spaces; they were not hostels or hotels (which the FCC was building in quantity) but superior private homes. Even so, they were not altogether private, because in addition to suitable living quarters for the first people in the land they also had to provide dignified reception rooms for official functions.

Yarralumla was much bigger than the new house built for the Prime Minister. Like many old Australian pastoral homesteads it had grown by gradual accretions over many decades. When Fred Campbell bought the property in 1881 it was an unpretentious L-shaped building with surrounding verandahs. The first part was built by Yarralumla’s first resident owner, Francis Mowatt, in about 1834, the second (rather taller and at right-angles to the first) in 1843 by Terence Aubrey Murray, who purchased the property from Mowatt in 1837. Murray lived at Yarralumla with his wife and family until 1855, when he moved with them to Winderradeen near Collector, leaving his brother-in-law Augustus Gibbes at Yarralumla, which he subsequently purchased. Gibbes made no substantial alterations: the house and land remained much as they had been in Murray’s time until Fred Campbell purchased the property in 1881. Fred built a new three-storey gabled wing in 1891, and added to it in 1899 when he also remodelled the old Mowatt/Murray wing. Now the Federal Capital Commission was adding more. By May, 1927, the house could with some justification be described as “a pile of rooms” for which “no one would claim any beauty or dignity”²⁰ [PIC]

²⁰ *Australian Home Beautiful*, May 2, 1927, p. 13, editorial by-line to Ruth Lane Poole’s article, “A Home for a Governor-General”.

In March, 1926, the FCC engaged Mrs Ruth Lane Poole to design the interiors, including the furniture, of these two official residences.²¹ The project had to be completed in time for the official opening of Parliament in Canberra on 9 May, 1927, giving her little more than a year to finish the job. In addition to a tight deadline, she also had to work to a strictly limited budget to comply with the greatly reduced scale and far more meagre funding for the federal capital than originally intended.²² Very few people (let alone women) in Australia in the 1920s had comparable training, though some had the artistic talent and technical skills. Nevertheless, it was remarkable that the Federal Capital Commission – a very masculine group of officials in a construction-site town run by the Public Service and the Army – should have engaged her at all. Perhaps they recognised (correctly) that for this particular job a woman's touch was needed, and that this particular woman was exceptional.

Ruth Lane Poole with three daughters joined her husband Charles in Melbourne in the autumn of 1925. They had been married for fourteen years, but had spent barely five together – a brief sojourn in Western Australia where their second daughter was born. For most of her married life, while her husband worked overseas for the British Colonial Forest Service and visited her briefly on leave, Ruth lived with her own extended family in Ireland and in London. In 1925 Charles was appointed Commonwealth Forest Adviser, based in Melbourne but soon to be transferred to Canberra. Here at last they were able to establish a home together.

Ruth belonged to a gifted family. Her grandfather, William Pollexfen, was a successful ship owner and merchant, running his business from the town of Sligo in the north-west of Ireland. From the age of fifteen, when her parents separated, Ruth lived with her talented cousin, Lily Yeats. Lily's father, John Butler Yeats, was a portrait painter; her elder brother, William, was the well-known poet and playwright;

²¹ This project is very well documented: the relevant papers are in the National Archives of Australia: and may be viewed in their "Uncommon Lives" Series, <http://uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/lane-poole/ruth/capital-interiors.aspx>. The drawings and some photographs are held in the Pictures Room of the Australian National Library, which also holds the papers of her husband, *Papers of Charles Edward Lane-Poole, 1905-1970*. NLA MS 3799, Bib. ID 2268351. Ruth Lane Poole outlined her ideas about the project in a series of articles published in the *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1926-27.

²² "When Ruth Lane Poole provided her plan for the furnishing of Government House in July 1926, her costing of £12,000 'completely staggered' the Federal Capital Commission, who ordered an urgent review. She responded that she had looked to 'save every penny possible' while maintaining the required standards and quality. When the review vindicated her estimates, Cabinet increased the sum approved from £10,000 to £13,400 (about \$771,000 today), later adding £325 for furniture for the royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, the first state visitors accommodated at Yarralumla." Uncommon Lives, *loc cit*.

her younger brother, Jack, was an artist, and her sister Elizabeth a watercolourist, designer and printer. Lily inherited some of the Pollexfen good sense in money matters: it was she who began to establish the family on a more secure financial basis by working in William Morris's embroidery workshop.²³

Ruth joined her cousins when they were living in London at Bedford Park, a prototype "garden suburb" that embodied new concepts in urban and domestic design and home of many artists and writers. Here Ruth began to practise her skills in drawing, design and embroidery, as she became acquainted with William Morris's ideas and admired his work. In 1902 she returned to Ireland with the Yeats sisters to help found an Arts and Crafts establishment in Dublin. Ruth thus lived and worked in the very centre of the Arts and Crafts movement. Her cousins gave her an education that would enable her to earn her own living, as they did, in one of the very few ways socially acceptable for a woman of her class.

In Melbourne Ruth soon became very much involved in the Arts and Crafts Society. In September, 1925, she made a substantial contribution to the Society's annual exhibition in the Melbourne Town Hall, for which she designed a whole room in order to display works of other artists as well as some of her own, and to demonstrate that Australia possessed both the raw materials and the craftsmen to build, decorate and furnish a room to the best international standards.²⁴ At this time she also began to contribute articles to the *Australian Home Builder* (from November, 1926, re-named *The Australian Home Beautiful*), a popular magazine that provided practical information on building and equipping the home, gardening, cooking and home decorating. These articles provide valuable insight into her ideas on furniture and interior design as she worked on the official residences in Canberra.

Fortunately, Ruth was engaged to furnish both houses while they were in the course of construction or conversion, so that she could consult the architects and make suggestions for adjustments and alterations to the basic plan before it was too late. She regarded herself lucky in having "no family atrocities in the way of furniture" that she had to accommodate. Neither house had any furniture; the Lodge

²³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 1931-1940*, p. 928. A fuller account of the family is given in the electronic version...R. F. Foster, 'Yeats, William Butler (1865-1939)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37061> Nicola Gordon Bowe, 'Yeats, Susan Mary [Lily] (1866-1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61425>.

²⁴ Melbourne *Herald*, 12 September, 1925, p. 14.

because it was brand-new, and Yarralumla because the Campbells had vacated it more than ten years earlier and had taken with them the furniture they did not sell. For the last decade the old house had been used intermittently as a hostel for Members of Parliament and other official visitors, but it had no furniture suitable for its new function.

I discussed the Prime Minister's Lodge in the talk I gave here last year; today my subject is Government House. I want now to concentrate on its transformation from family home to vice-regal residence.

Writing for a special edition of *Home Beautiful* published in May, 1927, Ruth Lane Poole hinted at the difficulties encountered on the way. The accommodation at Yarralumla was ample for the Campbells' large family, but "in the official residence of the King's representative and his attendant secretaries, aides-de-camp, and large staff, it would be totally inadequate." Extensive alterations and additions had to be planned and some of the clutter of old farm huts and sheds had to be cleared away. "However difficult the task was," she continued, "the architect, Mr Murdoch, was equal to it, and the result is most successful – for today it combines all the necessities for the official residence of the Governor-General of Australia, and yet retains the charm of a gentleman's country seat."²⁵

The "necessaries" included areas for the Governor-General to carry out his formal and ceremonial duties, including a study, a formal dining room, reception rooms and drawing room, offices for the military and official secretaries, and residential accommodation for everyone, kitchens and storerooms, as well as provision for growing some fresh food on site, because Yarralumla was rather remote from the designated city area.

John Smith Murdoch designed a new three-storey extension on the north (river) side of the gabled wing of the house, to provide a study and a formal dining room on the ground floor with a new kitchen wing attached, and guest and staff bedrooms above.²⁶ The principal bedroom suites were in Fred Campbell's old building, with a magnificent view of the Brindabella mountains to the south-west.

²⁵ *Home Beautiful*, 2 May, 1927, 14.

²⁶ Peter Freeman, "Quite an architectural cocktail," in *Gables, Ghosts and Governors-General: The Historic House at Yarralumla, Canberra*, edited by C.D. Coutlhard-Clark (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 89-109

Murdoch added a private entrance between the two gabled sections on this side and relocated the staircase to open up a hallway leading to the dining room with reception rooms on either side. He retained Campbell's *porte cochere* and formal doorway on the eastern side of the building as the official entrance, and as reception rooms two of the old apartments – “in beautiful proportion,” Ruth noted, “opening on to the verandah, and thence to the gardens.”

Ruth Lane Poole furnished the Governor-General's study with a desk made of figured blackwood inlaid with tulip wood and chairs of blackwood covered with Australian leather. She lined the walls with bookshelves to the height of four feet, allowing a space above them for pictures. She had the dining room walls panelled from floor to ceiling in mountain ash, and provided a table in Queensland maple constructed in six free-standing sections – four of them rectangular, with two semi-circular end pieces – to be fitted together variously to suit the occasion. The sideboard matched the table; the comfortable saddle-seated chairs were covered in Australian leather. Both rooms were carpeted – the dining room for the practical reason of avoiding the noise of waiters' footsteps. Well lit by north-facing windows, these rooms could be furnished in rich, dark colours. The drawing room, however, on the cool side of the house, required a much lighter treatment to give it an airy, open appearance. The couches are low and wide, the lyre-backed side chairs slender and elegant, the fabrics and walls are light coloured.

Upstairs, the bedroom suites for the Governor-General and distinguished guests have the same aspect as the drawing room, and Ruth gave them a similarly open and airy treatment. Her ideas of beauty excluded ostentation and “showiness”. She preferred the simple, uncluttered style now known as “stripped classical”, which accorded well with the early twentieth-century emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene. She had no time for fussy frills or dust-collecting drapes and swags: her window-curtains hung straight down from plain rods, her beds had no curtains or canopies, just bedsteads fashioned from fine timbers. She did, however, introduce a note of opulence in the two principal bedrooms by commissioning her cousin Lily Yeats to embroider two bedspreads. Eighty-five years later, these may have been worn out or lost (I have never traced them), but Ruth describes the one in Her Excellency's bedroom as embroidered with bunches of tulips, auriculas and primroses in pale yellow, “greyish jade green and moonlight blue”, which made the keynote of the whole colour scheme of the room.

The rooms were not palatial, she observed, “the dining room can accommodate not more than 22, while dances have to be very restricted in numbers” because there was no ballroom. When Fred and Christina Campbell wanted a ball they held it in the woolshed, where dances are still held to the present day; but this country arrangement would not suit the dignity of the Governor-General. Instead,

The big doors which separate the reception rooms from the private entrance and stair halls are all hinged with pins, which can be pulled out at a moment’s notice, the doors removed, and a good dancing space made available. For this reason the carpets are laid with socket pins, and in a very short time they can be rolled back, and the wonderful two inch, secret-nailed jarrah floors laid bare for dancing. It is an accepted fact that tallowwood and Jarrah floors are among the finest dancing floors in the world.

As a matter of principle, as well as of government policy, Ruth chose Australian timber in order to furnish the official homes of the foremost people in Australia. As wife of the first Forester of the Commonwealth she had privileged access to information about Australian timber, and this project was an excellent opportunity to showcase it. It was a choice in advance of its time, shared by Murdoch, whose design for provisional Parliament House also featured Australian timber floors, panelling, and furniture. (In fact, Ruth shared many of Murdoch’s principles.) Ruth used appropriate Australian timbers for every piece of furniture, as Murdoch did for the floors, doors and panelling.

Australia possesses a fine range of beautiful woods for cabinet work, and there are not wanting the skilled craftsmen to carry out the building of notable pieces of furniture on the lines of the old masters of this art. Curiously enough, although Australia possesses these woods, she has no faith in them herself, with the result that it is almost impossible in either Sydney or Melbourne to buy in any quantity pieces of furniture in good taste made of Australian timbers.²⁷

In the chapter of *Gables, Ghosts and Governors-General* about the furnishing of the house, Pat Wardle refers to Ruth’s designs rather dismissively as “reproduction

²⁷ Ruth Lane Poole, “A Home for a Governor-General”, *Australian Home Beautiful* (May 2, 1927), 14.

antique”.²⁸ Ruth herself argued defensively that “there can be nothing fundamentally new in furniture design. All the pieces in use today are copies of older ones – the good work lived and became “period furniture”; the bad found its way on to the fire heap.” So she set to, “taking all the old designs that have lived down through the centuries, I had drawings made, and with full scale details, where necessary, of each piece.” She then engaged skilled Australian craftsmen (including Melbourne firms Ackmans, Ltd, W.H. Rocke & Co, and C.F. Rojo, and De Groote of Sydney) to build the pieces to her designs.

Ruth was asked to consult the wives of the incumbent Prime Minister, Mrs Ethel Bruce, and Governor-General, Lady Stonehaven, to find out their requirements, even though they might not live in their new official residences for very long. Lord Stonehaven was concerned that the old stables should be enlarged to accommodate his horses as well as provide garage space for official cars. Lady Stonehaven’s requirements included suitable accommodation for her two youngest daughters, Ariel (aged ten in May, 1927) and Ava (aged seven). Ruth, who had young daughters of her own, understood their needs very well and designed a special set of rooms for them including a play room, “a real children’s room, a happy and delightful one, in which to play or work – or romp”. Ruth strongly advised her *Home Beautiful* readers to have a day room for the children, however small the house and even if it meant forfeiting the spare bedroom.

People are apt to overlook the necessity for such a room. It is quite impossible with even one child to keep a house tidy and the small people really happy unless they are given a special room in which to keep their toys, and books, and precious treasures, which to grown-ups may be simply so much rubbish. A clear floor on which their railway lines may be laid and remain laid for days if the owner so wishes without fear of their removal during his absence – for after all they are only asking what we ourselves consider a necessity, i.e., somewhere where we may leave our possessions in safety, so that we may find them undisturbed when we come in . . . Incidentally it is very much more useful to teach a child the elements of tidiness on his own ground rather than trying to enforce it on yours.²⁹

²⁸ Pat Wardle, “So aesthetically erratic,” *Gables, Ghosts and Governors-General*, 110-130.

²⁹ Ruth Lane Poole, “How to Furnish the House Successfully”, *Australian Home Beautiful* (July 1, 1927), 21.

Ruth also believed that servants should have pleasant, comfortable living quarters, and realised this belief in the rooms she designed for their use.

She knew how to use colour and line to correct a room's faults and deficiencies so that it would appear to the best advantage, knowledge she put to good use in dealing with some of the awkward spaces in old Yarralumla Homestead.

It is now difficult to distinguish the old part of the house from the new, but the official entrance hall is part of the old house. This was my greatest problem. It was a narrow passage, lit only by a skylight, and divided in two by a highly decorated blue and gold painted archway, and yet this was to be one of the really important features of the house. By widening the doors opening into the hall, substituting beautiful modern glass for the old skylight, demolishing the painted arch and opening a fireplace on the angle wall, steps were taken in the right direction. Then one day I discovered some English reproduction tapestry, and I knew that my official hall would be satisfactory . . .

She used Australian leather to cover some of the chairs, and she promoted the idea of a collection of Australian paintings to adorn the walls. Where Australian materials were not available or suitable, she was asked to use first quality British – furnishing fabrics, fittings, carpets, silver, china and glass. Her cousin Lily Yeats acted as her agent in Britain, obtaining the necessary materials and dispatching them promptly in order to meet the tight deadline for the project's completion.³⁰

Meeting the deadline became even more difficult when she was notified in December, 1926 (not five months before the event), that the Duke and Duchess of York would be accompanied by an entourage of eleven – eleven extra people including aristocratic ladies-in-waiting and aides-de-camp to accommodate appropriately as well as feed.³¹ Persuading the authorities that extra beds and bedding, as well as other bedroom furniture, would be essential, and obtaining an extra £350 to purchase them took several months of urgent notes, telegrams and fuss. For Federal Capital Commissioner John Butters, who was in charge of building and

³⁰ John Dargavel and Lenore Coltheart, "Uncommon Lives: Charles and Ruth Lane Poole", National Archives of Australia website.

³¹ NAA Item No. A1, 1927/6507, "Governor-General's Residence Canberra, Furnishing of," 1925-27, Barcode 44343, 269-300.

equipping the entire city in time for the official opening on 9 May, continually harassed about expenditure, this must have been the last straw. His reply to Ruth's request for more money was tetchy, to say the least; her response conciliatory but firm.³² On 4 January a further harassing note hit the desk of the Minister for Home and Territories, who sent it on to Butters:

In view of the visit of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York to Canberra, I hope you will see that "Yarralumla House" is completed in time for the Governor-General to occupy it when they leave Sydney on 28 March.

Butters sent a reassuring reply – and hoped for the best. Ruth Lane Poole and the renovators did not let him down. When Lady Stonehaven visited Canberra on 28 March she noted in her diary, "House very nice – Pretty furniture," and invited Mrs Lane Poole to tea the next day.

³² NAA Item No A1, 1927/6507, "Governor-General's Residence Canberra, Furnishing of", pp 178-191, 186--300.

Yarralumla/Government House, Time Line (handout)

- 1820: Explorers Joseph Wild, James Vaughan and Charles Throsby Smith view Limestone Plains.
- c. 1827: James Taylor sets up stock camp, builds slab hut near entrance of Yarralumla Creek to Molonglo River (just below site of future Scrivener Dam).
- c. 1829-31: Henry Donnison takes up 5120 acres on south shore of Molonglo River (Yarralumla site).
- 1832: William Dawes buys Yarralumla from Donnison.
- 1833: Francis Mowatt buys Yarralumla from Dawes.
- 1835: Mowatt builds first house on site, 3-room stone cottage with verandahs. Outbuildings situated to west of cottage, constructed of timber and locally made bricks, including a milking shed and dairy, stables and woolshed. All these still standing in early 20th Century until demolished after Commonwealth take-over. Mowatt uses Yarralumla as “hunting lodge”; keeps hounds in kennels, and brings his wife and family for holidays.
- 1837: Terence Aubrey Murray buys Yarralumla from Mowatt. Property used to run 25,000 sheep, and employed 50-60 men, mostly assigned convicts.
- 1843: Murray marries Mary (“Minnie”) Gibbes. House extended, gardens established.
- 1846: Minnie's brother Augustus (“Gussie”) Gibbes comes to Yarralumla to look after Minnie while Murray attends to duties as Member of the NSW Legislative Council.
- 1855: Murray moves his wife and children to Winderradeen near Collector; Gibbes left in charge of Yarralumla.
- 1858-64: Negotiations to sell Yarralumla to Gibbes. Murray's parents-in-law, Colonel and Mrs Gibbes move into Yarralumla until they die in 1873 & 1874 respectively.
- 1881: Gibbes sells Yarralumla to Frederick Campbell, who carries out extensive improvements to the land, building it up into one of the largest and most successful station properties in the district.

* * * * *

Frederick Campbell (1846-1928), born at Duntroon, NSW, second son of Charles and Catherine (née Palmer) and grandson of Robert (“Merchant”) Campbell.

m(1) Frances Catherine Burford Wright (1855-1881); ch Catherine b & d 1879; Sybil Jean (1880-1962).

m(2) Christina McPhee (1861-1933); ch Charles Bruce b 1890 kia 1917 France; Kate Agnes Margaret Annabella (1893-1969); Walter Malcolm (1897-1972); John Andrew MacDuff (“Jackie”) (1902-1917). All born at Yarralumla.

* * * * *

- 1890: New dairy built by Fred Young; new overseer's cottage.
- 1891: Three-storey gabled extension to homestead built by Fred Young.
- 1899: Old eastern wing rebuild to design by E.C. Manfred; 1891 wing extended.
- 1902: New stables, designed by Manfred.
- 1904: New woolshed, built by Fred Young.
- 1901-1911 improvements to homestead and out-buildings, including gas-lighting, telephones, sewerage and reticulated water-supply.
- 1901: Fred Campbell appointed President of Queanbeyan Federal Capital League.
- 1908: “Yass-Canberra” chosen as site for Federal Capital City.
- 1911: New Year’s Day, 1911, Capital Territory created as a distinct legal entity.
- 1913: Yarralumla Station compulsorily acquired by Commonwealth Government.
- 1913-1925: Yarralumla Homestead used as guest house.
- 1919: Some Yarralumla land leased as soldier-settlement farms.
- 1921: Federal Capital Advisory Committee recommends Yarralumla Homestead be refurbished as temporary residence for Governor-General.
- 1924: Cabinet meets at Yarralumla.
- 1925: John Smith Murdoch designs renovations to turn Yarralumla into (“provisional”) Government House.
- 1926: Ruth Lane Poole engaged as “furniture specialist”.
- 1927: May 9, official opening of Parliament in Canberra by Duke of York (future King George VI).
- 1934: Private sitting room added for Lady Isaacs.
- 1939: Renovations and extensions to Yarralumla for Duke & Duchess of Kent.
- 1944: Edna Walling designs memorial garden for Lady Gowrie’s son (killed in the war). Paul Sorensen takes in hand the trees at Yarralumla.
- 1960: “Vista” begun on south side of the house, with view of Brindabellas.
- 1959-1964: Construction and landscaping of Lake Burley Griffin. Service road to Scrivener Dam moved further away from the house, tripling size of the grounds. Landscape architect Richard Clough designs “water gate” and northern gardens, lawns and terraces.
- 1969-1979: Other planned extensions, not carried out.

Government House from Lake
Burley Griffin, 1964
NAA Image no A1200, L49445.

