

# **Governors, Residents and Administrators of the Northern Territory**

**Excerpts from**

## ***The House of Seven Gables – A History of Government House, Darwin***

**By Paul A Rosenzweig, Published 1996**

## Introduction

*“Government House, for many years known as the Residency, appears from records to have had a very chequered career, and, like the Government Office, to have been built in a somewhat piecemeal fashion, either as money was available, or as the dictates of the architect led him” .*

Thus wrote Mr Justice Samuel James Mitchell, Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia in his Annual Report for 1912, reflecting upon the Government Residence’s forty year history in the town of Palmerston. Mitchell holds a unique position in the history of the Northern Territory, overseeing the transfer of responsibility from South Australia to the Commonwealth and being the last South Australian appointed Government Resident to occupy the Residence. Little has changed in the eight decades since Justice Mitchell made this observation, except that the history of Government House, Darwin (as it is today known) has perhaps been even more chequered.

After the first contact by Janszoon in 1606, the north Australian coastline was visited regularly by Dutch mariners during the period 1623-1756, but it was only after visits by English explorers in the early 19th century that some degree of colonisation was attempted. From 1824 to 1863, the Northern Territory was administered by New South Wales and during this period there were three failed attempts at settlement, demonstrations of British sovereignty – Fort Dundas on Melville Island (1824-29), Fort Wellington at Raffles Bay (1827-29) and Victoria in Port Essington on Cobourg Peninsula (1838-49) – followed by an intense period of inland exploration.

It was at Victoria that North Australia’s first Government House was built, for the official representative of the Government of New South Wales. The site of Victoria settlement was selected and established by Captain J Gordon Bremer of HMS *Alligator* in 1838, and the settlement was named Victoria in honour of the British Empire’s new Queen by Captain John MacArthur RM (Commandant of the settlement from June 1839 until 30 November 1849 when the settlement was abandoned). Government House, Bremer’s official residence for the few months he was at Victoria, was built of timber, with a shingled roof, on the high ground south of the main camp and completed towards the end of March 1839. After Bremer’s departure for Sydney, MacArthur was left solely in command as garrison Commandant.

Government House was lifted from its stumps by the cyclone of 25 November 1839 and had to be physically lifted from the ground and replaced on stone piles by a work party the following May. During its short existence, Government House was the venue for a significant dinner party on 17 December 1845. Captain MacArthur was the host, and joining him and the officers of the garrison were a party of explorers and their leader, Doctor Ludwig Leichhardt who, that day, had arrived on foot at Victoria after leaving Sydney on 13 August the year before. A remarkable naturalist and explorer, Dr Leichhardt became famed as the ‘Prince of Explorers’ and, in recognition of his feats and leadership, was granted a Pardon by the King of Prussia for not having returned for compulsory military service. The Royal Geographical Society of London, on the other hand, awarded him their Patron’s Medal for his efforts in increasing the knowledge of Australia’s geography.

By late 1847, the roof of Government House was so rotten that it could no longer keep water out and the timber was heavily infested with white-ants; it was subsequently found to be in such a bad condition that it had to be re-roofed. For a number of reasons, MacArthur was ordered to abandon Victoria on 30 November 1849 and Government House, along with the other buildings, was gutted by fire; any remaining traces were demolished by white-ants in the ensuing years.



## **C A FitzRoy, Governor**

Meanwhile, on 17 February 1846, the Colony of North Australia, comprising all lands north of the 26°S latitude, was established by the British Government for settlement by released convicts. Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy was appointed Governor of this Colony of North Australia on 21 February 1846 (whilst he was concurrently Governor-in-Chief of NSW). He had earlier seen military service as an officer in the Horse Guards, notably at Waterloo in 1815, had been a member of the House of Commons for a brief period, and was Lieutenant-Governor of Prince Edward Island (1837-41) and then of the Leeward Islands (1841-45) before coming to New South Wales.

Whilst FitzRoy can certainly be claimed as the Northern Territory's first Governor, in reality his brief period of rule extended only as far as the small number of marines, some with wives and families, and their convicts at the relatively autonomous Victoria settlement. Beyond Victoria settlement however, North Australia was never physically established and, following a change in Government in Britain, FitzRoy's Letters Patent were withdrawn in December of that year and the Colony was abandoned; that area north of the 26°S latitude reverted to the control of the Colony of New South Wales.

FitzRoy served as Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales from 1846 to 1851, and was subsequently the first 'Governor-General of all of Her Majesty's Australian Possessions from 1851 to 1855, an experiment which was abandoned in 1861. FitzRoy returned to England and died in London on 16 February 1858. He had been appointed a Knight of the Royal Guelphic Order (of Hanover) in 1837 and a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in the Civil Division in 1854.



## **B T Finniss, 1st Government Resident**

After control over the Northern Territory passed from New South Wales to the Colony of South Australia in 1863, the Government of Premier Henry Ayers began making plans on how best to establish a northern colony. With the passing on 12 November 1863 of an Act to regulate settlement in the Northern Territory of South Australia, it was only a matter of time until the three failed attempts by New South Wales to colonise the north would be forgotten, fading into obscurity beside the success of the South Australian Government's commercial venture in the north. Land sales in Adelaide and London were followed in the following year by the appointment of the Honourable Boyle Travers Finniss as Government Resident of the Northern Territory, and his dispatch to survey and establish a northern capital.

Finniss and James Thomas Manton, his Chief Surveyor and Second-in-Command, were responsible for founding a fledgling settlement at Escape Cliffs, and Finniss became the first Government Resident of the Northern Territory. Manton had been an applicant for the position of Government Resident but had been unsuccessful, appointed deputy to Finniss instead. Finniss had gained some notoriety as the surveyor of Gawler and as commander of the Adelaide Volunteer Regiment, an Assistant-Surveyor in South Australia with Colonel William Light in 1836 and was in private practice with Light in 1838-39, while in 1839 he was Deputy Surveyor-General of South Australia. He was later a Member of the South Australian Legislative Council (1851-62), which service included terms as Colonial Secretary (1852), Administrator (1854-55), and a term as the first Premier and Chief Secretary of South Australia (1856-57).

He was appointed Government Resident of the Northern Territory, representing the interests of the distant South Australian Government, on 3 March 1864 and on 29 April left Largs Bay in the barque Henry Ellis with 40 men to inspect the suitability of Adam Bay for a settlement. On 20 June 1864, they arrived in Adam Bay and his party surveyed and established the Escape Cliffs settlement. Finniss did not experience his earlier successes in the north however. After much quarrelling, breaches of discipline and complaints about the site, Finniss was recalled on 21 September 1865 to face a Royal Commission. Finniss unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament for redress and compensation, and was then an agent for the British Australian Telegraph Company in 1870-71, a member of the South Australian Forest Board in 1875, and Auditor-General from 1876 to 1881. He died at Kensington Park, South Australia, on Christmas eve, 1893.

At Escape Cliffs meanwhile, Manton was appointed Acting Government Resident on 4 November 1865, but the whole party was recalled on 6 November the following year and Escape Cliffs was abandoned. After the recall of Finniss, the South Australian Surveyor-General Goyder was despatched to the Northern Territory where he selected sites for settlement. Goyder and his party of 135 men arrived in Port Darwin on 5 February 1869, via the west coast from Adelaide, on the coastal barque *Moonta* and the Canadian-built schooner *Gulnare*. They established their camp at the foot of Fort Hill, on the saddle between it and the mainland plateau – an anchor and commemorative plaque today records the site. The area on which Goyder's party established their camp was not unoccupied; it was the property of the Larrakia people and, although there were some clashes, relations were generally cordial. During their brief time in Palmerston, at least one member of the

survey party fathered a child by a Larrakia woman, the part-Aboriginal boy later having a significant association with Government House.

On the plateau to the north was laid out the township of Palmerston, today the Northern Territory's capital, the city of Darwin, and then, his role fulfilled, Goyder departed on the *Gulnare* on 28 September 1869. On 22 January 1870, Dr James Stokes Millner arrived in Palmerston on SS *Kohinoor* as Acting Government Resident of the Northern Territory of South Australia, although he also held the appointments of Special Magistrate, Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines. As the South Australian Government's representative in the Northern Territory, he had jurisdiction over a white population of just forty-four, until the arrival of South Australia's substantive Government Resident.



## **W B Douglas, 2nd Government Resident**

Captain William Bloomfield Douglas RNR was appointed on 27 April 1870 as South Australia's second Government Resident in the Northern Territory, but he was the first to be based in Palmerston. Born on 25 September 1822 in Aberystwyth, Wales, Douglas had served with the Royal Navy and was later a clipper skipper in the China Sea and participated in expeditions off Sarawak in 1843-44. From 1854 he was Naval Officer and Harbour Master of Adelaide, South Australia while he was Collector of Customs, Master of Trinity House and Chairman of the Harbour Trust.

He arrived in Palmerston on the Canadian-built schooner *Gulnare* under Captain Samuel Sweet on 24 June 1870 with his wife Ellen, two sons and five daughters, and their maid Annie Crerar. His arrival and welcome was recorded as follows: *"The ceremony of landing the new Government Resident was a little more pompous than previous officials had had. Douglas was met by a guard of honour consisting of police and several leading civilians. Seven shots were fired from the obsolete old cannon that Mr Goyder had erected to scare away the blacks. This outburst was answered by a few shots from the 2 x 12 pdrs on the "Gulnare" and one of the other vessels raked up another gun to add to the already dense smoke"*.

The landing was also described by Elizabeth Sweet, wife of the Captain of the *Gulnare*, who wrote: *"On arriving at Port Darwin Captain Douglas landed in great state. There were seven guns fired from shore, and returned from the "Gulnare" and troopers and men arranged on the shore as guard of honour"*.

Having been forewarned of their arrival, the Acting Government Resident Dr Millner commissioned the team of J G Kelly, Benjamin Wells, Thomas Neate, Ned Tuckwell and Edward (Ned) Ryan, all carpenters or masons, to erect suitable accommodation for the new Resident. Ned Ryan, a stonemason, and Ned Tuckwell, carpenter, had been members of the Finniss expedition to Escape Cliffs and were members of McKinlay's 1866 expedition in Arnhem Land. Together with Ned's brother Jeremiah Ryan, an axeman and blacksmith, they had come to Port Darwin with Goyder in 1868-69.

Upon their arrival in Palmerston, the Douglas family was allocated two log huts on the foreshore; the eldest daughter, Harriet Douglas, later described these original dwellings: *“The quarters assigned to our use were two huts, not large enough to accommodate such a party, but they were pleasantly situated close to the sea, and were, moreover, the best the place afforded”*. *“The huts were very rough, and it was only by dint of management that we fitted into them at all. The sleeping apartments were in a large log hut divided by partitions. The spaces between the poles were plugged with ‘paper’ bark – a species of gum tree whose bark is nearly white, and peels off in loose flakes; our roof was of bark also”*. *“The floor of our hut was made of mud, pressed flat, and mixed with gravel, sand and limestone, well rolled till a smooth surface was obtained. Glass windows were unknown – our windows were frames filled with unbleached calico, and they swung on a pivot, propped open by a stick which was fitted for the purpose. The floor was a great trial of patience, for every clean dress we put on became soiled round the edges immediately”*.

The girls wore dresses of unbleached calico and Charles Fry, a saddler, made them shoes from bolts of canvas and sheets of saddle leather, for the shoes and dresses they had brought with them began rotting in the humidity of the Wet Season. Of the sitting-room, Harriet Douglas wrote: *“We had only one sitting room, which was joined to the sleeping apartments by a covered way. This was a galvanised iron hut about 20 feet long, lined with deal and possessing the luxury of a wooden floor; its windows were sheets of iron propped open in the usual way; there was a door at each end, and we habitually sat in a draught for the sake of air. The iron roof was shaded by bark but it was a very hot room at any time. We arranged our furniture here to the best advantage, but owing to the incongruous medley, the room reminded me of nothing so forcibly as a broker’s shop – chests of drawers, sideboards, chiffoniers, tables of every description and shape elbowed each other, seeming as lost as we were at the strange and novel associations in which they found themselves”*.

The Douglas family made every effort to add to the comfort of their primitive Residence with a few basic home improvements. Harriet Douglas related: *“We made a verandah, which added greatly to our comfort, by means of saplings fixed in the ground, and covered with a canvas awning. Here we spent the greater part of our time...”*

Such was the first Residence in Palmerston, Port Darwin. The team of Kelly, Wells, Neate, Tuckwell and Ryan, responsible for the first, rather crude, accommodation for the Government Resident in Palmerston was again commissioned when Douglas realised that a more substantial home needed to be built – the central hall of which provided the basis of the historic Government House which stands today. Thus, although built during Queen Victoria’s reign, the Residence in Palmerston was not erected as the residence of Her Majesty’s vice-regal representative in a colony but rather, as the home of the South Australian Government’s representative in a distant outpost of a remote territory.

Conditions in Palmerston were primitive, labourers were in widespread demand, and supplies were brought by ship around the coast from Adelaide. Little wonder then, that much of Government House’s form today is owed to prisoners and Chinese coolies who provided the labour to cut and square the locally-quarried stone, to construct lime-kilns to burn local coral, and to cut and carry cypress pine from nearby islands. Even when finally established as the Residence, Government House has had to survive the ravages of white ants and cyclones, and the changing tastes of its occupants and their wives. While the terms of the various Residents and Administrators have generally been reasonably brief, their impact on

their residence has been quite significant. The house has generally been furnished, at least until the establishment of an Advisory Committee, solely at the discretion and according to the tastes of the Government Resident/Administrator and his wife.

And, as the structure of Government House was physically shaped by the citizens of late nineteenth Century Palmerston (Darwin), so too has its character been influenced over the years by a representative cross-section of the 'Top End' community. The staff of Government House, Darwin has comprised the full spectrum of Territorians, including Europeans, English, Chinese, Russians and part- and full-blood Aborigines, and even the part-Aborigines who have worked at Government House had parentage which included Australian, Chinese and even Ceylonese blood. As the Territory's fifteenth Administrator, the Honourable Austin Asche, has himself observed: "*A number of great Territorians have worked at Government House – not all of them have been Administrators – and they are as much a part of the history of Government House as the Administrators themselves*".

It did not take Captain Douglas long to realise that his rudimentary quarters on the Port Darwin foreshore were unsuitable as a family home and that he would have to move. He chose for the location of his Government Residence, and the headquarters of administration in the north for the Colony of South Australia, a hilltop site of three and a half acres, some sixty feet above the waterline, linked to the main camp by a road lined with poinciana and banyan trees. This plateau surface comprised a grey mottled sandstone known locally as 'porcellanite', a stone which was readily found, and can still be seen today, on the many coastal cliffs around Darwin. This porcellanite overlies grey phyllite of the early Proterozoic Burrell Creek Formation, which is tightly foliated and practically impervious.

In mid-1870, Douglas reported to his South Australian Minister that works on the new Residence were in progress. His Residence would be on the hill to the west-northwest of the camp, overlooking Fort Hill (which has since been removed), and was to follow the standard pattern for tropical areas, being a bungalow style of house with a total of ten rooms. There was to be one long centre room with walls of stone surrounded by six sleeping apartments of timber construction opening off it on either side forming two wings, and the roof was to be of thatch and the floors of cypress pine. There would be a verandah all round, built of rough timber and roofed with bark, a log kitchen was to be built detached from the main house, while the store-room, servants' room, pantry and bathroom were to be formed under two of the ends of the verandah.

Douglas' daughter Harriet provided a comprehensive narrative on the construction of this first Government Residence in Port Darwin: "*Building this house was a matter of great difficulty; in fact that word seems to be the one most frequently associated with every species of enterprise connected with the Northern Territory... Robinson Crusoe had nothing like the difficulties in obtaining building material that we had... We literally had to begin at the very beginning of everything*". "*Having arranged the plan, the next thing was to carry it out; and from the very laying of the foundation-stone, that ceremony being performed by my mother, to the completion of the building, nothing but difficulties and makeshifts attended the work. Lime was the first one that had to be overcome – not a trace of limestone was to be found, search far and wide as the men would. 'Burn coral and make a limekiln at once' was the remedy that suggested itself; this was accordingly done, and the most beautiful lime was obtained from that source. Coral reefs, alas! were not hard to find, and at low tide breaking up quantities of it was easy enough*".

The plentiful ironbark about Port Darwin was found to be almost impossible to saw by hand. A supply of white-ant resistant timber easy enough to cut by hand was soon found in the extensive cypress pine forests on islands in nearby Bynoe Harbour and the *Gulnare* was loaded with as much as she could carry. This timber was used for the flooring and roof of the Residence, as it would again a century later following the partial unroofing of Government House by Cyclone Tracy. At about this time, there was a ceremony in Palmerston at which the Resident's eldest daughter Harriet officially 'planted' the first pole of the Overland Telegraph Line at about 4.00 pm on 15 September 1870. The camp and stables of one of the OT Line contractors were situated at the foot of the hill on which the Residence was built.

At first, the Residence's roof was of thatch but this was impractical – a roof was required which could withstand both monsoonal storms and the intense heat of the tropical sun. The Resident had an extensive maritime background – in the Royal Navy, with clippers in the China Sea and in expeditions against pirates off Sarawak. He had also been Harbour Master of Adelaide and the first President of the South Australian Marine Board, and was an officer of the Royal Naval Reserve. It is perhaps not surprising therefore, that Harriet Douglas felt that the renovations to the roof gave the Residence a decidedly nautical nature:

*“... on either side were scuppers, and it was slightly arched in the centre; it was commonly said that two masts, a bowsprit and a swivel gun would have transformed our dwelling into a line-of-battle ship; indeed, so seamanlike was our architecture, that we feared when once we had taken possession of our new house, we might be disturbed during the night by an order being given to “go about”, and by hearing in the quiet hours of the morning the familiar enquiry of “How’s her head?”. Mine often ached with the din of the men caulking all day long!”*

The latter reference to caulking is an indication that the roof was not coping with its responsibility of being watertight. The timber had been cut before being properly seasoned, so it had warped and shrunk as soon as it had been laid down. Canvas was stretched tightly across the roof and saturated with paint, but the intensity of the sun dried the oils and blistered the paint so that by night the rain penetrated it freely. Finally, a cement covering was made and laid over the planked ceiling.

Harriet Douglas recorded: *“This plan succeeded, and notwithstanding the weight and strain of such a heavy roof, it answered remarkably well. The flat roof proved a great luxury, for we sat on our housetop at night, which we reached by a species of companion-ladder from below, and enjoyed our elevated position immensely”* .

Douglas reported to his Minister in April 1871 that the Residence was a month away from completion. The work had again been accomplished by Ned Tuckwell, an overseer in the Government workshops, and his gang which included Ned and Jeremiah (Jerry) Ryan, under the supervision of J G Kelly who was now Foreman of Public Works earning seven shillings a day.

Ernestine Hill recorded the occupation of the first official Government House, making reference to its nautical architecture: *“Captain Douglas moved his wife and pretty daughters into the first little Residency on the crest of the cliffs, a look-out on the lovely harbour. A one room stone cabin, crazy with outhouses and verandahs of pise or pug, it was built by Ned*



*Tuckwell, ship's carpenter, all the settlers sitting around on logs shouting advice. Caulked by sailors of "Gulnare", with awnings of sailcloth, it looked more like a Malay proa blown inshore".*

As well as the increased privacy the new Residence afforded, one of the greatest comforts was an improved laundry so the girls could pursue their "*Dhobi-like duties*" with greater ease. Within the grounds the family kept geese, ducks and fowl which enjoyed names of great distinction – while The Queen of Sheba presided over her brood of chickens, The Czar of Russia fought the Chief Secretary in the fowl-yard. Harriet's pet however, was a gaudy parrot simply named 'Mac', for there was apparently no refinement whatever about his personal appearance. They had brought with them a cat (who soon had kittens) and kangaroo dogs and retrievers (who soon fell prey to crocodiles in the mangrove swamps or sharks in the harbour), while they later acquired cockatoos (whose language was anything but polite) and a monkey.

In the grounds at the front of the Residence, on its northern aspect, was established a carriage-loop around a small plot of grass, in the centre of which was the settlement's flagstaff from which the Union Flag was flown. In keeping with the Residence's 'line-of-battle' appearance and seamanlike architecture, Goyder's small signal cannon was installed at the base of the flagstaff. This cannon, fired to welcome Douglas and his family, was subsequently again fired for the occasional ceremonial purpose. The following is an account by Harriet Douglas of the celebrations of the Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Victoria in 1871:

*"The Queen's birthday was usually celebrated by a hunting expedition and by a general air of festivity throughout the settlement. All the bunting we could display was hoisted ashore and afloat, and at noon a salute of twenty-one guns was fired from the plot of grass in front of the Residency, where the solitary cannon, which gave utterance to our loyalty, had its abode. Firing a salute sounds an easy proceeding, but with one gun it was quite the contrary, and the intervals that elapsed between the firing would have driven the mind of any Commanding Officer in Chief to a state bordering upon distraction. One or other of the children fired the first gun of this remarkable and prolonged salute".*

In 1871, the South Australian Government conducted a detailed census on all property in its charge as at 30 June, and in this report is a description of the Residence: "*Residence on Tableland: 66 feet x 64 feet x 15 feet with cellar 12 feet x 12 feet and 6 feet deep. Inner building of stone used as drawing and dining rooms 43 feet x 22 feet. Deck roof with coating of cement. Surrounded by 6 bedrooms 10 feet x 12 feet, bathroom and pantry built of poles and roofed with bark. Kitchen, 24 feet x 12 feet. Built of poles, stone chimney and fireplace at one end, 2 rooms, verandah all round – gable roof with thatch".*

The first recorded marriage in the Northern Territory was of the Government Resident's maid, Annie Crerar, to harbourmaster William Cook, in November 1871. The second was of the Resident's second daughter, nineteen year old Eleanor Douglas, who married Enston Squier, a Cable Superintendent with the British Australia Telegraph Company, on 25 April 1872. Her sister Harriet, who subsequently married Dominic Daly, nephew of a former South Australian Governor (Sir Dominick Daly, Governor 1862-68), provided a description: "*The marriage, which took place at the new government residence amidst myriad cannon salutes, secured Eleanor's social position in Palmerston among the married women".*

Ross MacCartney visited Palmerston in 1872 and in a dispatch to the *Illustrated Sydney News* described the Residence as “unpretentious”.

The South Australian House of Assembly called for another report on Government Buildings in its Northern Territory in 1873, and during that year the Honourable Thomas Reynolds, Commissioner for Crown Lands, visited Palmerston. He was scathing in his report on the quality of the various government buildings. Of the Residence in particular, he remarked that the “*Residence roof leaks so central and side rooms almost uninhabitable*”. His report to Cabinet was published the following year, and commenced with the observation that none of the Government buildings could be considered creditable except the Telegraph offices, and they were facing the wrong way!

He continued in his contemptuous description of the Residence: “*The Government Resident’s house is the next in importance, the cost of which I could not ascertain; and, although I firmly believe thousands have been expended on it, I firmly believe in its instability and the reckless expenditure upon it. I do not consider it worth much more than 500 pounds. The absence of all records of special expenditure has prevented the supply of information. There is one large room in the Residence, the beam across which has been jointed and given way, causing the cemented flat roof to crack and admit rain – the walls are of stone, and bedrooms along the side as lean-tos to the large room, and built of pine poles*”.

Before his departure, Douglas sent another dispatch to Adelaide suggesting that the Residence should be repaired and a second storey added, although there was a notable inaction by the South Australian Government. Douglas meanwhile, had been asked to resign in June 1873 following the visit by the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Dr Millner was Acting Government Resident until 13 November 1873. Although he moved to Singapore where he was a Police Magistrate from 1874 to 1876, Douglas maintained a connection with the NT for a brief time, recruiting the first Chinese coolies for the Territory goldfields. He was appointed Acting Government Resident at Selangor in 1876 but was closely supervised by the Governor at Singapore and was heavily criticised by an 1879 inquiry. He transferred his headquarters to Kuala Lumpur in 1880, but soon after was asked to resign. He then served with the British North Borneo Company, 1882-87, and the Department of Marine and Fisheries in Nova Scotia, Canada from 1893, where he died on 5 March 1906.



### **G B Scott, 3rd Government Resident**

The incoming Government Resident was George Byng Scott Esq SM appointed on 6 October 1873. Born in Gillingham, Kent, Scott had arrived in South Australia in 1846 and had been a pastoralist on the River Murray near Morgan, a gold miner, Inspector of Police and Stipendiary Magistrate to the south-eastern district of South Australia (1854-59), and Stipendiary Magistrate at Naracoorte (1859-73). He arrived at Palmerston on 13 November on the liner RMS *Gothenburg* from Adelaide, with his wife Caroline, their two children and their servant. By this time, white ants were the scourge of the settlement – the Residence

itself lost its piano and wine stocks to the rapacious insects and required the services of a carpenter to continually renew floors and walls. Scott's arrival would not have enthused him too greatly: *"The Resident was welcomed by a stack of greenery that turned into a mound of dead leaves, and a few feeble cheers from the population in pyjamas. We did not fire a salute because the white ants have taken possession of our twelve-pounder"*.

Scott must have thought he was dreaming when the town lawyer, W V Smith, read a speech of welcome at the wharf dressed in his pyjamas! And no gun-salute because the cannon's carriage had been destroyed by white ants, leaving the 30-year-old barrel lying impotently in the grass plot outside the Residence. Ernestine Hill further records Scott's first impressions of Palmerston: *"Climbing the cliffs in a buggy to Government House, Mr Scott thought it was the blacks' camp. First of his public works was to build a house fit to live in"*.

Scott soon wrote to his Minister in rather caustic tones, condemning the Residence and calling it an ill-devised dilapidated barn: *"I may report that the Building is an ill-devised and badly built place, the whole of the rooms excepting the one in the centre being constructed with rough poles standing upright, the intervening spaces being filled with rotten 'Pugging'. The structure presents a wretched appearance and as the verandah is merely covered with bark it reminds me of a dilapidated barn"*.

Having been offered an appointment as Secretary to the Government Resident, John George Knight departed Adelaide and arrived in the Territory on the SS *E J Spence* on 28 September 1873. Having been responsible for several architectural works in Victoria, including Parliament House, the Government Resident soon tasked him with architectural duties as well. Knight, was responsible for compiling a comprehensive report, for forwarding to Adelaide, on the state of Government works and buildings in the Territory in 1874. In describing the house itself in detail, Knight remarked that the various outbuildings – the kitchen, storeroom, servants' room, pantry and bathroom – were *"of a very poor and flimsy kind and should be pulled down"*.

He also summarised the recent repairs to the Residence: the collapse of the old flat roof, partly from its own weight and decay, had necessitated the construction of an upper storey of timber and weatherboard with an iron roof in an attempt to waterproof the house – this adding a further *"five bedrooms and a commodious staircase"*. Further, the old walls had been re-pugged and coloured and the paper-bark roofing replaced by corrugated iron. The retaining wall of the verandah was rebuilt and Portland cement was imported for the verandahs, laid on a bed of ironstone gravel, as an alternative to wooden floors which had to be replaced every six months.

Much of this work had been done using Chinese labourers, most of whom had come to the Territory to work with the various mining companies in search of gold. The lack of riches led the Chinese to subsequently be employed in public works, in the Botanical Gardens, with the Telegraph Company and Overland Telegraph, or as cooks at various residences. Among them was Moo Yet Fah, a carpenter born in southern China in 1847 who had come to Palmerston by sailing ship in the mid-1870s, finding Palmerston nothing more than scrub and a few Aboriginal wurlies.

*“The only thing now required to give the place a ‘representative’ aspect is to fix a corrugated iron roof to the verandah, with slightly ornamental posts and brackets in place of the present bark covering which disfigures the ‘Residence’”.*

The foundations of the upper storey were found to have become weakened, once again as a result of white-ant activity. Later in 1874, Knight reported that the Government Residence, only recently and very extensively repaired under his supervision, required further work because all of the hardwood framing had been *“completely riddled by these fearful pests”*. The timbers were accordingly replaced, but they were soon again weakened by the voracious insects.

*The Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, established in 1873, summarised developments thus far: *“The first building was a flat roofed affair, thoroughly suitable for the dry season but barely tenable during wet weather, and the second Resident, disliking sleeping in the wet, had another storey added, which again turned out to be a failure, as the inhabitants were in constant terror of the upper storey parting company with the lower during a heavy squall”*

In a reply which later became a hallmark of Palmerston-Adelaide relations (as indeed it also came to represent the Darwin-Canberra relationship), the distant Minister, completely oblivious to Territory conditions, replied that, *“with the improvements lately effected the Residence ought to be sufficient for some time to come”*.

At about this time, His Excellency the Governor of South Australia, Sir Anthony Musgrave KCMG, began receiving several complaints on various matters from aggrieved settlers, one of whom remarked about the Residence: *“Nature has given a fair tropical climate where men can live fairly well but South Australia and her rulers have decreed her officials shall dwell in places where one would not put a horse. Government House is a dirty barn with fowl houses jutting out around it”*.

A guest of Scott’s at the Residence at this time was Mr Justice W A Wearing from South Australia, visiting Palmerston to preside at the first sessions of the Circuit Court. He was accompanied by his Associate, Mr Lionel Pelham, and the Acting Crown Solicitor for South Australia Mr J J Whitby. On the morning of 15 February, he was reportedly in good spirits, and told Scott of his happiness at returning to Adelaide and rejoining his family. He sailed, together with Mr Pelham and Mr Whitby, on the RMS *Gothenberg* on the 16th, and all three were drowned when the *Gothenberg* struck a reef off the north Queensland coast during a heavy gale on the night of 24 February 1875.

Also among the 102 to drown (only 22 were saved) were Dr J Stokes Millner – after five years’ service in the north including two terms as Acting Resident – with his wife and three children. While churches in Adelaide were draped in black, everyone on board was known to the small population of Palmerston. *The Northern Territory Times and Gazette* lost its Editor, Mr Richard Wells, and a subsequent editorial, recording that every house had become one of affliction and every man a mourner, was bordered in black. Mrs Mina Price had taken her six children (including two infants) on a holiday to Adelaide on board the ill-fated vessel. Her husband, Edward William Price, Stipendiary Magistrate and Commissioner of the Circuit Court in Palmerston since 1873, was devastated and was granted six months leave on full pay by the Government Resident.

Knight again reported in 1875 on various public works, noting that the wooden buildings of the Residence were “*useless*”, and that by this time a substantial picket fence had been erected around the Residence. While he was obviously satisfied with his plethora of achievements in Palmerston, Southport and on the goldfields, the Residence stood as his great frustration and disappointment. He wrote to Scott:“... *the building is still unfit for a gentleman to live in and the cheapest thing in the long run would be to build a substantial stone house in its stead*”.

The retrenchment of Knight in November 1875 saw him depart for Adelaide, but he returned to Palmerston on 7 February the following year with an appointment as Goldfields Warden.

In February 1876, Scott wrote to the South Australian Government detailing the disposition of the 186 indentured Chinese in the Northern Territory which had been recruited in Singapore by Captain Bloomfield Douglas and shipped on SS *Vidar* to Palmerston, arriving there on 5 August 1874: one of these coolies was in the employ of the Government Resident at the Residence.

Scott resigned on 30 June 1876 and departed for Adelaide on SS *Claude Hamilton* on 2 July upon the arrival of his successor; he subsequently served as a Stipendiary Magistrate in Adelaide, Port Adelaide and Mount Gambier, and died at Mount Gambier on 17 February 1886.



## **E W Price, 4th Government Resident**

Edward William Price Esq SM was appointed Government Resident on 1 July 1876 and arrived from Adelaide on SS *Claude Hamilton* on 2 July, but he had served in the Northern Territory since 1873, as Stipendiary Magistrate and Commissioner of the Circuit Court. Born in Dublin, Ireland in 1832, Price had served in the Royal Navy on Her Majesty’s Ships *Ajax* (1851-52) and *Simoon* (1852-56), including service in the Black Sea during the Crimean War. Entering the South Australian Civil Service in 1860, he served terms as Clerk of the Court at Gawler and Clerk of the Adelaide Police Court. He was a widower at the time of his appointment, having lost his wife and six children in the *Gothenburg* tragedy off the north Queensland coast the previous year.

On occupying the Residence, he too was quick to report upon its poor condition: “*This unfortunate building which cost so much is the permanent residence of the white ants, and ever since the top storey of wood was put on it is worse, and almost takes the work of one carpenter to keep it from falling. I have arrived at the conclusion that it is a waste of money to attempt to keep the top storey in repair, and as soon as it becomes unsafe the best plan will be to take it off and by building stone walls at the wings instead of the mangrove poles, for a small outlay a sufficiently large and substantial house will be built, containing seven rooms. The verandahs are good, roofed with bark and cement floors, but so dangerous is the top storey that in windy weather my predecessor used to remove himself and family downstairs. The ground is fairly fenced in and planted with bananas*”

At this time it was costing Price £400 per annum to maintain the Residence, as well as employing a carpenter on a regular basis for 13 shillings per day. In a further dispatch in early 1877, Price recorded the effects of a particularly fierce storm: *“The Residence is still holding together, although in the severe gale we have just been visited with I thought the second story would have gone, however, the only damage done was the falling in of the roof of the North wing; when the iron was stripped off, it was found that the rafters had been completely eaten away and the roof only hung by the rivets. I had the same iron used again in repairing”*.

A vote of £200 to be spent on furniture failed to pacify Mr Price, and a third dispatch reflected Price’s growing frustration with his ‘dilapidated barn’: *“I have ceased to repair the Residence, as it is only wasting money, but I hope, should you approve of the sum being spent, that I have placed on the subestimates to be able to erect a plain stone building, to the one stone building already built”*. As the first Government House, at Victoria on Cobourg Peninsula, had suffered from white ants, so too the upper storey of the Residence finally became so ravaged that in late June 1877 this *“fear-inspiring portion of the Residence”* was pulled down.

Meanwhile, the allocation of monies for renovations was discovered by the press, who wrote: *“There is now some rumour of a sum of money being placed on the estimates for the erection of a stone building, and the question is whether it would not be better to wait till this amount is forth-coming before again catering for the special benefit of the white ants”*.

Goldfields Warden Knight was the architect responsible for planning the new Residence together with the Supervisor of Works, Gilbert Rotherdale McMinn. Born in Ireland in 1841, McMinn had emigrated to Australia in 1850 and served as a labourer with Finniss at Escape Cliffs in 1864-66. He was then First-Class Surveyor with Goyder’s party in 1868-69, helped with the laying of the central portion of the Overland Telegraph Line, and discovered Simpson’s Gap. His association with the Northern Territory continued with the appointments as Senior Surveyor and Supervisor of Works (1873-86) and Acting Government Resident (1883-84).

At the instigation of McMinn, the central stone hall was again used as the basis of the new building but this time additions were to follow Knight’s recommendations of being in stone built upon thick concrete foundations, producing the basic structure which is still present in Darwin today. The distinctive climate caused Knight to ignore much of what he had previously considered to be of importance, and increasingly led him towards plans which allowed the free circulation of air. Thus, his plans for the new Residence had it standing atop the hill, facing west to catch the prevailing breezes – still a popular feature of the western verandah today. In a series of four dispatches during the course of the twelve months from December 1877, Price detailed the rather slow progress of the new Residence’s construction:

**December 1877:** *“The new Residence will I trust be a more suitable one than the present unsightly and uncomfortable old wooden building. The present room being of stone will remain attached to the new rooms”*

**March 1878:** *“The building of the new wings to the Residence proceed fairly, although owing to the want of brick it is slow work having to dress stone, and the masons engaged by*

*Mr Hunt are not quite up to the work required of them. The Residence when completed will be a substantial fair sized building, and will be much cheaper in the end, than attempting to patch up the old wooden building, which had been destroyed by white ants”.*

**May 1878:** *“The only public work now in hand is the Residence and it progresses fairly; unfortunately we have not been able to procure bricks. The brick factory established by a party of Chinese at Fanny Bay has not yet been successful and those they have made have turned out too brittle for use in walls.*

**December 1878:** *“The new Residence (a plan of which I forwarded to your predecessor by the August mail) is now nearly completed. I have kept down the cost as much as possible, and have not used any ornamentation, but owing to the high rate for skilled labour here, and the difficulty in getting stone squared, the cost will exceed the estimate. I was obliged to make the original estimate myself, without assistance as the Supervisor of Works was away on leave in the “Victoria” schooner. I had also trusted that more of the old building could be left standing, but owing to its utter destruction by white ants only the inner walls of the large room could be utilised. To give you some idea of what white ants can do here, I may mention that they have found their way up through about 18 feet high of stone wall of the new building on to the timber of the roof”.*

By 11 May 1878, the kitchen, store-rooms, servants’ rooms and the stables had been erected, and three large rooms were well underway. Locally quarried porcellanite stone was used for the main part of the building; unfortunately, it is a soft and porous stone, which would cause problems in later years. Carpenter Moo Yet Fah took parties by sailboat to Victoria settlement in Port Essington to collect quantities of cypress pine for use in the remainder of the construction, the pine being thought to be impervious to the white-ants. Moo Yet Fah and his wife Moo Wong See, born in southern China in 1859, settled in Palmerston and there raised their family of Territorians; Moo Yet Fah died in Darwin in 1927 and his wife in 1932. A son, Moo Fatt, was later cook at Government House.

The new Residence was reported completed on 17 May 1879, being described and christened by the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette* as follows: *“The House of Seven Gables, known as the Residence is now finished, and though it may not be considered a model of architectural skill, it may claim to be a comfortable house and well suited to the climate”.*

On 20 May 1879, Price was able to report proudly to his Minister that his new Government House had been completed: *“The new Residence is now complete, and is a plain substantial building, and its fine appearance from the harbour will I trust have a better effect on our visitors than the old unsightly shanty which was more like a cow shed than the Government Residence”.*

Knight had employed Chinese labourers to quarry the stones from the Fannie Bay and Larrakeyah cliffs, each block being squared using hand-saws, while the coolies also assisted as gardeners, painters and carpenters’ assistants, and the building was erected by Chinese and Europeans together. The central stone hall (today the Drawing Room) and its cellar beneath were the only structures of the original Residence which were left standing. From July 1878 to May 1879, a total of £3,817, 19 shillings and 11 ½ pence was spent in

building the new Residence. A subsequent occupant noted that, *“the degree of exactitude displayed in keeping figures to the last halfpenny is to be admired”*.

Yet again, Price reported on the continuing effects of the white-ants: *“The white ants continue to commit grave ravages. Every possible piece of timber that is not cypress pine has been destroyed, no matter how well protected. The verandah of Government House, the only part of it that is not cypress, has been eaten, and to get at it the white ants had first to go through a mass of masonry and solid lead. Such things are slight difficulties for them”*.

An invaluable description of the Residence was provided by William Sowden who visited Palmerston in 1882 as a member of a South Australian Parliamentary Party led by the Honourable J Langdon Parsons MP, Minister for the Northern Territory. Sowden wrote of the new Residence:

*“The old one succumbed to white ants some time ago; the new one is two years old, and it has inherited the same malady, but in a milder form. The walls are of soft sandstone stuff, for which there is no geological name under a multitude of syllables. The building looks fairly well architecturally, and when the rain comes down there is – well, there is no necessity to keep tanks outside. The accommodation is so limited that only two of the Parliamentary party could sleep in it. Its position is grand, however. From its high level it overlooks the rest of the town, and makes a conspicuous landmark for a great distance.*

*It is in the centre of a large enclosure, which goes seaward – steep almost as a wall. Previously to last year this hill was a rough, barren waste, and part of it was an old quarry. Mr Knight, Controller of Prison Labour, has converted it into a young tropical grove. Fifteen terrace walks, 200 yards long and five feet deep, have been made, the quarry has been filled up, walks and graduated stepping-stages have been fixed, and the whole has been planted with couch grass and bright blue creepers, and bananas, and numerous ornamental shrubs. There is a beautiful spreading lightwood tree in the centre; and as this year’s plants have beaten their last season’s predecessors by successfully defying the white ants, it is not too much to predict that Mr Knight will have an exceedingly beautiful lasting monument”*.

The Residence was the scene of a great display of affection by the Chinese community in 1883 when they farewelled Mr Price with a procession from Sun Wah Loong’s house in Chinatown (in Cavenagh Street), complete with gongs, drums, cymbals and crackers, leaving an opaque trail of sulphurous smoke all the way to the Residence. Dressed in silk and carrying umbrellas, the men had a testimonial read on their behalf by Mr Vaiben Louis Solomon, after which they presented Mr Price with a banner of crimson satin bordered by green velvet, hand-worked silk and with a silver fringe, seven feet tall by five feet wide, with an inscription on it bearing the signatures of the merchants Sun Wah Loong, Quong Nam On, Lee Hang Gong, *et al*. There was also a second crimson silk flag, eight foot by six, with Chinese characters proclaiming praises for Mr Price.

On departing the Territory Price was to retire to England so, prior to the time of his departure, he sold all of his personal furniture by advertisement in the public notices of the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*. If the modern Government House contains few genuine Territory antiques, it is because the original Residence was fitted out by each Resident at his own expense or with his own personal property, and all was removed upon his departure from office. Even the crockery and cutlery in use were the personal property of



each successive Resident, until 1912 when such items, crested with the coat of arms of the Commonwealth of Australia, were supplied by the Federal Government.

Price departed Port Darwin on the SS *Bowen* on Tuesday 6 March 1883 for London, and died there on 14 November 1893. The Senior Surveyor and Supervisor of Works (1873-86) Mr McMinn was then Acting Government Resident until the arrival of Price's successor in May the following year; McMinn was subsequently Magistrate and Customs Officer at Borroloola (1886-88).



## **J L Parsons, 5th Government Resident**

Before he was appointed Government Resident, the Honourable John Langdon Parsons SM had already sampled the relative grandeur of the Residence, at a public banquet hosted by Mr Price in early 1882. Born on 28 April 1837 at Botathan near Launceston, Cornwall, Parsons was a Baptist Minister in Dunedin, New Zealand from 1863 to 1867 before coming to South Australia. After a ministry at Angaston and North Adelaide, he was a broker and agent and then a Member of the South Australian House of Assembly from 1878. As Minister for Education from 1881 to 1884, he also held responsibility for the Northern Territory and it was in this capacity that he departed Adelaide on 30 January 1882 as the head of a Parliamentary Party to the Territory, arriving back in Adelaide on 13 April. He was treated to a grand Chinese banquet on 21 March and then a public European banquet at the Residence hosted by the Government Resident Mr Price.

Parsons was appointed Government Resident on 19 March 1884, and he arrived at Palmerston on SS *Menmuir* with his second wife Marianna and their two children on 8 May. An early function on the night of 31 May was quite successful, as reported by the local newspaper: *"KNEES UP AT RESIDENCE The Government Resident and Mrs Parsons entertained a large number of guests on Thursday evening last at the Residence; between 60 and 70 people were present; dancing being kept up until about two o'clock."*

A dinner guest of the Parsons soon after their arrival was Miss Ada Booty from Melbourne who was passing through Palmerston as a guest on the *Cushie Doo* of the Royal Yacht Squadron. She stayed in Palmerston for five months including some time at the Residence, finding life in Palmerston and at the Residence in particular to be very social; John and Marianna Parsons were especially great entertainers and most hospitable hosts. On their arrival in Port Darwin on Friday 1 August, she noted in her diary that her fellow travellers were ...

*"... quite surprised at the beauty of the harbour and position of the town which is built on a hill where the view of the harbour is very fine. From the sea we saw land on all sides. The health officers boarded us and several Chinamen. The Government Resident's Secretary (Mr Whitelaw) called. At 4.30 we all landed and called at the Residency and saw Mr Parsons who invited us to dine tomorrow. Their house is delightfully situated for view of the harbour having the sea on 3 sides and standing on the verge of a hill, part of which is laid out in terraces. A wide veranda runs all round the huge unceilinged rooms"*.

The following day, Ada Booty recorded in her diary her impressions of the dinner at the Residence with John and Marianna Parsons: *“The gentlemen went on shore, returning to dress, we all very naturally deploring the necessity of broadcloth in such climate. We reached the Residence at 6.30. Sat on the veranda until the announcement of dinner when I had the pleasure of being taken in by Mr Parsons. Miss Patterson was the only guest besides ourselves. We were waited on by 2 Chinamen. On returning to the drawing room there was quite a reception, in fact I was told pretty well all Palmerston; there are only about 5 single girls in the place. I was introduced to several people but was glad to get into a quiet corner and chat with a Mrs James and Miss McDonald. Several men and women sang and played very well. Most of the men wisely kept to the veranda which I certainly envied them. We left shortly before 11”*.

There were abundant numbers of Chinese in Palmerston by this time, and the Resident would have had no difficulty in obtaining staff. In fact, the Chinese had outnumbered the European population of the Territory since 1879, reaching nearly 2,600 by 1884 compared with under 600 Europeans; just four years later, their numbers would swell to over 6,000 while the European population remained relatively steady at about 1,000. The Chinese staff at the Residence built huts for their accommodation at the back of the house (to the south), at the edge of the hill overlooking the sea, and these or similar structures remained for many decades as ‘staff accommodation’.

Among the more notable guests entertained by the Parsons was the Duke of Manchester, who arrived in Palmerston on the *Menmuir* on 15 August 1884 and was collected from the wharf by Mr Parsons. Mr McMinn was also a passenger on the *Menmuir*. On the following day, almost all of Palmerston attended the BAT beach picnic, including the Parsons and the Duke; at the end of the day, at low tide, some ladies were carried bodily to the boats while others insisted that the gentlemen make sedan chairs for them. That evening, the Parsons hosted a small dinner: *“I found Mr and Mrs J (Johnson) ready dressed to dine at the Residence. dressed in a great hurry, however we found ourselves in good time, the Duke not having completed his toilet. Mr and Mrs Pater were the only guests besides ourselves. I sat opposite His Grace. Mrs P sang. We left early”*.

Miss Booty continued with her narrative: *“Miss McD stayed on the yacht with me for three weeks. We then went on a visit to Mrs Parsons. After a fortnight Miss McD had to leave for Southport. I remained – and spent Xmas at the Residence. The dinner party there on Xmas night consisted of Major Snelling, Captain Carrington, Mr Osmond, Mr Hall, Mr and Mrs Parsons and I. I took a long solitary walk to Mindil Beach that same afternoon”*. On New Year’s Eve, a Wednesday, Miss Booty was accompanied by Mr Parsons to the *Cushie Doo* to discover that she would sail the following Saturday. After dinner at the Residence, the party went to an entertainment at the Youth Hall and, later, Miss Booty went to the midnight service with the Foelsches. At midnight, some guns and a few rockets were fired from the *Cushie Doo*, and the ship’s bells were set tinkling.

They spent the first day of the New Year sailing in the harbour with, among others, Mrs and Miss Foelsche and the Resident’s Secretary Mr Edgar Whitelaw and most were very badly sunburnt. That evening, she attended another dinner party at the Residence with guests Messrs Bernard, Knight, Little, Christoe, Cuthbertson, Foelsche and Dr Wood. While preparing to depart Palmerston, Miss Booty cryptically records that on the Friday she *“had a*

*last walk and not alone*"; later, while Mr Osmond had a gentleman's dinner party on board the yacht, Mrs Parsons held "a very nice little tea" at the Residence. After five pleasant months in Palmerston, with much hurraing from shore and long farewells waved from the yacht, the *Cushie Doo* sailed on Saturday 3 January. The Resident Mr Parsons accompanied them as far as Emery Point, and on passing the Residence, a gun salute was fired from on board.

Parsons was persuaded to retire, together with Mr Justice Pater, so that the South Australian Government could amalgamate the two offices, thereby completing their cost-cutting programme commenced in 1885 as a result of the depression. Accordingly, he resigned in January 1890 to stand for the South Australian Parliament, and maintained his Territory connection by serving as a Member of the South Australian House of Assembly as the first Minister for the Northern Territory, 1890-93 (jointly with the Honourable V L Solomon). *The Northern Territory Times & Gazette* wrote rather disparagingly of his subsequent antics: "All the principal southern papers contain references with more or less sting in them concerning the drunken pranks of Mr J L Parsons, who has evidently forgotten whether he is the elect of a political constituency or a brewer's advertisement".

Parsons was subsequently Commissioner to enquire into the prospect of establishing trade relations with Japan, China and the Philippines (1893-96), Consul for Japan (1896-03) and Member for the Central District in the South Australian Legislative Council from 1902 until his death at Kensington in August 1903.



## **J G Knight, 6th Government Resident**

Upon his appointment as Acting Government Resident on 15 February 1890, and consequently upon confirmation of that appointment becoming substantive on 16 July, John George Knight Esq SM occupied the Residence in which he had been instrumental in designing and upgrading. Believed to have been born in London in 1824, the son of John Knight, stone & marble merchant, Knight had been articled to the dock and railway engineer Henry Daniel Martin. On emigrating to Australia in 1852, he was Clerk of Works (1852-55) and then Chief Clerk of Works (1855-61) in the Victorian Public Works Department, while he organised the Victorian displays for the 1862 international exhibition in London.

He had come to the Territory as Secretary and Accountant to the Government Resident and also Architect and Supervisor of Works, 1873-75, while from 1876 he increasingly amassed the various appointments of Chief Goldfields Warden, Clerk of the Local Court and Licencing Bench, Deputy Sheriff, Curator of the Property of Convicts, Special Magistrate and Crown Prosecutor, Accountant, Controller of Prison Labour, Deputy Returning Officer, Official Receiver and Public Trustee, Coroner, Registrar of the Insolvency Court, Justice of the Peace and Registrar of Companies. His appointment as Acting Government Resident had been made by the South Australian Government in an attempt to delay appointing a successor to Parsons and thereby save themselves more money.

Knight's architectural background came to the fore again, and he took the opportunity to made some long overdue renovations to the Residence. Among the minor works undertaken at this time was the sealing over with a special cement of the exterior stonework which was fretting away, still maintaining the stone-work appearance (by the late 1930s, the external stonework was fretting away so badly that the then Administrator, the Honourable Aubrey Abbott, ordered it to be completely sealed over with cement render).

Knight continued putting the Residence "*in order*", as he wrote to his daughter-in-law, Emilie: early in his occupancy, he "*made a great clearance of overgrown vegetation in the grounds*", opening up to the sea the 180-foot frontage of the verandahs, which he half-filled with ferns. Of the interior works, he wrote, "*I have engaged a Japanese artist to decorate the walls of my dining and Drawing rooms with painted panels in oil – the eternal stork will be shown in all stages from its cradle to its grave*". In another lengthy letter, on paper bearing the letterhead "Government Residence, Palmerston", he described the Victorian splendour of his 'reception room' (Drawing Room) after his renovations were completed, one of the few accounts of the interior of the Residence:

*"The walls and underside of roof, treated as a ceiling, are painted pale yellow stiles and pale greyish blue panels, the iron rods and margins of the panels 4 in height and 18 in number being maroon, an imitation of festooned crimson drapery, edged with gold cord and gold tassels between, runs round the upper part of walls and makes such a good finish as to be often mistaken for the real thing. On the line of panelling above the dado, eighteen very handsome Japanese pictures in gold, silver and all sorts of colours are pasted in the centre of each panel the edges being covered by a gold molding which makes each a complete picture 6 feet by 2 feet wide – they embrace beautiful birds, flowers and these airy sketchy nothings which the Japs know how to make attractive.*

*There are four canopies in black and gold over the four folding glass entrance doors which are draped and overhead are huge fans 6 ft by 3.6" forming a sort of ceiling. Then there are fans 4 ft by 2 ft over each of the three internal doors, while 22 very handsome smaller fans are tacked on the stiles between the panels – there are 4 large fans over the pier glasses at ends of room – with groups of hand fans on either side. The open roof painted in light and harmonious tints looks rather elegant while a height of 32 feet renders it necessarily lofty."*

He also described with some pride the fact that he had been required to fit out the Residence completely at his own expense because it had been 'stripped bare' by the previous Resident. Of his furnishing of the Drawing Room, he wrote to Emilie, "*The furniture is not good enough for the rooms but there is plenty of it. Ten fancy Chinese chairs, 14 Australian ditto – 6 lounging chairs, 4 sofas – one loo table – two walnut card tables, 2 occasional do (ditto) – 4 wall tables – specimens of china ware (services) teasetts, books, photos, and a fine piano help to fill the room*".

Similarly, of the Dining Room with its "*carved and panelled ceiling*", he wrote that he was able to entertain twelve comfortably for dinner, with "*relays of everything for that number*", including a cook, an assistant and three boys to serve at the table. The great expense of establishing the Residence as a fit and appropriate dwelling for the representative of the South Australian Government troubled Knight greatly, and he soon found that his salary and allowances of £1000 (in comparison with Parsons' salary of over £1,600) was not sufficient to meet the necessary expenses of maintaining a decent appearance at the Residence. He

wrote to the Minister in Adelaide: *"I have spent a lot of money on furniture and decoration out of my own pocket so that the establishment is now fit to receive His Excellency the Governor, the Defence Commissioner or any other travelling notabilities"*.

He also wrote to his daughter-in-law, *"I am now ready to receive Kintore (the Governor of South Australia) or the devil himself"*. The Residence was home to many social activities during this time, indeed Knight was regarded as the *"most excellent of entertainers"* despite the absence of Knight's wife Alice . His usual choice of hostess was Mrs Ellen Adcock, wife of the Chairman of the Palmerston District Council, to assist him with entertaining at such functions as a mineral show and a *'conversazione'*.

Other functions hosted by Knight at the Residence included a lecture on the mineralogy of the Territory by a visiting Inspector of Mines, J V Parkes. He hosted a banquet for twenty guests and, the following night, a ball for 120 for the South Australian Governor the Earl of Kintore PC GCMG during his official visit in 1891, complete with *"a big Native Corobooree on the ground outside the Residence"* an hour before the guests began dancing. Otherwise, he made good use of the tennis court for entertaining: *"There is a capital lawn tennis ground with a cement floor to which the best girls have the entree on Tuesday afternoons and afternoon tea is also served"*.

Knight died in bed at the Residence on the evening of Sunday 10 January 1892, of a severe asthma attack following a long illness of bronchitis and influenza. *The Northern Territory Times & Gazette* reported: *"On Monday morning flags were half-masted everywhere, the public offices remained unopened, all places of business closed their doors and suspended work, and everyone who could possibly arrange it prepared to pay the last tribute of homage to the dead gentleman. The cortege moved from the Residence shortly after 9 am, and it was the largest collection of mourners that has ever attended a burial in the Far North"*.

*"His hospitality and friendship were in no respect limited; they were ever open to all who chose to accept them, and he imposed no conditions. To strangers who called upon him, he was the personification of a kind host, and many a one owes a pleasant time spent in Port Darwin to the excessive welcome and generous entertainment provided at Government House. In private life he was affable, kind, and courteous to all, the polished gentleman from first to last"* .

Knight was subsequently recorded as *"a kind of uncrowned king of the Northern Territory"*. He is the only Government Resident or Administrator of the Northern Territory to have died in office and is the only one to have been buried in Darwin, and is the only person to have died within the House of Seven Gables.



## C J Dashwood, 7th Government Resident

The Honourable Mr Justice Charles James Dashwood SM was appointed Government Resident on 24 February 1892. Dashwood has the distinction of being the Northern Territory's first Australian-born Government Resident, having been born at 'Parkhurst' in Dashwood's Gully, near Eyre's Flat (now Kangarilla), South Australia on 17 July 1842. Dashwood was a graduate of St. Peter's College and held a degree in civil engineering from Rijksuniversiteit at Ghent, Belgium.

Returning to South Australia in 1859, he was initially a farmer at Guichen Bay until 1865 but, after service as Clerk of the Local Court in Woodside and of the Local Court in Adelaide, he was articled to W H Bunday from 1868 until he was admitted to the Bar in 1873. He then worked as a solicitor, and was a Member of the South Australian House of Assembly from 1887 to 1892.

Offered the position of Government Resident after the death of Knight, Dashwood accepted subject to a salary of £1,000 *per annum*, return passage for himself and his family to Palmerston, and tenure for a period not less than five years. He arrived in Palmerston with his two younger sisters Augusta and Millicent on *SS Catterhun* on 27 April 1892.

The Judge was a confirmed bachelor and so, like his predecessor, had to rely on close female associates to fulfil the role of hostess – in Dashwood's case, his two sisters. The Dashwoods were welcomed at the wharf and then driven to the North Australian Hotel where they were accommodated until repairs to the Residence – to damage yet again caused by white ants and mildew – had been effected.

A fierce cyclone hit Palmerston during the night of 6 January 1897, the eye passing over between about 3.30 and 4.30 am the following morning. The editors of the *Northern Territory Times & Gazette*, whose office was completely demolished, claimed that the town was nearly obliterated. Dwellings collapsed like houses of cards and vessels in the harbour were sunk or driven ashore, and at least 28 people were killed. This first major cyclone to be experienced by Palmerston caused two rooms of the Residence to lose their roofs completely, and two-thirds of the verandah was badly damaged, while several outbuildings were destroyed. The Residence's flagstaff, which was set in a metre of concrete, was torn from the ground – concrete base included.

The approach of Federation brought little excitement in the Northern Territory of South Australia. Former Government Resident and Minister for the Northern Territory, J Langdon Parsons had been the only witness called before the 1895 Northern Territory Commission to suggest that the proposed Commonwealth of Australia should take responsibility for the Northern Territory (the others suggested returning the Territory to Britain!).

When Federation was eventually attained in 1901, it brought little more than a minor change in designation for the Government Resident – he had previously represented the Government of the Colony of South Australia, whereas he now represented the State Government. The Governor of the Colony himself, Lord Tennyson KCMG, simply became redesignated as Governor in and over the State of South Australia and its Dependencies. It would be a further decade before South Australia could rid itself of its troublesome Territory.

Prior to 1901, the Residence had been the home and office of the Government Resident, the northern agent of the Colony of South Australia, while from this time onward Mr Dashwood was the representative of the State of South Australia in the Australian Commonwealth. In practice, this brought little change for the Residence or for the position of Resident. Government Residents generally seemed to have very little initiative in Northern Territory affairs, despite their eminence in the Territory itself. They were essentially senior public servants with limited powers: for instance, Government Residents were expected to forward all matters for decision, other than those dealing with minor public works, to the South Australian Government via the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory. Thus, their main role at this time was a supervisory one.

Dashwood hosted a visit by the Earl and Countess of Jersey, and by A B Patterson ('The Banjo') in 1898 who recorded his impressions of the Territory and the rather limited range of topics of conversation in Palmerston – the cycloon (cyclone), the Government Resident and Paddy Cahill the buffalo shooter. Of the 'GR' in particular, he said of Dashwood: *“Good man for the position too as he doesn't care a damn for anybody, and starting from that safe basis, discharges his varied duties with a light heart”*.

Dashwood resigned on 19 January 1905, this resignation to take effect from 31 January, having served a record term of thirteen years which is still unbeaten today. He took his memories of the Northern Territory to South Australia where he was Crown Solicitor in 1905 and 1906, where he acquired the nickname 'Northern Territory Charlie' for his continual references to the Territory. He was appointed King's Counsel (KC) in 1906 and retired on 31 August 1916, dying from heart failure on 8 July 1919.



## **C E Herbert, 8th Government Resident**

Upon Dashwood's resignation, the Honourable Mr Justice Charles Edward Herbert SM occupied the Residence, appointed on 1 February 1905. He was eagerly welcomed back by the Palmerston population, having served as the town's only lawyer in 1883-84 and again in 1896-1900, and for five years as the Northern Territory's MHA. Herbert had been born in Strathalbyn, South Australia on 12 June 1860 and was articled to his maternal uncle Henry Mildred in 1877; he had been a lawyer at the South Australian Supreme Court when he went to Palmerston in October 1883, and he was subsequently also a lawyer at Moonta, Sydney, and again in Palmerston. He was Member for the Northern Territory and Government Whip in the South Australian House of Assembly from 1900 to 1905, jointly with the Honourable V L Solomon (1890-1901) and the Honourable S J Mitchell (1901-10).

In their first year in the Residence, Mr and Mrs Herbert hosted a visit to Palmerston by the Governor of South Australia, Sir George Le Hunte KCMG and Lady Le Hunte. A number of Chinese merchants gathered at the Residence to pay tributes to His Excellency - Darwin residents are descendants of these early merchants.

Although Herbert left Palmerston on leave of absence on 8 February 1910, he maintained a significant association with the Northern Territory. Whilst Deputy Chief Judicial Officer for

the Territory of Papua (1910-28), Herbert returned to the Territory and heard criminal matters in Darwin in late 1918 arising from the attempt to depose the then Administrator, and was an Acting Judge of the Northern Territory from May to October 1921. He subsequently held vice-regal office, being appointed as the fifth Administrator (and Chief Magistrate) of Norfolk Island in 1928, but he died of pneumonia on 21 January 1929 and was buried on the island.

His widow and sons were managing a cattle property in the Northern Territory at the time of World War 2 and notably, his sons Oscar and Evan Herbert were running cattle on Humpty Doo Station in the 1950s when the great Territory rice scheme began. A maternal descendant, Dr Michael Hamilton of Adelaide, visited the Territory in 1990, aware of Herbert's judicial standing but surprised to find that he had also held supreme office in the north for the South Australian Government.

From 8 February 1910 until the arrival of Mr Justice Mitchell on 9 June, the Government Secretary and Curator of the Government Gardens in Palmerston (renamed Darwin Botanical Gardens in 1911), Mr Nicholas Holtze, was Acting Government Resident. Holtze, a botanist born in Russia near the Siberian border in 1867, had grown up in Palmerston and Southport and eventually became Curator of the Government Gardens in Palmerston. In April 1884 he was appointed Secretary and Accountant to the Government Resident while in 1911, upon the transfer of control to the Commonwealth, this position was retitled Government Secretary.



## **S J Mitchell, 9th Government Resident**

Mr Justice Samuel James Mitchell well knew the Northern Territory of South Australia when he was appointed Government Resident and Judge on 1 April 1910, having represented it in the South Australian House of Assembly since 1901. Born near Mount Barker, SA on 11 May 1852 and educated at R C Mitton's Grammar School, Adelaide and the University of Adelaide, Mitchell was admitted to the South Australian Bar in 1889. He was an auctioneer at Mount Gambier, Melrose, and Port Augusta but became District Councillor and Master of the Masonic Lodge at Port Augusta and, for two years, was the town's Mayor. After being articled with H E Downer, he was a barrister with P Nesbitt QC, and later with R Ingleby QC (1889-1901).

His Territory connection began in 1901 when he was elected as one of the two Members for the Northern Territory in the South Australian House of Assembly, serving jointly with C E Herbert, the Honourable V L Solomon and then T G Crush. He was Attorney-General for two years before he resigned in January 1910. He and his wife Eliza arrived in Palmerston on SS *Empire* on 9 June 1910 and were welcomed with a civic reception.

As with his predecessors, Mr Justice Mitchell was host to a variety of visitors to the Territory and the Residence was the scene for some great entertainments. In October of his first year in office, for example, he received Commander Antonio Aluisio Jervis de Atouguia Ferreira Pinto Basto, commander of the Portuguese *Cruzador Santa Gabriel* from Lisbon via Dili in



Portuguese Timor following the revolution in Portugal. The officers were suitably entertained by the Mitchells, both at the Residence and on a kangaroo hunt in buggies. Commander Basto later wrote: *“I visited the Governor of the Territory, Mr Justice Mitchell, who was very kind to us, offering us every facility and coming nearly every day to the wharf for us to go for a ride in his carriage ...”*

Mr Justice Mitchell reported on the state of the Residence in a long letter in which he described its dilapidated condition, the unsuitability of the furniture (most of which was shattered) and the unattractiveness of its dark paintwork. The roof leaked, the china was incomplete, the old piano was warped and toneless, and the lighting was so inadequate that it was impossible to read at night. In particular, he recommended the demolition of the Chinese shanties at the rear of the Residence which had been built some time ago to provide sleeping quarters for the Chinese servants. The size of the Chinese population in Palmerston had shrunk considerably following the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* and the Residence would not again have the abundance of Chinese staff enjoyed by previous Residents.

Mr Justice Mitchell has the distinction of having been in office in Palmerston upon the introduction of the *Northern Territory Acceptance Act 1910* and the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act 1910*, Commonwealth Acts which provided for the transfer of the Northern Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth. Thus, the Territory would be under the control of the Federal Government for the next seven decades or more. In his annual report for 1911, Mr Justice Mitchell remarked,

*“On Sunday, 1st January, 1911, the transfer of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth took effect. The following day, a gathering of the citizens took place at the Residency, Darwin, when Mrs Mitchell hoisted the Commonwealth Ensign amid acclamations, and I gave an address calling upon the citizens to exhibit loyalty and patriotism to the flag. Up to that time the depression that had prevailed for many years had sunk deep into the heart of the people, but the new order of things called forth much hope for a speedy revival of business and enterprise”.* It was at this event that Mitchell formally named the town Darwin, and from this day forward the Commonwealth flag, later officially known as the Australian to commemorate this significant event. Donated by the artist to the Northern Territory Government, this painting today hangs in the dining room of Government House, on long-term loan from the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT.

Accordingly, Mitchell ceased to be employed by the Public Service of South Australia and transferred to the service of the Commonwealth as Acting Administrator and judge of the new Supreme Court. Retiring in 1912, he returned to South Australia and was a Stipendiary Magistrate in Port Pirie and at the Adelaide Police Court, as well as later being Commissioner of Insolvency and Stipendiary Magistrate of the Adelaide Local Court and the Taxation Appeal Court from 1918 to 26. He was a Royal Commissioner investigating the State Bank’s ‘Thousand Homes Contract’ in 1925, and investigating police bribery in 1926. He was a Judge of the Insolvency Court at the time of his death from pneumonia on 3 October 1926.



*The Northern Territory Acceptance Act 1910* authorised the transfer of control of the Northern Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth, while the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act 1910* detailed the applicability of Commonwealth laws to the Territory, provided for the appointment by the Commonwealth of an Administrator, and provided for the making of ordinances. In the Northern Territory Government's first ordinance of 1911, the position of the Administrator was set out: the Administrator was charged with administering the Government of the Northern Territory on behalf of the Federal Government, "*in accordance with such instructions as are from time to time given to him by the Minister*". Although the Administrator was empowered to appoint and suspend all necessary magistrates and officers, his powers were otherwise very limited. He did not have control over several major departments including Railways, Public Works, Post and Telegraphs and Customs, and secondly, the Administrator was responsible to a Federal Minister and Department in the south.



## **J A Gilruth, 1st Administrator**

On 25 March 1912, Dr John Anderson Gilruth DVSc FRSEd, a Doctor of Veterinary Science and Professor of Veterinary Pathology at the University of Melbourne, was appointed by the Federal Government as the first Administrator of the Northern Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia with an annual salary of £1,750. Born on 17 February 1871 at Auchmithie near Arbroath, Forfar, Scotland, Gilruth was a graduate of Arbroath and Dundee High Schools, Glasgow Veterinary College and the Pasteur Institute in Paris. He was the New Zealand Government Veterinary Surgeon (1893-97) and then Chief Veterinarian and Government Bacteriologist (1897-1908) before taking up his Professorship at the University of Melbourne in 1908. A booklet issued by the Commonwealth Government in Melbourne in June 1913, designed to attract settlers to the new territory, stated that, "*An Administrator has been appointed with capable staffs to deal with land and mining settlement, railways and other public works, agriculture, public health, and other matters of public importance*".

Gilruth arrived in the north with his wife Jeannie, children and Governess Elsie Masson in April 1912. Also with Gilruth was his Private Secretary Henry Ernest Carey and later, upon Gilruth's dismissal of Nicholas Holtz, Carey was appointed Government Secretary. Carey was also Chief Protector of Aborigines, was *ex officio* the seventh member of the Darwin District Council upon its creation in 1915 and, during the war, was Gilruth's Press Censor as well as Director of Agriculture and Director of Lands.

Ernestine Hill descriptively recorded Gilruth's arrival in Darwin: "*Mr Justice Mitchell thankfully handed over the pandanus strings of government. The shabby old Residency, as the new Administrator crossed its threshold, blushed under its bougainvilleas in new dignity of a Government House. Official and parliamentary parties arrived by steamer, and at the courthouse Mr Justice Bevan presented to Dr Gilruth His Majesty's Commission*".

His Excellency, as Gilruth had been titled by the Fisher Labor Government, hastily tidied up the Residence and, on 21 April 1912, he and his wife Jeannie hosted a garden party and

banquet at which he officially changed the name of the Residence to Government House. Among the guests that night were several prominent persons including parliamentarians, the Director of Lands Mr George Ryland, the Director of Agriculture Mr W H Clarke, and the Reverend John Flynn of the Australian Inland Mission.

One of the earliest recorded investitures in Government House, Darwin took place in 1912, the presentation by Gilruth to the Myall Aborigine Neighbour of the Albert Medal for gallantry in saving life on land. In February 1911, Constable Bill Johns (later South Australian Police Commissioner) had rounded up three Aborigines, Neighbour amongst them, responsible for stealing and killing cattle in the Roper Valley. Riding back with the captives in neck-chains, they reached the Wilton River in flood. The three swam across easily but Johns' horse went under and kicked Johns, knocking him unconscious. Neighbour, who had meanwhile reached the far bank, dived into the water, at risk to his own life, and rescued the drowning trooper, brought him back to consciousness and then rode sixty miles to obtain help. No action was taken against Neighbour and, on the recommendation of Professor Sir Baldwin Spencer, he was decorated and his photograph appeared in London newspapers.

Neighbour, originally from Hodgson and Nutwood Downs Stations and later a reliable Police Tracker known by the name of Nipper, was again a prominent figure in another flood drama, in the great Roper Flood of 1940. After this incident, the great Territory figure Constable Jack Mahony described Nipper (Neighbour), who died on 21 June 1954, as follows: "*He was a wild native, but, in my opinion, was the best boy I ever had; certainly the most courageous*". He was listed as one of '200 Remarkable Territorians' by the Australian Bicentennial Authority's NT Council in association with the Darwin City Council, and his name is commemorated by a plaque in Darwin's Bicentennial Park. Present at his Investiture at Government House, Darwin on 16 December 1912, the first to any but a white man, were Judge Bevan, Professor Baldwin Spencer and Bishop White of Carpentaria.

In addition to banquets and investitures, Government House was the setting for a number of formal evening functions hosted by Mrs Gilruth. It was recorded that "*...Mrs Gilruth stimulated social prestige by giving calico balls at the Residency – a tactful courtesy to those with nothing but calico to wear...*".

In the centre of the grassed lawn at the front of Government House, surrounded by the dirt carriage-loop for carriages to turn around, stood the flagstaff and, in front of this, Goyder's old cannon. Around the lawn were planted coconut palms, one of these being planted by young Jean Gilruth. Elsie Masson was a family friend from Melbourne whom the Gilruth's invited to join them in Port Darwin as Governess of their children. She travelled extensively with Dr Gilruth and her observations during her eighteen month stay in the Territory provided the basis for a number of magazine and newspaper articles and one book. From 1914, the Gilruths employed Miss Zelma Farr as Governess. Amongst their other staff were a Chinese cook simply known as 'Cook', dressed in a uniform of white singlet, wide black trousers and blue cummerbund, and Chin Sing, the laundryman, who carried the washing to and fro from his home in Chinatown. Gilruth's gardener was a part-Aboriginal by the name of Billy Shepherd. Billy's mother had been a full-blood Larrakia of the Dungalaba clan group.

One of the first items on Dr Gilruth's agenda was his intention to become intimately familiar with the whole Territory and its inhabitants by means of regular travel to the outer settlements. He had already toured the Territory in 1911 as a member of a scientific

expedition led by Professor Baldwin Spencer to investigate the potential of the NT, accompanied by experts in the fields of geology, agriculture, entomology and tropical medicine. Now, as Administrator, he would tour again.

Up until the time of Gilruth, the official vehicle for the Government Resident had been a phaeton, a light 4-wheeled open carriage drawn by a pair of horses. In 1912 Gilruth obtained from the Commonwealth Government a 15-horsepower Colonial Napier and chauffeur – one of the earliest motor cars to come to the Territory but the first to be seen by most Territorians. The Napier arrived by sea in August and the chauffeur, Cowper, began a series of test runs around town to tune it, much to the derision and indignation of the locals. Of Cowper, Elsie Masson noted, “*After the manner of chauffeurs he worshipped the car above all mundane things, while the car’s master served as a minor deity*”. With this conversion to internal combustion, the Administrator’s now out-dated ‘phaeton’ buggy was handed over to be used as official transport for departmental heads.

For the Napier’s final road-test, Cowper drove the Administrator and his Governess Elsie Masson to Umidu (known by the Europeans as Humpty Doo) and back to Darwin in the same day, an escapade described by Masson as “*a bold experiment in a country roadless*”. In these days well before the appearance of the Stuart Highway, Cowper was largely forced to follow the old teamsters’ track, which had not been used for six Wet Seasons, dodging ant-hills, stumps, rocks and six-year old saplings and then out into ‘debil-debil’ country with no recognisable landmarks. That night, on the final leg of the return journey, for reasons of safety, Cowper was forced to drive along the railway line. Elsie Masson recorded that Cowper proved himself “*a giant of pluck and energy*”.

Setting out on 2 September 1912, His Excellency the Administrator commenced his first overland tour of the Northern Territory in a motor car. Dr Gilruth sat in the front beside Cowper while in the back seat were Billy Shepherd and Professor Baldwin Spencer, Special Commissioner for Aborigines and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Spencer had succeeded Herbert Basedow, an anthropologist from Adelaide, who had come to the Territory in 1911 as the Commonwealth’s first Chief Protector of Aborigines but had quarrelled with Mr Justice Mitchell and quit the Territory. The small car was so loaded, with the various spare parts, supplies and rations carried in boxes on the footboards, that Shepherd and Spencer in the back seat were made to sit on their swags with their legs hanging over the sides of the car. Dr Gilruth subsequently complimented the efforts and ability of his driver: “*There is no doubt that had the chauffeur, Cowper, not been thoroughly conversant with every detail of his work, as well as a good mechanic and a man of indomitable pluck, the journey could not have been done*”.

Another to be complimented was an Aboriginal from Newcastle Waters by the name of Jack, who replaced Billy Shepherd due to his more extensive knowledge of the local conditions once the party crossed an unmarked tribal boundary. The car’s petrol consumption rose, giving them just three miles per gallon, and consequently they ran out of fuel. Jack walked some fifty miles to Eva Downs where he collected a horse to ride a further fifty miles to Anthony Lagoon where a petrol dump had been pre-positioned by packhorse, returning to refuel the Napier.

Billy often acted as a guide for the Administrator, but he could only take him a certain distance into the hinterland before he would have to halt, having reached the limit of the

Larrakia tribal area. On another such trip inland by car, the vehicle broke down and the party had only limited supplies of food and water. Billy walked and ran some considerable distance back to Darwin to obtain help, thereby saving the life of the Administrator. In appreciation of his gratitude, Billy was rewarded by Gilruth with a lifetime contract of employment at Government House. Recalling the groundswell of displeasure with Gilruth's administration, Abbott observed the bestowal of this distinction somewhat wryly: "...years before he [Billy Shepherd] had been with a previous Administrator when there had been a car breakdown and he had saved the Administrator from perishing from thirst. This act possibly did not gain him merit with a certain portion of the Northern Territory population...".

His guaranteed employment at Government House also ensured guaranteed accommodation for Billy and his family, to the rear of the house near the cliffs. During the course of his employment at Government House, Billy had a number of wives. His first wife, Ruby, had one daughter, also named Ruby, and then died giving birth to their son Robert. Robert subsequently married Maggie, a full-blooded Marathiel girl from the Daly River region with the Aboriginal name of Gurrumundum, and they produced five children, Nellie, Pauline, Bobby, Patsy and Alice, who all lived and worked at Government House, with Billy and other family members, for many years, through the terms of Urquhart, Weddell and Abbott. Billy's great-grandson from Ruby and Robert recalls family tales of the children and their mother playing around the dining room table, between the legs of Dr Gilruth's guests. It was Maggie Shepherd who passed on the oral history that Billy Shepherd's father had been "the head man on the first ship to come in to Darwin".

Upon his arrival in Darwin in January 1912, Baldwin Spencer had been disgusted by the beach camps of the Larrakia and Wagait Aboriginals at Lamaroo, and had moved them to a new camp at Kahlin Beach. In dealing with the problem of the camp's part-Aboriginal children, Spencer deemed it best to separate the children from their full-blooded mothers and, using his powers under Section 13 of the South Australian *Aborigines Act* 1910, he established the Darwin Aboriginal Compound (later known as Kahlin Compound). It was from this Compound that Gilruth obtained his part-Aboriginal maids for Government House, dressed in blouses and skirts but barefoot.

Under the *Aboriginals Ordinance* of 1918, those living in Kahlin Compound had been subject to a curfew to keep them off the streets between sunset and sunrise, being identified by an identification disc worn around the neck. Billy Shepherd's second wife, Ruby Arryat, had been the first part-Aboriginal child to enter Kahlin Compound and subsequently had worn a 'dog-tag' inscribed "Ruby Darwin No.1"; this had subsequently led to rumours that she was the illegitimate daughter of Charles Darwin! Ruby Arryat was a deaf mute as a result of rubella, and was known by family members as Granny Abbaba. Her totem was the 'Itchy Dreaming' which was associated with Inyarany on the Cox Peninsula, and she regularly visited Cox Peninsula by canoe. Ruby and her daughter Molly both worked as maids at Government House with the rest of the Shepherd family, living in an apartment at the southern end of the grounds.

During 1916, the Gilruths took leave and returned to Melbourne, where they renewed their acquaintance with Dr Sugden – a Yorkshire man, the first Master of Queen's College, Melbourne University. Despairing at their need for a Governess for young Margaret, then aged 6, following the departure of Miss Zelma Farr, the Sugdens recommended Miss Mildred Gardner. Born in Nundah in 1891, Mildred had completed her studies at the

Methodist Ladies College in Melbourne, and accompanied the Gilruths back to Darwin. Her daughter related some of her mother's memories: *"It was a very happy time for my mother. They played tennis and went for picnics and also there was a lot of entertaining ... Once there was a picnic and my mother was asked if she would like to drive the sulky. The horse bolted, the vehicle turned over and the Judge [Judge Bevan] broke his arm"*. She further related her mother's recollections of the dhobie, Ah How, who objected to ironing the night-dresses because they were too long and would 'crush-up'.

Dr Gilruth saw himself more as a colonial Viceroy than a senior public servant and to complete this view, within two months of his arrival in 1912 he had insisted upon his appointment as an officer in the AMF. He was appointed a Temporary Colonel on the Unattached List in May 1912 and had commanded the Cable Guard, Darwin's only military presence at that time. By 1914, it comprised some 220 young men (10% of Darwin's population) armed with old .303 rifles, ready to repulse any aggressive move by German cruisers. In the years following 1914, from Government House the uniformed Gilruth also farewelled Territory volunteers for World War 1, some 228 in total. In 1917, Gilruth received an extension of his term but his title was downgraded from 'His Excellency' to the title still in use for the Administrator today – 'His Honour'. After the cessation of hostilities following World War 1, a cenotaph was erected on the lawns outside Government House recording the names of those Territorians who lost their lives. It was in this grassed square that, during the rebellion, Darwin's 'extremists and agitators' held their meetings and abused the Government and the Administrator over the building, operation and subsequent closure of Vestey's Meatworks.

On the afternoon of 17 December 1918, some 400 men marched from Parap along the shoreline and up the hill towards town. Here they were joined by another 500 men as they made their way towards Government House; they marched behind a car carrying an effigy of Gilruth hoisted on a stake. On the grassed area outside the grounds they waited as a deputation of trade unionists led by Hardie Gibson entered and approached Gilruth's office. The deputation was met by a special constable brandishing a baton; interestingly, one of the constables on duty that day to protect Government House was Patrick ('Paddy') Cahill, the famous horse-back buffalo shooter, a good friend of Gilruth's who is said to have antagonised the rioters. The party, introduced by the Mayor Douglas Watts, demanded that the Administrator address the gathering. In the branches of a tree at the gates of Government House were two schoolboys – one of them Jock Nelson, son of one of the men in the forefront of the demonstration, and himself an Administrator of the Territory in subsequent years.

Gilruth emerged from his office, refused to order the withdrawal of the special constables and at first also refused to address the citizens of Darwin. He eventually agreed and, refusing a packing-case placed for him outside the white picket fence, he spoke from within the grounds but could not be heard over the din of the crowd, which by this time had swollen with an influx of Chinese from Chinatown and Aborigines from Kahlin Compound.

As Gilruth stood stubbornly stating that he was answerable only to the Minister, the picket fence gave way under the weight of men pressing forward. A voice from the crowd urged the men to jump the fence and, expressing their collective dissatisfaction, several dozen men swarmed past the fence across the garden and into the grounds, disarming the constables as they went. Gilruth was pushed and shoved somewhat before being taken into

the House by Gibson. Government House was not 'sacked' as some might romanticise today – some lattice work on the windows was damaged and the high wire netting was pulled down from one end of the tennis court. The safety of Government House was feared but the protesters were soon settled by Hardie Gibson and Harold Nelson, and their most violent act was the burning of Dr Gilruth's kerosene-soaked effigy outside the front gate, after which they dispersed.

In the weeks that followed, Gilruth and his family were virtual prisoners within their residence, the siege exacerbated by his daughter's sudden illness. The 'Darwin Rebellion' and the storming of Government House was described by the southern press as a Bolshevik plot, Darwin being described as being in a state of anarchy with the establishment of a Soviet across northern Australia imminent. The stories and tales of that day subsequently grew into myths but there is no evidence to suggest that pickets from the Government House fence were brandished as weapons during the surge into the grounds, nor were they thrown onto the fire which consumed the effigy of Gilruth (although one rifle taken from a special constable was).

The lightly armed gunboat HMAS *Una* arrived within a week to protect the Administrator, anchoring beneath the Government House cliffs on Christmas eve; she was soon replaced by the former Royal Navy cruiser HMAS *Encounter* with eleven 6-inch guns and nine 12-pounders. Gilruth and his family quietly went aboard HMAS *Encounter* and sailed with her on the night of 20 February 1919. Government Secretary R J Evans fulfilled the duties of the office of Administrator until Federal Cabinet announced the termination of Gilruth's appointment as Administrator in June 1919. It was recorded of Evans that, "*He did little but witness impotently the growth of another's rule in his capital*", Henry Ernest Carey rising to become the Commonwealth Government's representative in the Northern Territory, but with the lesser status of Director.

Gilruth meanwhile, arrived in Melbourne on 5 March and conducted the formal duties of his office from there until June when the office of Administrator was abolished. The road which now runs past the site of Vestey's Meatworks (now Darwin High School), along the Mindil shoreline and up the hill towards town, part of the route of the demonstrators in 1918, has since been named Gilruth Avenue. Gilruth went into private consultancy in 1919, and was a Consultant for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (later CSIRO) from 1929 to 1935. He was Acting Chief, later Chief, of the Division of Animal Health, from 1930 until his retirement in 1935. He died of a respiratory tract infection at South Yarra on 4 March 1937.

Government House was the scene of a similar fiery demonstration on Monday 2 May 1988, protestors marching on Commodore Eric Johnston to express their dissatisfaction and to demand his resignation. But it was a re-enactment, for the 1988 Bicentenary May Day parade, in which the modern incumbents played the roles of those nearly seventy years ago. The parade stopped several times along the route to enact significant events in which the Union movement had played a major part, culminating in their rally outside Government House. The Darwin City Brass Band had an interesting task, leading the parade to Government House and then entering the grounds to assume the role of the special constables.

## H E Carey, Director

Gilruth's Private Secretary during this turbulent time had been Mr Henry Ernest Carey. Born in Tiverton, Devon on 11 November 1874, Carey's career incorporated clerical and secretarial work with the British Post Office (1894-1900), the New Zealand Agriculture Department (1900-07), the *Dominion* Newspaper in Wellington (1907-09) and the Fresh Food & Ice Company in Wellington (1909-11) before Dr Gilruth selected him in 1912 to come with him to Darwin as his Private Secretary. The Government Secretary and Curator of the Darwin Botanical Gardens, Nicholas Holtze, was summarily dismissed by Gilruth in 1912 and was replaced by Carey; Holtze died from stomach ulcers on 24 May 1913 and was buried in the Palmerston Cemetery (now the Pioneer Cemetery on Goyder Road).

When the Darwin District Council was abolished in 1915 and replaced by the Darwin Town Council, Gilruth had Carey installed *ex officio* as the Council's seventh member. Gilruth also appointed him wartime Press censor, Director of Agriculture and Director of Lands. The Director of Mines, Dr H I Jensen, said that Gilruth was the Mikado and Carey his Pooh-Bah. He even acted in the capacity of Administrator during Gilruth's absences from the NT, notably for eight months (October 1916 to June 1917) while Gilruth was in Melbourne seeking an extension to his term. Carey resigned from the Civil Service in 1918 to become Manager of Northern Agency Pty Ltd, the management company of Vestey's in Darwin, again upon Gilruth's recommendation.

He was asked by Gilruth in April 1919, and then by the Department of Home and Territories in June 1919, to accept the Directorship of the Northern Territory for a three-year term. He was appointed Director by the Federal Government on 1 August 1919, with an Advisory Council to assist (consisting of a number of nominated members and with Carey as President) and the position of the Administrator was temporarily abolished; the Advisory Council held its first meeting on 21 August 1919. Interestingly, Carey chose to continue residing in his bungalow rather than move into Government House.

Carey was accused of collusion with Vestey's and confronted by a union rebellion at a meeting of the Advisory Council on 11 October 1919, and was confronted by a deputation the next day demanding his resignation. He was forced to board the SS *Bambra* on 18 October 1919 together with Mr Justice Bevan and Government Secretary Evans, the *Bambra* departing Darwin the following morning for Adelaide via Wyndham and Fremantle (Mrs Carey waited for a later ship). His appointment as Director was officially terminated by the Governor-General in Council with effect from 22 September 1920. Returning to New Zealand, Carey became somewhat a local hero according to his obituaries, in which his Territory escapades rated barely a mention, and suggested that only his untimely death prevented him from receiving an imperial honour. He was the Commercial Manager and later Head Reader of the Taranaki Daily News in New Plymouth until 1948. He applied to the High Court in November 1921 for compensation for wrongful dismissal but was unsuccessful in this bid. He died in New Plymouth on 5 May 1964.



## **M S C Smith, Acting Administrator**

The Honourable Staniforth Smith MBE was appointed Deputy Administrator on 15 November 1919 but he did not arrive in Darwin until the 30th, on SS *Mataram*. At noon, he hoisted his flag from Government House flagstaff and HMAS *Brisbane* gave him a 17-gun salute. He assumed office as Acting Administrator on 1 December, his term being “*at the Minister’s discretion*”, and noted that he would make his own arrangements about obtaining servants. Within just a few days of taking up residence, Smith had the significant honour of welcoming Captain Ross Smith MC DFC AFC and Lieutenant Keith Smith who arrived in Darwin from London in a Vickers-Vimy bomber on December 10th.

Captain Ross MacPherson Smith had served in the Sinai and Palestine during World War 1 with the Australian Light Horse and then as an officer in the Australian Flying Corps of the Australian Imperial Force, with Number 1 Squadron as an Observer-Gunner and, from 1917, as a fighter pilot. He was wounded in action twice and, upon being decorated seven times for bravery, became Australia’s most decorated flyer – Military Cross and bar, Distinguished Flying Cross and two bars, Air Force Cross, and the Order of El Nahda from the Government of Hejaz. Ross Smith’s brother, Lieutenant Keith Smith, was also a pilot during the war but with the Royal Flying Corps and then the Royal Air Force, and had been Mentioned in-Despatches for bravery.

The London-Australia Air Race was actually a means of returning Australian Flying Corps pilots and crews to Australia after the cessation of hostilities – they were required to fly their aircraft home, with a £10,000 prize as the incentive for the first aircraft manned by Australians to reach Australia in less than 30 days before the end of 1919. Having departed Hounslow near London on 12 November, Ross and Keith Smith landed their Vickers FB27 Vimy G-EAOU40 at Darwin aerodrome at 3.05 pm on Friday 10 December 1919 and were met by the Acting Administrator, Staniforth Smith. They had accomplished the first ever flight from Europe to Australia, a distance of 18,500 kilometres, in 27 days and 20 hours.

The following day, the Acting Administrator entertained the heroes at Government House, where they were joined by Lieutenant Hudson Fysh DFC, another veteran of the Light Horse and No.1 Squadron AFC, who had been responsible for clearing the airstrip at Fannie Bay. The aerodrome in Darwin at which they landed was in the suburb of Parap, near the site of the present pool. In later years when it became too small for the more modern aircraft it was abandoned and converted into a main road linking the Stuart Highway with East Point Road on the coast, appropriately named Ross Smith Avenue. An obelisk was erected by the Commonwealth of Australia, on the coast overlooking Fannie bay, to commemorate this first aerial flight from England, and a small plaque marks the actual site of their landing.

## F C Urquhart, 2nd Administrator

Following this period of political and industrial unrest in Darwin and the consequent downgrading of the position of Administrator to that of Director, and goaded by adverse public opinion to do something about the Northern Territory's labour problems, the Federal Government appointed Mr Frederic Charles Urquhart, a former Commissioner of the Queensland Police Force, as Administrator on 17 January 1921.

Born at St. Leonard's-on-Sea in Sussex on 27 October 1858, after service as a Midshipman on Wigram's clipper ships he migrated to Australia in 1875 and was engaged in droving and book-keeping in outback Queensland until 1878. He joined the Queensland Native Mounted Police Force as a Cadet Sub-Inspector in 1882 but was soon after a Sub-Inspector in charge of the Gulf, Cape York and Torres Strait Districts until 1889; he was wounded twice while trying to restore law and order amongst the Kalkatunga (Kalkadoon) Aborigines in the McKinlay Ranges in 1884. Transferring to the Queensland Police in 1889, he rose to the ranks of Inspector Second Class in Brisbane in 1896, Officer in Charge of the Criminal Investigation Branch in 1898 and Chief Inspector in 1905, and was Commissioner of Police from 1917 to 1921.

Retiring from the Queensland Police, Urquhart was appointed Administrator on 17 January 1921 for a five-year term with a salary of £1,500 *per annum* and no allowances except for travelling allowance; Staniforth Smith was appointed Deputy Administrator on the same day. Urquhart and his wife arrived in Darwin on SS *Montoro* on 13 February 1921 and he was sworn in the following day. His reputation had preceded him – not only the Kalkadoon incident in the McKinlay Ranges, but his prominence in the police actions against the General Strike in 1912 and again against the 'red flag rioters' in Brisbane in 1919. He gained further notoriety when, within a week of arriving in Darwin, he called at the Post Office with a shotgun in the crook of his arm.

Billy Shepherd, with his son Robert and Maggie and their children, all lived and worked at Government House through Mr Urquhart's term as Administrator, barefoot but in a uniform of white blouses and skirts, shirts and shorts. There came to be an increasing reliance on part-Aboriginal staff at Government House as the effects of the Commonwealth's *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901 were felt. Those Chinese whom Urquhart repatriated to Hong Kong could not be replaced, and most of the families remaining in Darwin had well-established businesses to manage. And where the hardworking Chinese could find or create employment in the post-war years, Darwin's whites could not, and this was to present Mr Urquhart's successor with something of a challenge.

Billy's second wife was Ruby Arryat and their daughter, Molly Shepherd, was born on the beach down from Government House towards Lamaroo Beach, near the Larrakia's Trevally Dreaming site, on 10 August 1924. This site was a Larrakia camp and, during these depression years, their countrymen on Cox Peninsula would row canoes across the harbour to bring them food. The Administrator drew up a birth certificate for Molly before she was taken away by Government patrol officers to the Croker Island Mission where, in 1942, she took part in the evacuation march through the Northern Territory, eventually ending up in Sydney.

Molly returned to Darwin and worked as a housemaid and in the laundry at Government House for a while after World War 2, a deaf mute as a result of rubella contracted from her mother at birth. Billy Shepherd's grand-daughter, recalls as a child, being told stories of Government House by her grandmother as they sat at the Larrakia Women's Dreaming Site on the beach, Grannie Ruby pointing up the cliff towards the Residence and reciting tales of Billy Shepherd, Gilruth and Abbott.

Retiring upon the expiration of his term on 16 January 1926, Mr Urquhart left the Territory to settle at Clayfield in Brisbane, and there died on 2 December 1935. From 17 January 1926, Mr Edward Copley Playford SM (Urquhart's deputy since 9 December 1925) was Acting Administrator until 28 February the following year.



## **R H Weddell, Government Resident**

On 4 June 1926, the *Northern Australia Act* was assented to, under which the Northern Territory was divided in two at the 20°S latitude, to become North Australia and Central Australia, each of the two Territories to be headed by a Government Resident. The division of the Territory took place by proclamation on 1 March 1927, on which date Robert Hunter Weddell was appointed Government Resident for North Australia, and on the same day he and Mrs Flora Weddell arrived on SS *Marella* and occupied Government House. Housekeeper at this time was Mrs Lillias Carroll (nee Kingston), born in 1884.

The Weddells had the distinction that year of seeing electricity introduced to Darwin, albeit an expensive and irregular supply, largely because it was privately run. The Darwin Town Council, under Mayor Douglas Crombie Watts, managed Darwin's electricity supply from 1934, with Mr Reginald Sylvester Leydin as Manager; in 1937, control was given over to NT Administration and in 1941 the Stokes Hill power station commenced operation. Born on 15 May 1905, Reg Leydin had arrived in Darwin in 1926 and served as an internal audit clerk until he was appointed Town Clerk in 1928. He subsequently held appointments as acting Chief Clerk (Administration) and then Staff Clerk in NT Administration and Chairman of the Darwin Town Management Board, although he would have a significant association with Government House, as both Official Secretary and acting in the capacity of Administrator.

Colonel Weddell had been born in Geelong, Victoria on 26 December 1882 and educated at Geelong College and the University of Melbourne. He was a teacher in Victoria and then Resident Master and Captain of the Cadet Corps at Scotch College until his enlistment in the Australian Imperial Force in 1914. He saw active service as a Captain in the original 7th Battalion, AIF 1914-15, notably commanding the two lead companies in the attack on Krithia on 8 May 1915 – they occupied a front of about 500 metres in the assault, from which he was the only surviving officer. He was later wounded and invalided to England. Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, he was commanding the 7th Battalion at Gallipoli later in 1915. Upon his retirement in 1917, he remained in uniform as an Intelligence Officer with the Citizens' Military Force (CMF) in Perth until 1926 (interestingly, he was recalled by the Army to again serve with the Intelligence Corps in Melbourne during World War 2, retiring in 1943). From

1917 until 1926 he was Inspector-in-Charge of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch of the Attorney-General's Department in Perth.

His military background in both command and active service environments perhaps well suited Weddell to the role of a Government Resident to see the Territory through a great depression. As the depression had taken hold, there was widespread unemployment – in early 1930 there were street marches reminiscent of the marches on Dr Gilruth and a chain of events which the southern press likened to the rebellion of 1918, Darwin being described as 'Little Moscow'. One Saturday morning a deputation of unemployed men called on the Government Resident at his office: a persistent myth is that Lieutenant Colonel Weddell was locked inside Government House by a deputation of unemployed men demanding work or full benefits. There was a deputation of protestors but these events took place at Colonel Weddell's office which was at that time the corner office of the administration building on the corner of the Esplanade and Mitchell Street, not at Government House across the road.

They called again on 29 April to hear Weddell's reply. With Weddell were the Chief Medical Officer Dr Cecil Cook and the Crown Law Officer Eric Asche, whose son Austin was to later become Chief Justice of the NT Supreme Court and Administrator of the Northern Territory. Weddell had been in contact with the Minister as he had promised and read to the deputation the Minister's telegram of reply. Expressing their dissatisfaction, the deputation of four was joined by seven other protestors who forced their way into the office, bolting and locking the doors behind them. Weddell was then told, "*You will stay locked in here until our demands are met*". Police Inspector Stretton and five constables arrived and, at Weddell's request, were admitted into the office. Two of the protesters left without resistance but the other nine were forcibly evicted.

By now there were over fifty demonstrators on the verandah and in Liberty Square by the Cenotaph where they camped for four days outside the Government House fence, cooking stews in four-gallon drums, with placards prominent and red flags flying. They resisted when the police were ordered to remove them from the verandah and fourteen were arrested and charged; further police cleared the mob from the vicinity of the Cenotaph. In addition to the fourteen charged with trespass, the eleven men of the deputation were charged with unlawfully imprisoning the Government Resident in his office – two were imprisoned and the rest were fined, but none were able to pay so they were all sent to Fannie Bay Gaol. A similar deputation marched to these Government Offices on 21 January 1931 where they were met by the Deputy Government Resident Mr Leslie Giles. Again the men occupied the verandah outside the Resident's office, flew a red flag from one of the posts, and were fed on stews boiled up in large drums. There was some violence before the men were evicted.

The Resident had an advisory council of four members (two appointed and two elected), but they were still very much under southern control. The first Administrators, Gilruth and Urquhart, and Government Resident Weddell added several colourful incidents to Territory history while working under the administrative constraints to their authority; notable was their inadequate local independence and their lack of control over the full range of administrative functions in the Territory. Weddell's successor, Aubrey Abbott, said of his position, "*In major matters, the Administrator cannot take immediate action, he can only make recommendations, and frequently my recommendations were so altered and whittled down, or consideration and discussions so delayed, that they were of little use when they returned*".

## **R H Weddell, 3rd Administrator**

The *Northern Australia Act* 1926, which had established the separate Territories of North and Central Australia, was repealed by the Scullin Government on 11 June 1931, and on the following day Lieutenant Colonel Weddell took office as Administrator of the re-united Northern Territory. He had Carrington in Alice Springs as an Assistant Administrator. After his earlier experiences, Weddell was physically threatened with a revolver at a local gathering of the Communist Party and was actually assaulted in 1932, which events prompted him to seek federal approval to carry a revolver to protect himself.

Among those occupying rooms at Government House at this time were two bachelors, the Director of Works, Eric Stoddart, and the Surveyor-General of the Northern Territory, Bill Easton. Born in Melbourne, Bill Easton had worked as a surveyor in Western Australia, the Straits Settlements, East Africa and the Panama Canal and served as a Lieutenant with the 1st Australian Division Engineers during World War 1 before coming to Darwin in 1926 as Surveyor-General.

By 1931, he had met Gertie Styles, a sister of Lillian (later Mrs Lovegrove), Myrtle (Mrs Fawcett) and Eileen (Mrs Fitzer), daughter of Tom Styles and his wife Eleanor, and granddaughter of Ned and Eliza Tuckwell. Bill proposed and, as they were due to leave Darwin, on 13 June 1931 they were married at Government House in what they described as 'the ballroom'. This was the Drawing Room – the original stone hall of the first Residence built by a team of pioneers numbered among whom was Gertie's grandfather, Ned Tuckwell. Bill had Chief Medical Officer (and Chief Protector of Aborigines) Dr Cecil Cook as his best man and Works Director Eric Stoddart as groomsman, while Gertie's sister Myrtle was matron-of-honour.

Housemaid for the Weddells was a young girl named Mingkit Chong, daughter of a Larrakia Aboriginal mother and a Chinese father, who had been born on the Perron Islands in 1918 and had been living with her family at Charles Point. Known as 'Kitty' (later Mrs Kitty Moffitt), she commenced employment at Government House with the Weddells in 1930 at the age of twelve. Kitty Moffitt particularly recalls that Colonel and Mrs Weddell used the cellar to store their crockery, were driven around in a car bearing the registration number '1', and that Colonel Weddell was a fine piano player. The housemaids wore a blue uniform with white collar and apron; among them were Lindy Roman (later Danks), Yula Williams and Lindy Quall, the seamstress. In later years, Lindy's young daughter Dianne (Didi) Quall played in the grounds of Government House while her mother was working.

Cleaner and gardener at Government House during this period was Dinah de Silva, who spent many years living on the beach in Frances Bay which was later named Dinah Beach in his memory (as too was Dinah Oval). Born in Ceylon in about 1868, Dinah de Silva served at Government House through the term of Colonel Weddell and died in 1938. Also on the staff of Colonel Weddell was Moo Fatt the cook. Territory-born in 1889 but of Chinese descent, he was the son of Moo Wong See and her husband Moo Yet Fah who had been a carpenter in Palmerston, responsible for repairs to the original Residence and its 1877-78 rebuild. Moo Fatt was an uncle of Bill Wong, for many years Secretary of Darwin's Chung Wah Society. In 1932, Bill Wong was in Grade 2 at Darwin Public School, earning the prize for proficiency, as also in that year did Rosemary Weddell (in Grade 4) and young Austin Asche (Preparatory 3).

Colonel and Mrs Weddell were great entertainers and hosted regular tennis sessions. The social elite of the Darwin community at this time comprised the officers, and their families, of the Administration, the British Australia Telegraph Company, the banks and the Services. Notable amongst these were the Weddells, Judge Wells (Supreme Court), Dr and Mrs Cecil Cook and Mr and Mrs Eric Asche (Crown Law Officer).

Eric Asche MM (1894-1940), grandson of lawyer Thomas Asche who came from Norway to the Victorian goldfields in 1854, was a veteran of World War 1 who had served with distinction in the Australian Artillery and had been awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field. After the war, he graduated in law, joined the Commonwealth Civil Service as a lawyer, and was posted to New Guinea and then, in 1927, to Darwin. The Asche family had as their home the grand old residence built by John George Knight in 1883-84 known variously as 'Knight's Folly' or 'The Mud Hut', a two-storey rammed earth and concrete structure with impressive parapets. Eric Asche's eldest son, born in Melbourne on 28 November 1925, was Austin Asche who, in 1993, would become the twenty-fourth occupant of Government House.

Austin Asche attended Darwin Primary School in 1930-33 and again in 1937, and recalls that, as a child, he would climb the hill to the Esplanade and walk across to his father's office beside the Courthouse – later Naval Headquarters and today the Administrator's offices – and play in the grounds at the back, around the well. He also recalls that as a child he used to play with his sister Erica and Rosemary Weddell, the daughter of the then Government Resident/Administrator, on the flagpole lawn, on the tennis court and also around the well at the back of Government House. Contemporary photographs show that the tennis court, on the eastern side of the House, was well used both for sporting pursuits as well as in its dual capacity as an entertainment area. Kitty Moffitt recalls that the Weddells played tennis regularly every Tuesday and Friday afternoon.

The Government House well, a short distance out from the southern end of the Residence, had a rainwater tank on a stand directly over it. There was no water supply in Darwin in those early days and these wells, dug down through solid rock, were barely adequate and were supplemented by rainwater as a necessity; the water supply was certainly insufficient to permit operation of a sewerage system and a night-cart operated for many years. The tank was removed and the well filled in and sealed over in the term of Mr Dean (1964-70), while the well behind the courthouse is still present today, sealed over by a concrete slab by the Department of Transport and Works.

In Darwin in the late 1920s and early 1930s, there were only two patches of lawn for the children to play on – one in the Botanic Gardens and the other at the front of Government House. As a child, therefore, Austin Asche and his sisters would climb the hill from Knight's Folly to the Esplanade and play barefoot upon Government House's carriage-loop lawn. His sister Erica, who was particularly friendly with young Rosemary Weddell, recalls that this lawn was always kept looking tidy by the Aboriginal gardeners who would trim the grass with scissors; Austin, and various ladies who had an association with Government House at this time, including Judith Friel, Kitty Moffitt and Daisy Ruddick, recall that the gardeners later used a small pair of shears. The gardeners had a busy time, controlling the grass which could grow head-high in the Wet Season and carefully nurturing it during the Dry, carrying water from the back of the House. They were also responsible for manually watering the unsealed carriage-loop and driveway, to keep the dust from being blown into the House.

At the age of seven, Austin was sent to Melbourne Church of England Grammar School; whilst he was away the Asche home was destroyed by fire in December 1933 and the Asches transferred to one of the government houses at Myilly Point. Austin Asche returned to Darwin in 1937 but, in 1938, suffering from health problems, his father resigned his appointment and took the family to Melbourne where he died in 1940.

During the period April to September 1934, Weddell took leave and Mr Joseph Aloysius Carrodus, then Chief Clerk with the Department of the Interior, came to Darwin as Acting Administrator to assume control in Weddell's absence. One item which attracted the attention of Mr Carrodus and received mention in his report was the Visitors Book: "*I found the book in a drawer a few months after I took over my duties*". He recommended that the book should be kept in a prominent place on the verandah at Government House near the main entrance and suggested that there should be a notice on the wall drawing attention to it. In reply to this, upon his return Colonel Weddell stated:

*"...there is a fixed place for the Visitor's Book, namely in the Office in the front of Government House, but, when it happens that there are guests occupying the front portion of the house, it is the practice to remove the Book to the Administrator's Office, the verandah owing to the humidity in the wet season and to the heat at other times of the year being an unsuitable location. No difficulty has been experienced by callers at Government House, there having been since my return last September 108 entries in the Book"*

Colonel Weddell agreed with the suggestion of a notice near or over the Office door, but there is no evidence that one was installed. Mr Carrodus was subsequently Secretary of the Department of the Interior (1935-49) and Director of Civil Defence (1949-50), and appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the 1939 New Year's Honours List.

Robert and Maggie Shepherd's daughter Patsy was born on 20 February 1935 and, as a child, she too worked as a housemaid at Government House. In his senior years, Billy Shepherd was a Ceremony Man for the Larrakia people, and from a shack which he had on the cliffs near Doctors Gully, he would send up smoke to call the dugout canoes across from Delissaville for corroborees. Sometimes, when Patsy was older, he would take her across to Talc Head to go walkabout.

Government House sustained minor damage as a result of the cyclone which struck Darwin in the early morning of 11 March 1937, just prior to Colonel Weddell's departure. The garage was destroyed and the garden battered and, while the House itself received no serious structural damage, it lost several of its brown timber shutters.

Having seen his tenth anniversary in office – a full decade as the head of government in the Northern Territory – Weddell retired on 28 March 1937 due to an angina problem and settled in East Malvern, Victoria where he died on 23 November 1951. Weddell's term was the second longest served, after Dashwood's thirteen years, but he has the distinction of having served both as a Government Resident and Administrator. Housemaid Kitty Moffitt, who had worked closely with the Weddells and had travelled extensively with them, also finished her term at this time; her husband was a crocodile shooter, and Kitty was his coxswain, and they went to live at Charles Point across the harbour.

## C L A Abbott, 4th Administrator

Born in North Sydney on 4 May 1886, Aubrey Abbott had run away from school in 1895 to be a jackeroo near Gunnedah and was subsequently a stockman at Mitchell and Roma, a cane-cutter at Pleystowe Mill near Mackay, a mounted constable in the NSW Police Force and a Confidential Clerk at Police Headquarters in Brisbane. He enlisted in the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force and served in German New Guinea, then transferring to the 12th Australian Light Horse Regiment, AIF.

He saw active service at Gallipoli (as a Corporal at first but later commissioned in the field), the Sinai (where he was wounded-in-action), Palestine and Syria, demobilising in 1918 with the rank of Captain. From 1919 until 1937 he established and managed 'Echo Hills' near Tamworth, NSW, during which time he was Member for Gwydir in the NSW House of Representatives (1925-29 and 1931-37). He had had responsibility for the Northern Territory while Minister for Home and Territories (1925-28) and then as Minister for Home Affairs (1928-29). He resigned as MHR on 28 March 1937 to accept the post of Administrator of the NT, being appointed the following day, March 29th.

As well as being Administrator, Abbott held the appointment of Commissioner of Police, giving him considerable power in the Northern Territory. He continually pressed for the formation of a Legislative Council but did not see its formation during his term. Arriving in Darwin on 19 April 1937, Aubrey Abbott was conservative and his wife Hilda was elegant but with a strong character; they enjoyed entertaining but never lost sight of their own social eminence in the Darwin (and therefore Northern Territory) community. Their daughter, now Mrs Marion Bednall, said of her father: *"I am sure my father made many mistakes in his difficult job and he could sometimes appear arrogant but he was never a snob. He was witty and kind and greatly loved by his family"*.

Hilda Abbott was an attractive and creative lady, a prolific writer and a skilled furniture designer. In the late 1930s, she put much energy into re-establishing the original concept of Knight's terraced gardens about Government House, and she put her creative talents to further good use by designing a desk for the House. A 1937 issue of *Womens Weekly* described Hilda Abbott as *a petite and charmingly self-possessed woman*. She began her interview with the following statement: *"They call Darwin "the front door of Australia", these days, and I shall walk in and make myself at home"*. The two Abbott girls, Marion and Dorothy, were fortunate to have left Darwin by the time of the Japanese air-raids, but Marion was able to recall something of the life at Government House during the pre-raid period: *"G. House was very much a home when we were there, and we were a very close family... There was a lot of tennis and swimming and dancing and picnics etc"*.

One of the young Lieutenants at Larrakeyah Barracks had a little to do with the Abbotts and Government House in these pre-War days. Lieutenant A T 'Dinger' Bell had just completed his university course and was sent as the 'Works' officer to continue the construction of barracks and coastal fortifications for Darwin. He recalled: *"The Garrison, as it was called, led by our esteemed CO then Lt Col W W Whittle [1936-39] had a great respect for the Administrator A L Abbott and for his control of his house. At that time Darwin was very much a frontier town full of amazing characters including some notable rogues. Much of it was in the style and behaviour of the outback. The Administrator's House constituted an island of calm in this often troubled sea"*.



Where in other outposts of the British Empire, Government Houses have generally been established to be oases (of refinement and civilisation) in the (colonial) desert, the history of Government House in Darwin shows it to have been rather more a tranquil refuge in troubled and roguish times. Bell was supported in his view by a naval officer, Lieutenant Owen Griffiths RAN, who published his personal account of the bombing of Darwin as viewed and sketched from HMAS *Platypus*. Of Government House, Griffiths wrote: *“For all the wild pace set, Darwin was not without respectability. From Government House circles, a decorous and gentile atmosphere permeated throughout the community”*.

The incoming ‘First Lady’ had found that they had inherited a house not in the best of conditions. The old brown shutters on the verandah, those which had survived the cyclone, stood in stark contrast to the new wooden slats which had been nailed from roof to floor to cover gaps where shutters had been blown away. Mrs Abbott also noted that the surviving shutters had not been painted for a very long time. All of the rooms had half doors painted dark brown with bright yellow imitation grain, and the concrete around the doors was grey and weather-stained. The rooms were large with high ceilings, containing black iron bedsteads with straw mattresses. All of the rooms of Government House had that musty smell of wet straw which made the whole House seem shabby and depressing. Little wonder that Hilda Abbott was both innovative and energetic in renovating the House and gardens.

On occupying the House, the Administrator and Mrs Abbott decided to take action with regard to the number of small cottages which were dotted about the grounds. The roof of one long cottage in particular, on the terrace of the western slope, spoilt their view of the sea and beach from the western verandah. This cottage had two bedrooms and a bathroom, providing extra accommodation for visiting guests, and because of its appearance, or perhaps because of some particular guests who had occupied it, was referred to by Mrs Abbott as ‘the monkey house’. It was subsequently removed and the area landscaped into an attractive garden, the view of the harbour thereby restored.

Colonel Weddell had used the front bedroom as his Government House office, while his official office was in the Government building across the road. Upon arrival in Darwin, Abbott chose to use this front room of Government House as his official office as a temporary measure and ordered the construction of an office within the grounds of Government House, on the western side of the carriage-loop alongside the garage. This office, completed in 1938, housed both the Administrator and his Official Secretary as well as the Crown Law Officer in a room at the back overlooking the harbour. It was a strongly built office, *“abutting from the side of a slope, with strong reinforced-concrete pillars supporting a concrete floor. Beneath this floor was a large concrete strong-room with a very thick iron door”*. Abbott sought engineering advice from the Colonel commanding the Army engineers in NT Force, enquiring as to the suitability of this under-floor area as a bomb shelter. He was told that it would be safe against anything as long as it did not sustain a direct hit.

Among other preparations for war, the Director of Works for the Armed Services, Wing-Commander Hepburn, attempted to acquire for the Navy all lands between Bennett Street and the wharf. The Administrator over-ruled to ensure that the courthouse, police barracks, government buildings and Government House were excluded from this compulsory acquisition. Soon enough, however, the Navy would make good use the Administrator’s residence.

Appointed as Aubrey Abbott's Clerk was Mr D R M Thompson – most people in Darwin came to know Deric Thompson simply as 'APC' – the Administrator's Personal Clerk, while the *Northern Standard* referred to him as "the chauffeur secretary" after journalists noticed him driving Mrs Abbott to the Golf Clubhouse. He was not at Government House for long, leaving following some disagreements with the Abbotts and was 'banished' to the Resident Engineer's Office in Alice Springs, although he would return after the war. He was succeeded as Staff Clerk in NT Administration by Mr Reginald Sylvester Leydin, the acting Chief Clerk (Administration) who, through his close involvement with the Abbotts, continued to assist them in their social life as a social secretary. He was promoted to Chief Clerk, which included the duties of Staff Clerk, and through their close acquaintance, generally acted in the capacity of Personal Secretary to the Administrator. The Administrator's *ad hoc* Aide-de-Camp was the District Naval Officer, Lieutenant Commander A E 'Chook' Fowler RAN, later an officer of the boom defence vessels.

During Deric Thompson's days at Government House, the young NT Public Service messenger based in the Government offices across the road was Les Liveris, who had started working for NT Administration in June 1937 at the age of 13 after completing his studies at Darwin Primary School. Darwin born, but of Greek extraction, Les Liveris' father had come to Darwin from Kastelorizo in 1915, and returned to Greece in 1917, bringing his family out to settle in 1919. Selected for duties of messenger by Reg Leydin, young Les was introduced to the Government Secretary Mr Leslie Henry Alfred Giles and, for the next two years, ferried files and correspondence across the Esplanade between the Government Secretary and Administrator, every hour on the hour. He recalls the Administrator as being "*active and hard-working, a man who had a huge input into NT Administration*" unlike some of the previous 'armchair Administrators'. Les was promoted to Junior Clerk in 1939, and succeeded as messenger by Con Parker, also Darwin-born of Greek extraction. He was the son of Ellen and Robert Stanley Parker, a plumber commemorated by a plaque in Bicentennial Park, and later an Army Finance Officer at Larrakeyah Barracks.

The oldest of the Government House staff was the Ceylonese gardener Don Thomas Babun, who was accepted for employment at Government House in 1938 at the age of 57, succeeding Dinah de Silva who died that year aged 70, a Darwin resident for the preceding fifty years. Tom Babun had been one of the earliest bakers in Darwin, living in the first of a row of stone houses on Cavenagh Street from about 1929. It is recalled that he was well accepted and respected by his fellow staff, particularly by the Aborigines who saw him as some sort of elder statesman; besides his dark skin, he was fluent in Larrakia. They adopted the use of the nickname 'Tom Baker' which had been coined by some of the old Chinese in Darwin, including the Quong family, who had been his competitors in bakery. Interestingly, some fifty years later, one of the descendants of the Quong family would have a close association with Government House.

One of Tom's sons, Bernard Baban, was a repatriated soldier in Darwin after the war, who took as his wife the daughter of Billy Shepherd and Ruby Arryat, Molly Shepherd, who was at that time a housemaid at Government House. They settled in Salonika, near where St John's College is today, Molly never again having to row a canoe to Cox Peninsula to obtain provisions. Among the other staff was an Aboriginal houseboy Samuel. Deric Thompson recalls that Sam was always immaculate in his white laundered shirt, although he wore no shoes, and that he always managed to keep Deric's white shoes white. Deric

Thompson also recalled that, "*the house servants were at all times quiet, mouselike and went about their duties noiselessly*".

The use of Commonwealth number plates on Departmental vehicles came into practice in 1938. Abbott chose not to comply with this directive but rather, to continue to register his motor cars as civilian vehicles. Thus, Abbott's official car, a royal navy Vauxhall, was registered with the NT registration number '1' and was known simply as 'NT1' while his second car, a 1937 Buick, was later registered as 'NT2', a practice which has continued through to the current day. The Buick was used by Mr Abbott for long tours to Territory stations and he was fiercely careful of it; Deric Thompson recalls that "*the few who were allowed to drive it received threats if anything happened to it*". The garage stood in the north-western corner of the grounds on the Esplanade, immediately next to the entrance. The Administrator's driver was Nicholas Kampur and his wife, Katherine Kampur, was the Government House cook, the couple having been taken by their parents from Moscow after the 1917 Revolution. In his capacity as Chief of Police, on formal occasions Abbott was driven by a police driver in a police vehicle.

Charles Tsang See-Kee, the first Territorian of Chinese extraction to be appointed to the Public Service in the NT, was on secondment from the Primary Producers' Board as the Administrator's secretary and typist in 1941-42. He had an office to the side of the Administrator's, while the Crown Law Officer had a room at the rear, facing seawards. See-Kee had been born in Hong Kong and was educated at Nudgee College in Brisbane, St. Steven's College in Hong Kong, Ling Nam University in Canton, and finally the University of St. John in Shanghai majoring in Economics. After the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in early 1941, he sailed for Australia, working around the country and finally taking a Qantas flying boat to Darwin.

He was employed as Secretary to the Primary Producers' Board of the Northern Territory from April 1941 to April 1942, although he also held a number of other appointments during that time: he was the Agent for the Commonwealth Statistician, a Chinese Interpreter, and a censor at Army Headquarters in Darwin (Headquarters 7th Military District). He carried out his duties as censor at the Post Office, and was lucky not to be on duty on 19 February 1942 when it was demolished. At that time he had actually been seconded from the Primary Producers' Board to the Administrator's Office, the Administrator's Chief Clerk (Administrative) Reg Leydin having left the Territory only a week or two earlier to enlist in the RAAF.

See-Kee recalls that Abbott was the last of what might be called 'Colonial Administrators'; under Abbott's regime, for example, civil servants wore a 'uniform' of white shorts and stockings, white shirt and tie, reminiscent of the old colonial era. They always had a coat handy though, in case they were called to see the Administrator. As the Territory's first Administrator, Dr John Gilruth, had styled himself as a traditional colonial Viceroy, so too did Abbott, wearing a white uniform (with gold braid epaulettes and embellishments on the collars) which he had personally designed, styled on the formal dress tunic of a colonial Lieutenant-Governor, which Abbott virtually was. Brigadier Bell, a young Lieutenant of the Garrison occasionally employed as the Administrator's ADC for functions at Government House, recalled some of his experiences:

*“As you may know, civilian dress at that time was white jacket and trousers. For those invited to the House [Government House], it was customary to arrive at least wearing the jacket. On the other hand when invited to the Deputy Administrator’s [Government Secretary’s] or Judge’s house, it was customary merely to arrive carrying a jacket on one’s arm. All three of these personalities had charming daughters so we young subalterns (2 of us) were not averse to being summoned to their establishments”.*

Brigadier Bell further recalled of his time at Larrakeyah: *“Dinner at the House was a sophisticated affair and perhaps the only place in Darwin, a strongly beer area, where good wine was served. Beer was drunk in large quantities in Darwin much of it from Victorian breweries, Foster’s Export was the brand favoured by us. On arrival in Darwin, doctors usually urged newcomers to drink as much as possible, thereby preventing pyilitis. We worked hard to prevent such a condition. I remember a garden party given by the Administrator to welcome another Dutch warship. That ship took a long while to berth and asked for Commander Chook Fowler our local NOIC to pilot her. All of this was watched from the Administrator’s House, our watching being eased by consumption of almost all the Administrator’s beer. Reg Leydin, the Administrator’s secretary appealed to us in vain to drink less. When the Dutch officers did arrive they were greeted with loud cheers”.*

Wife of a young AIF doctor, Ailsa Craig recalled her rather different impressions of the pre-war Darwin that she was made to leave Sydney for, and in particular, Abbott’s garden parties: *“In this relaxed, informal society, in which women went bare-legged in short white dresses and no bras, and men wore open-necked shirts and short pants, there existed, however, a kind of psychological hang-up from the Buck House garden party syndrome. This expressed itself in periodic functions at the residence of the Administrator of the Northern Territory, Mr C L A Abbott. At such times you were bidden to the Residence...”to be present at a garden party“.* You might be presented to a visiting Governor-General or VIP (with curtsy and the lot!) or you might simply be required to sip tea and chat with the charming Mrs Abbott. No-one relished the idea of “going to Government House”. It meant putting on stockings and things and it was so damn hot!

Of Abbott’s Visitors Book, Owen Griffiths from HMAS *Platypus* recorded: *“On arrival in Darwin, every naval officer was required to proceed to Government House and enter his name in the visitors’ book. Government House and the new Hotel Darwin were the centres of the social life”.* To dress appropriately for this life, there were such tailors as Fang Cheong Loong and Wing Cheong Sing in Chinatown – a corner of Darwin rich with embroidered silk costumes and brightly coloured banners, and the aromas of sandalwood, dried fish and opium smoke. If an order for a tropical suit was placed in the morning, mounted policeman Ted Morey recalled, *“you could be immaculately dressed to dine at the Residency or Victoria Hotel that evening”.*

On 25 October 1941, pay rates under the Hotel, Cafe and Restaurant Employees (NT) Award 1941 had been approved for Government House staff with a 10% loading. The basic rates were: Cook: £10-12-4, Housemaid/waitress: £9-3-9 Housemaid: £9-3-9, Laundress: £9-10-0. Nicholas and Katherine Kampur had some previous experiences of the devastation inflicted upon Darwin by the Japanese in 1942 – they had fled from Moscow across the continent to Vladivostok during the earliest days of the Russian Revolution and had seen quite a deal of bloodshed and misery. She was now the Government House cook, and her husband was the Administrator’s chauffeur and messenger, although he was

sometimes called upon by Mrs Abbott to provide a display of Russian dancing at receptions at Government House. At the height of the bombing, when it was apparent some of the staff were injured and the Administrator was going to assist them, Mrs Abbott pleaded with him to heed the advice of Mrs Kampur, whom she affectionately called 'the Russianess': Mrs Abbott felt that with her experiences in the aftermath of the October Revolution, she spoke with some authority.

The oldest of the staff at this time was the Ceylonese gardener Don Babun, aged 61, who was in effect an Elder for the younger Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal staff. Among the gardeners were Sam Kundook and his wife Silver, both full-blooded Larrakia Aborigines, and Billy Shepherd, by now a grey-haired old man, who had with him his third wife Lucy, a fully-blooded Aboriginal, both also of the local Larrakia tribe. Billy is recalled as a quiet and gentle man who largely kept to himself.". The most junior member of the staff was a young Aboriginal boy from the Maranunggu tribe, Leo Goodman (known by the tribal personal name of Midwei Alinggudum), who swept the verandahs and grounds. He had been born at Umidu in 1920 and was a ward of the Territory. A friend of Leo's was one of Billy Shepherd's grandchildren, Patsy Shepherd, who lived with the family at Government House up to the bombing, together with her brother Bobby and sister Nellie, and friend, Kitty. It is recalled that, after the first Japanese bombs fell, Mrs Abbott made up a picnic hamper for Granny Lucy and the young ones and had Constable 'Sandy' McNab put them on the train for Katherine. Patsy Shepherd was one of the last to board the train before it moved off.

Mrs Abbott in her diary also records some of the others who had some association with Government House at that time. At Larrimah on the 21st, as they welcomed the train in from Darwin, Mrs Abbott recorded, *"The seamen sat about and every now and then I saw some old friend from Darwin. The plasterer, my maker of concrete garden pots, called to me. He was shaking like a jelly and his voice trembled. "I was just leaving the Post Office", he said, "and I was blown across the road. I couldn't get on my feet, and I went rolling down the cliff. Some girl was there too – that big fair girl I see about. I grabbed her, but we both went down. I 'eld 'er in my arms. Clean to the bottom of the cliff we went". Ah, this was the man. Betty Page had told me she'd been blown down the cliff in some strange man's arms"*. Later, upon arriving at the Residency at Alice Springs, one of the first to greet Mrs Abbott was, *"Tony Schwerub, the most perfect draughtsman, who in the goodness of his heart used to make our dinner tables famous by his exquisite writing of menus and place-cards"*.

The first Japanese air raid of 19 February 1942, at 9.58 am, was responsible for a substantial amount of damage to the front portion of Government House. The Administrator recorded his impressions: *"The planes dropped their bombs in patterns at a signal from their leaders. The first bombs fell on the harbour edge and were aimed at the ships lying around the wharf. It was this group of bombs that did so much damage to the Government offices, to my office in Government House grounds, and, worst of all, to the post-office"*.

Sergeant Bill McKinnon was at the Police Barracks in Mitchell Street that morning, living there because he had already sent his wife to Adelaide. As he sheltered in a slit-trench he watched the bombers coming in, and watched the bombs falling *"like soap bubbles"*; this first stick of bombs exploded near the Administrator's residence. The Administrator's personal secretary and typist, Charles See-Kee recorded his impressions of that first raid: *"The Sons of Nippon had a field day strafing at will . . . Government House, the Police*

*Barracks, the Government Offices and other important building were strafed with high explosive bombs”.*

Shortly after 9:50 am, the Abbotts had heard the wailing of the siren followed by the first bomb blast. Eisey and Daisy went for the bomb shelter but Leo warned them away, saying that they would be safer down the cliff. Daisy was adamant that they should shelter under the office, so the three went there together. Hilda Abbott recorded: *“The Administrator raised his eyebrows. “That’s it”, he said. The two half-caste girls, Eisey and Daisy, and Leo, the black boy, came trailing round – “Run!” I called. We went together to our shelter underneath the Administrator’s office, down below the level of the drive about twelve feet. We put the boy and the half-castes behind us, as there was a possible danger from machine-gun bullets”.*

They were quickly joined by Billy and Lucy, and by the two Russians carrying their ready-packed bags and with rucksacks on their backs. This drill, practised at the Administrator’s insistence, was to save their lives. Mrs Abbott continues: *“We had just got into our places when came the most terrific, incalculable noise. Mortar, concrete, grit, fell, bruising and blinding us. The whole structure cracked and moved down over us and the most terrible screams filled the air”.* One of the first to fall was a 1,000-pound bomb which landed immediately adjacent to the office, leaving a great crater some ten metres wide and again as deep. Abbott later recalled, *“Presently I heard the unmistakable sound of a bomb bursting, and the whole structure seemed to rise in the air. I could see the concrete floor above us lift as the reinforced pillars snapped like dry sticks; then it settled down, and there was the crash and rumble of falling masonry and grey dust everywhere”*

As the pillars and concrete roof collapsed in amongst them, the Administrator, Mrs Abbott and their staff crawled and jumped to safety, Hilda Abbott falling into the pineapple bed in so doing. Abbott himself later discovered that he had suffered a perforated ear-drum as a result of the raid. Tom Babun, the Ceylonese gardener, had been working in the garden and had not had time to get to the shelter – he had been lifted bodily into the air by the blast and thrown over the cliff, suffering many cuts, scratches and bruises. Daisy Martin was killed, Eisey was for some time trapped in the rubble before she dug herself out, and Leo Goodman was also caught by falling rubble and had his foot and leg pinned by a concrete slab. Only after exhaustive efforts for over half an hour by Abbott and Nicholas Kampur was young Leo extricated. He later related: *“It was just a little-bit accident. When that half-caste girl, Daisy Martin, was killed I thought I would die too, but I pulled through alright”.*

Abbott’s first appointment on 19 February had been with the Chief Accountant Alex Fyson. When the sirens sounded, Abbott had sent Fyson back to his office across the Esplanade in Administration Headquarters. The bombs which fell about Government House and the Cenotaph, however, threw Fyson to the ground, leaving him badly bruised and shocked. He packed his account books and ledgers and headed for Alice Springs and, amongst the many other evacuees on board the train, was recognised by Mrs Abbott: *“... his head was all tied up and there was blood splashed all over his white clothes. Men only wore white suits in Darwin, and after two nights and glaring hot days on top of lorries they looked indeed a dishevelled lot.*

Fortunately, the strongroom door had swung open and jammed under one corner of the floor, holding it up enough to allow most of those inside to avoid being entombed. The

Administrator later mused, *"When I went through the ruins of the office later I realised that we would have all been crushed under the collapsing concrete floor but for the steel door of a strong-room, which had swung open in the blast and jammed under one corner of the floor, holding it up"*. The office building was destroyed and the Indian Laburnum trees uprooted. The room on one side being used by Abbott's secretary, Charles See-Kee, was completely obliterated. The Crown Law Officer's office at the rear was also no longer. The Administrator's Visitors Book, commenced in April 1937, had sat on the front verandah but was now lost beneath the rubble. It lay there for two months before it was discovered and sent to Alice Springs where the Administrator had established himself. This battered, soiled and water-stained book continued in use both in Alice Springs and in Darwin until after the war.

Charles See-Kee recalls that after the raid finished, Leo Goodman, in a fit of patriotic fervour, had grabbed a rifle from somewhere and was patrolling the grounds of Government House, ready to repel any Japanese who dared to come ashore. For the duration of the raid the survivors sheltered over the edge of the cliff, desperately clinging to the bushes. Mrs Abbott wrote: *"Thankfully, I saw old Billy, the gardener. He and his wife, Lucy, had been in the shelter with us, but now he was in a kind of hollow of the cliff with his knees drawn up to his chin. He was scarcely visible."*

As the Japanese aircraft departed, the Abbotts and their staff moved out into the open to inspect the damage. The Administrator stood near the remains of his office, now all blown over and bending. *"There was rubble all over the lawns – the lawn where I took my peaceful evening strolls, up and down... the Administrator led me to the edge of a crater not two yards from the corner of his office. It was terrific, over thirty feet deep. I drew back from its terrible significance"*. Eley and Leo went back to the shelter and there they saw Daisy Martin's feet protruding from the chaos. Eley later told Judy Friel, her close friend since childhood, that Daisy was at that time clearly dead. By a stroke of luck, young Charles See-Kee had left the Official Secretary's office less than a minute before that section of the building was demolished by the high-explosive bomb. He recalls that he escaped death a second time in the shelter when the strong-room door prevented the concrete floor from crushing everyone beneath it.

Justice Lowe recorded in the report of his Royal Commission that the front of Government House was damaged by the bomb blast but that the rear portion was uninjured. The road to the House was almost impassable due to an accumulation of debris from the blasts. Mrs Abbott later recorded in her personal diary her impressions of the damage to Government House:

*"I went to my room. Dust and grit was over everything. Lumps of mortar were in the suitcases open on my bed. We had sent most of our clothes inland weeks before, but I'd kept this case for necessities should we have to leave in a hurry. Now I didn't seem at all interested in what I took – nor did it seem to matter what had happened to the house – the house we'd grown so fond of in all our five years there and had spent so much of our energies in improving. "It makes you feel how little all this matters", my husband had said as we had come up to the verandah after the raid. I looked into all the rooms. The beautiful high ceilings had panels hanging – riddled with bullets. Every room had been shot thro' and thro'. In the drawing room the hanging lamps were down, but the flowers in the vases quite*

*undisturbed. The dining room lamps were smashed to atoms. In the top bathroom the ceiling was piled in bits on the floor. Great gapes yawned up to the rafters.*

*Our kitchen ceiling was also shot through and all the big clear windows broken. Outside the door in two well-packed rolls was the new linoleum just up from Sydney, and a case I had painstakingly packed with my daughter's treasures. It had been booked to go by the Zealandia – but even that didn't seem to matter a bit. The overhead tank was pouring down floods of water. Mrs Kampur and I looked at each other. "We'll go now", I said and we walked thro' to the other side of the house and out towards the gate. I had on a two piece zephyr frock and a panama hat, but, for the first time in my life, I went out without my gloves! I saw the car ready about a hundred yards along from the gate. It stood between the garden fence from which the bougainvillea had been entirely blasted and the edge of a bomb crater that stretched to very near the monument of the Returned Soldiers' Memorial".*

After one false alarm, the alert sounded again, at 11:58 am, and they once again scrambled for the cliffs as the ground shook with the thud of bombs, although this time they were some distance away, out near the aerodrome. Various strange men joined them as they sought refuge in a big hole where the bamboos grew. One man gave Mrs Abbott his steel helmet. Mrs Abbott recorded the incident later: *"Is there any whiskey in your house?" the tall man asked me. "A drink would settle your nerves". I told him where it was in the cellar, but said I did not want anyone to go back to the house. When we had struggled to the top of the hill again, and I was panting from all this very unusual exercise, on my part, there was the man carrying a bottle of champagne, a bottle of Italian vermouth and a bottle of sherry. He had three glasses and a bath-towel! He was sorry he could not find the whiskey – it had been a bit dark in the cellar. We all had some champagne and I set off with my strange party for the long drive to the Centre of Australia"*

Abbott dispatched his wife and their staff for Alice Springs after that raid, but the Administrator himself stayed in town until 2 March 1942 when he was satisfied that he had done all that he could. The House was then occupied by the Navy for the remainder of the war. On preparing to leave Darwin, Mrs Abbott noticed that the bougainvillea had been torn off the front fence by a blast which left an enormous crater stretching to near the Cenotaph. The roadway was completely obliterated by debris. The garage was completely demolished, but the car was largely left intact; this was the Abbotts' Buick, which Mrs Abbott described as, *"our famous "Desert Car" that held such comfortable quantities of petrol and water for our long inland journeys. It appeared to have its nose blown off". "The Vauxhall was still whole – waiting by the steps, but a large stone sat on its top and there no trace of its highly polished Navy blue. Bits of gravel and mortar and grit entirely shrouded it"*.

Departing at about mid-day, Mrs Abbott drove the battered Vauxhall, Mrs Kampur beside her and Elsey and Leo in the back. They were accompanied by Constable Syd Bowie who, together with Mr Kampur, followed behind them in the Buick. Despite an undercurrent making her feel like driving faster, Mrs Abbott maintained a steady speed of 65 kilometres per hour. They stopped for water for the radiator at an Army survey camp some 50 kilometres out of town, and enjoyed a drink of tea and a slice of corn-beef on bread and butter. Pressing on, they reached Mt Bundy Station near Adelaide River and there they spent the night in a dug-out in the bank of the river underneath a bamboo clump, awakening at 4 am. Mrs Abbott, Mrs Kampur, Elsey and Leo caught the train together with eight nuns and 55 part-Aboriginal children from Melville Island, and a number of other prominent



citizens of Darwin. Among them were the Bishop of Darwin, the Right Reverend Francis Xavier Gsell, and Mrs Herbert of Koolpinyah Station, the widow of Charles Edward Herbert who had been Government Resident in Darwin from 1905 to 1910.

At 9 o'clock on the morning of 21 February the train drew in to Larrimah at the end of the military line and there they awaited the convoy which would carry them to the next railhead. At 2.30 that afternoon a long train came in, with the Administrator's cars on board. At the aid post meanwhile, the doctor dressed the wounds of those that needed attention. Leo's leg was by this time very swollen and this was bound firmly by the doctor. The raw places on Elsey and Mrs Kampur were also dressed. At about 4.30 the party set off again in their cars. Mrs Abbott driving the Vauxhall and Constable Bowie in the Buick.

The lights of the Buick had been shattered, so Bowie was required to drive close behind the Vauxhall at night, and each night they drove until 11 o'clock. They spent their nights on the roadside, on vast open plains under the stars. Mrs Abbott's diary records one night: *"The faithful Leo had brought his swag – a Chinese mattress, a blanket, a pillow and a mosquito net. No place for colour prejudice this. He handed them over with the grace of an Assyrian King, and they were divided among us as far as they would go"*. As the sun set on February 23rd, they drove through the ranges, pulling in to the Residency in Alice Springs at 7 o'clock. Their evacuation was complete, although it would be some time before Mrs Abbott would be reunited with her husband.

One member of the Administrator's staff not present at Government House that day of the raid was Sam Kundook and his wife Silver, both full-blooded Larrakia Aborigines. In his Annual Report for 1942-43, Aubrey Abbott outlined the exploits of Sam and Silver: *Sam is a native of the Larrakeyah tribe and had been employed for a number of years. It so happened that when the first fierce raid on Darwin was made by the Japanese on the 19th February, 1942, Sam was on his walkabout with his lubra, near Cape Don at the top of the Coburg Peninsula. There was no local shipping so he decided to walk back.*

*The rainy season was at its height, rivers were flooded, swamps spread out for many miles. Nevertheless, with his lubra, Silver, he made progress and eventually got to the Oenpelli Mission. He rested there for some days and then set off again. As far as can be ascertained, the pair skirted the edge of the Arnhem Land Reserve and came round the head of Deaf Adder Creek. They then turned west or "into sundown". A great misfortune then befell them as Sam became almost blind. Nevertheless, they kept on going and the lubra led Sam at the end of a long stick. They swam flooded rivers, she fished and killed for him, and eventually they came out south of the Adelaide River Railway Station where Sam sent word to me that he was ready to start work"*.

Truly a remarkable story of devotion by both parties, one to his employer and the other to her spouse. Their expedition totalled well over 640 kilometres, after which they were transported to Alice Springs to be reunited with the Abbotts and the other staff. By March 1944, Sam had almost fully recovered his eyesight.

Charles See-Kee did not leave Darwin until April, remaining behind to act as a volunteer Air Raid Warden. The Air Raids Precautions (ARP) Headquarters was established on the afternoon of 19 February in the Lands & Survey Office on Cavenagh Street. See-Kee worked tirelessly, as did the others, during subsequent raids, not leaving until just after mid-day on 5 April, on the last truck of the last civilian convoy of vehicles, while the town was

experiencing its thirteenth raid. He received the following testimonial from Judge Wells: *“The Bearer, Mr C T See-Kee, is one of the voluntary ARP Wardens who came together to undertake the care and control of the civil population of the town of Darwin after the big Japanese air raids on the 19 February 1942. He has been an active member of the organisation ever since, going through a succession of twelve heavy raids, and like all the other members of the organisation, has rendered services of inestimable value. The community owes him a heavy debt of gratitude”*.

He recalls four particular incidents from the period January to April 1942 which span a range of emotions. Firstly the raid on the 19th when, in the shelter beneath the Administrator’s office, they were shocked by the blast from the anti-aircraft guns on Darwin oval. They were all scared and said nothing; Daisy Martin was especially scared, he recalled, and Charles sat beside her to reassure her. Secondly, on the day he was leaving Darwin, for the first time the genuine fear that he would be killed. Through the dozen raids until then, as bombs fell about they only seemed to fall on the ‘safe’ areas where the ARP Wardens had collected people for their safety. Now he too was collected into a ‘safe’ area for his safety and this concerned him greatly. The third incident he recalls as being rather ironic, that after the bombings an American serviceman should see him at a Church and, after all he had been doing for the citizens of Darwin as an ARP Warden, he should be accused of being a Japanese! Finally, he recalls the vision of an Army section going to the Convent School, under orders to round up the Japanese children to intern them, standing outside the school grounds and fixing bayonets.

On the afternoon of the 19th at about 2:30 pm, Abbott returned to Government House to find that the cellar doors had been forced. He said to the subsequent Royal Commission: *“I knew there was a large quantity of liquor there, and I took steps to remove it so that it would not fall into any hands of men or civilians or soldiers on whom it would have a bad effect – it was mostly wine”*. At this time, Abbott directed Police Superintendent Stretton to send some police constables and a Sergeant to Government House. It is apparent that there were two main tasks set by Abbott – the removal of liquor and the removal of Government property (glassware, silverware and crockery). As occurred throughout Darwin, uninvited visitors turned their attentions to various items in the House and, during the subsequent days, Government House was practically stripped bare. After Abbott returned from Adelaide River on the 23rd, he found that the House had been looted and that, in particular, a number of electric fans had been stolen.

Another incident was widely reported ... A certain administrative Sergeant had been a Major in the British Army during World War 1 and during that war had earned the Military Cross for bravery in action. He and two other Sergeants obtained leave passes for the night of the 19th and, knowing that the Administrator would be dining with Major General Blake at Flagstaff House, decided that they would dine at the deserted Government House. They convinced the Lieutenant commanding the picket that they had an appointment and asked that he escort them lest a jittery guard shoot at them in the darkness. Although the House was in darkness and with water pipes burst, the three uniformed and be-medalled Sergeants set about preparing for their repast. Rolled newspapers served as torches, with the curtains drawn to observe blackout regulations. They dined at the long dining table, fully set with silverware and crystal, on cold chicken and salad accompanied by a generous selection of wines. They toasted the King, washed and replaced the crockery and cutlery, and departed by the front door.

The sole death in the grounds of Government House that day, of Miss Daisy Martin, was another circumstance to draw some controversy after the event. Daisy was aged 18 at the time of the raid, and she sheltered with the Abbotts and most of the other staff under the Administrator's Office, although she was not as fortunate as the rest. Abbott later recorded her fate: *"The office walls and floor were blown in and a huge block of concrete fell on the little half-caste girl, Daisy, burying her from the head to the waist and killing her instantly"*.

Mrs Abbott recorded that as she realised the office had been hit by a bomb and that the concrete roof was about to fall, she screamed, *"it's coming down!"*. She continued: *"I crawled up the bank a little and called "Elsey, Elsey, where are you all?" and to my relief she came to my side... The Administrator came, carrying a crowbar, and went back round the building. "Daisy is killed", he told me. "I must get Leo out. He's caught under some masonry". "The ants all here", Elsey kept saying in an ill-used voice. I had not been able to see her under that falling building and now found she had been buried in rubble and stones, but had fiercely fought her way out. She is a regal person. "Lie flat", I said. "Never mind them". Stones were falling all round us, shrapnel spattering up the ground, showers of gravel coming down. Her forehead was cut, and blood streaming all over her face. Later, while the others were over the edge of the cliff hiding from the machine-guns, the Administrator and Mr Kampur finally released Leo and the threesome then joined the rest.*

Daisy Martin, like so many others that day, was buried in a temporary grave at Kahlin Beach on 20 February 1942. Her body was later exhumed and reburied at Berrimah War Cemetery on 30 June 1942, grave BA15100. After the war, the Army Graves Service took responsibility for the various civil and military grave sites around Darwin and transferred the bodies to what became the Adelaide River War Cemetery, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission assuming control of the Cemetery in 1947. It is here that the body of Daisy Martin now rests, in a section set aside for the civilian casualties of the war. A plaque in her honour was erected in the grounds of Government House in the late 1970s at the request of the then Administrator, Mr John England ED, near the spot where she was killed on 19 February 1942.

Another aspect of the events of that day, Thursday 19 February 1942, to provoke unwarranted criticism of the Administrator, was the matter of the Australian flag flying at Government House. After withdrawing from the shelter, Mrs Abbott and her staff crawled over the lawn to the zinnia bed where they lay under some frangipani trees near the edge of the cliff. In her diary, Mrs Abbott later recorded: *"Terrible crackling and roaring overhead. Kampur threw himself across my head and shoulders. Bullets fell all round, hitting the low wall in front of us"*.

The harbour was by now an inferno, orange flashes piercing the acrid black smoke while bomb blasts and the incessant screams of the 'Val' and 'Kate' bombers created a deafening cacophony. The prominence of Government House made it a certain landmark for the Japanese pilots. Aubrey Abbott later wrote: *"The Australian blue ensign was flying from the flagstaff on the lawn in front of Government House. This appeared to be most irritating to the Japanese airmen and they fired at it continuously. However, it continued to fly and later on in the day it occurred to me that this was the first Australian flag damaged by enemy action on Australian soil, and that it had historical significance"*

After the raids, another flag was found in the Government Offices and this was raised at the flagstaff in place of the rather tattered flag which was found to be riddled with bullet holes – the large white star on the fly had been completely shot out. The flag was sent to Alice Springs with a quantity of Government property. When Abbott himself arrived in Alice Springs, he sent his wife out of the Territory for a few weeks rest. She took the flag with her and on 16 March 1942 presented it to the Minister for the Interior, Senator the Honourable Joseph S Collings.

The flag has since that time been preserved in the collection of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. It was removed from the collection when V-E Day was celebrated in May 1945 and was flown behind the Governor-General, the Duke of Gloucester. On this occasion, it was in honourable company, flying in association with the flag flown by HMAS *Sydney* when she sank the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in the Mediterranean Sea, and the Australian flag which had flown at Villers-Brettoneux during World War 1. The flag returned to Darwin for the commemorative service held in February 1988, and was again displayed in Darwin for the Northern Territory's 50th Anniversary Commemorative Year in 1992.

After the bombings had stopped, the Administrator and Mrs Abbott began to assess the damage. Buried beneath the rubble was the Abbott's Address Book – actually a Visitors Book containing the names of all who had called on the Administrator at Government House. This particular Visitors Book had been commenced on 26 April 1937, a month after Abbott took up his office, with entries by officers of HMAS *Moresby*. There follow some historic signatures – Jessie Litchfield, the 'Flying Doctor' Clyde Fenton, the Bishop of Carpentaria, Lieutenant-Commander John Walker RAN who commanded HMAS *Parramatta* when she was sunk off Tobruk, Lieutenant-Commander D A Menlove, who was later decorated for his service as Commanding Officer of HMAS *Deloraine* when she sank a Japanese submarine with depth charges off Bathurst Island on 23 January 1942, just two weeks after his visit to Government House.

The Visitors Book has traditionally served two functions. It has given citizens the opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown, while it is also a means whereby people who have been entertained at Government House may express their appreciation of that hospitality while, up to this time, it also served as a register by which the citizens of Darwin could advise the Administrator of their departure from town or their return. In such a way, it has become a historical record of local, national and international identities from all levels of society, containing the signatures of prominent persons as well as those of people who may subsequently attain prominence.

Only three signatures appear in the book for the week commencing Monday 16 February 1942. The last visitor to Government House was Mrs J Scott-Young, the wife of an Artillery Lieutenant Colonel, who called on the Administrator on the afternoon of Wednesday February 18th. Hers was the last entry in the book before it lay undiscovered for two months beneath the rubble of what had been the Administrator's office. It was sent to Alice Springs after it was found, but the next entry was not made until 1 June 1942 when the Administrator was visited by Mr Allan W Dawes, a War Correspondent. He wrote of his visit for the *Telegraph*: "*Somewhere in Australia: On Sunday night I added my name to a collection of autographs, probably unique in world – the official visitors' book of the Administrator's residence, Darwin*". He continued to report: "*Insofar as names make history, it is an*

*historical document of first importance. All the men who have successively contributed to Darwin's defences have recorded their names, and Australians leaving the country on national missions".*

Air history is also recorded in the pages of the book, Darwin being an important point of call for aviators arriving or departing. Among the famous signatures in this particular book are Julius H Barr (pilot to Chiang Kai Shek), Jean Batten and those of aviatrix Amelia Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan. Another interesting entry is Sub-Lieutenant Zelman Cowen RANVR of HMAS *Melville*, one of two Naval shore stations in Darwin during the war. Cowen visited Government House on 11 November 1941, and again fifty years later as a distinguished guest for the Commemorative Year, having risen to the position of Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia in the intervening years. Having served in Darwin from early October 1941 to May 1942 on the staff of the Naval Officer in Charge Captain E P Thomas, and with a distinguished post-war career, Sir Zelman was seen to be uniquely qualified to be the sole speaker at the main Commemoration Service on 19 February 1992.

Abbott's first visitors after the raid included the Government Secretary Mr Leslie Giles, who had been wounded in the raid and still had blood dripping from his forearm. Next was the Army commander, Major General Blake; Mrs Abbott recorded his visit in her diary: *"As we turned, General Blake and his ADC appeared. He said "Good morning" with a slight tone of surprise, I thought. "Hullo", I replied. We walked along rather quietly. The general look of desolation all round us seemed to cramp our usual flow of merry conversation! The front of the house was all skew-whiff and the crotons in stone jars were blown over. "Not too good, all this", I volunteered"*.

Aubrey Abbott dined with Major General Blake at Flagstaff House on the night of the 19th, staying the night for there was no water or electricity at Government House. He recorded the tone of the conversation that night: *"There was little information available, but the position in the Netherlands East Indies was deteriorating. We thought it probable that Darwin would be raided again the next day and that the raids could well be the forerunner to invasion. General Blake told me that he intended to move his forces out to their battle positions in the next forty-eight hours, and that the only troops left round Darwin would be in the fortress area. He said that it had been agreed that the few naval detachments in Darwin were to put up a "nuisance" resistance, but that Darwin could not be defended"*.

On the afternoon of the 19th, after the raids, Abbott had set up a temporary office in the Police Headquarters, and to this he returned on the morning on the 20th, to take charge of rescue operations and the evacuation of Darwin. Information that a strong Japanese force under naval escort was steaming towards Koepang prompted Blake to hurry his force's deployment to 'the Narrows'. Abbott and Blake decided to await further developments before committing themselves to a course of action. False alarms through the day added to the mounting tension.

That afternoon, Abbott returned to Government House and realised that the quantities of glassware, crystal and silver should be rescued, both because of their value and to discourage looters. The next day, under the direction of Sergeant Littlejohn, the valuables were packed, together with all the cipher and code books, and sent to Alice Springs. Major General Blake advised Abbott that with effect from Saturday 21 February, the whole area of

Darwin would be under emergency military control and that Blake would be in command. On 21 February, Abbott was required to visit Adelaide River, at the request of Major General Blake, to help clear the area of some 500 civilian refugees. To give the Administrator free passage, Blake wrote out a pass on Australian Military Forces letterhead: *“Pass the Administrator of the Northern Territory through military lines and areas & render assistance if necessary. Signature hereunder”*.

Abbott himself returned on the 23rd and established his office in the Lands & Survey Office; Abbott remained in Darwin upon his return from Adelaide River, despite it then being under military control, until 2 March 1942 when he was satisfied he had done all he could. The Administrator and Mrs Abbott remained in Alice Springs for the duration of the war, occupying the Residency until November 1945. The Residency was the former home of Central Australian Government Residents Cawood and Carrington during the period that the Territory was divided, although in the years since, Carrington had occupied it as District Officer for Alice Springs.

The Abbotts returned to the ruins of Government House late in 1945. Mrs Abbott later wrote of her impressions of the House upon their return: *“Although my husband and I left the house fully furnished as it had been during our residence there, when we returned to it the only furniture was a tall wardrobe in the front guest room (now the Queen’s Bedroom) and it had the drawer at the bottom gone. The rooms were bare – the house had been occupied by the Navy, and there were fifty-three large nails hammered into the drawing room walls. I understand they had been put there for hanging hats on– I presume caps in those days. It was all very bitter and sad”*.

Mrs Abbott then re-furnished the House but, as furniture of any type was scarce, she had to look far and wide for anything suitable. She searched the warehouses and shops of Sydney, finally finding in an old cellar the handsome Queensland red cedar furniture which she eventually bought for the dining room. Mrs Abbott recalled that they gave many distinguished parties, and described one particular post-war function held in the dining room in April 1946: *“... we gave Lord Louis Mountbatten breakfast, and there were twenty-seven people there – and young Lord Brabourne – (later Lord Louis’ son-in-law) would keep on eating Cornflakes, and the long sideboard was loaded with every luscious tropic fruit!”*. The Abbotts continued the tradition started by Dr Gilruth of having the Government House, Darwin crest (GHD) embossed on the glassware and engraved on the cutlery, all with the Tudor or King’s Crown, while the crockery bore the coat of arms of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Dismissed by ordinary letter, Abbott took sick leave and he and his wife left Darwin by aircraft on 26 May 1946, farewelled only by old friends Reg and Millie Leydin. The Government Secretary, Mr Leslie Giles, acted as Administrator from 27 May until the official expiration of Abbott’s term on 30 June 1946. Born in 1888, Leslie Giles was a son of the pastoralist Alfred Giles (1846-1931), who had worked on the Overland Telegraph Line and then managed the Springvale property near Katherine for Dr William John Browne of Adelaide. He had served in Darwin before World War 2 as Government Secretary and was wounded in the forearm by a shell splinter on 19 February 1942, having just returned from extended leave the day before. Giles continued to serve as Government Secretary after the war, retiring in 1947. The Abbotts settled on ‘Murrulla’ at Wingen, NSW, and Aubrey Abbott died at Darling Point on 30 April 1975.

## A R Driver, 5th Administrator

Mr Arthur Robert ('Mick') Driver, took office on 1 July 1946. Born on 25 November 1909 in Albany, Western Australia, Driver was educated at Hale School in Perth and graduated in civil engineering from the University of Western Australia. He served in the Australian Imperial Force during World War 2, notably with the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion in the Northern Territory, 1941-42, and as Brigade-Major of the 23rd Australian Infantry Brigade which had seen service in Darwin during 1942. He was later a General Staff Officer Grade 2 (Operations) at Advanced Land Headquarters, AIF, and was Mentioned-in-Despatches for his service in New Guinea. His pre-war employment as a civil engineer, with the Power and Water Department of the WA Government from 1928 to 1940, would prove to be invaluable in the Northern Territory.

Abbott had pressed for the formation of a Legislative Council, but it was not until 1947 that amendments were made to the *Northern Territory (Administration) Act* to create such a council. Driver was the first President of the Northern Territory Legislative Council, which comprised seven senior public servants and six elected members, while Deric Thompson was the first Clerk of the Council. Driver held deliberative and casting votes, and the power to refuse assent to ordinances passed, while the Federal Government retained the power of veto (the Council was superseded by a fully elected Legislative Assembly in 1974). Driver is recalled as the only Administrator to actively participate in proceedings, join in debate and to vote.

Mr and Mrs Driver hosted visits to Darwin by Field Marshal Lord Montgomery of Alamein and His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, but they received their most surprising visitor soon after moving in to Government House. A twelve year old orphaned boy named Barabas (Bas) Wie, who had been born on the island of Sabu near Timor, stowed away in the wheel nacelle of a Dutch Dakota DC-3 flying from Koepang in West Timor to Darwin. The boy was unconscious when the aircraft arrived in Darwin three hours later, burned by the friction of the wheels when they were retracted after take-off, and then nearly frozen to death in flight. There then followed a national appeal to allow him to stay in Australia and he was placed in the care of the Administrator. He resided at Government House with the Drivers for the next five years.

The Governor-General of Australia, the Right Honourable William McKell KC, and Miss Betty McKell visited Government House on 15 July 1948, accompanied by His Excellency's Aide-de-Camp, Lieutenant Dacre Smyth ADC RAN. Dacre Smyth's most significant recollection of Government House in 1948 was "... of spending a few pleasant days there in the midst of a busy tour of Queensland and the Territory. Mr McKell, despite the heat, still wore a dark suit and a homburg hat". In comparison, Smyth wore Naval Whites, medals and aiguillettes; so impressive did he look that a small Darwin schoolgirl insisted, despite his gesticulations, on thrusting the posy meant for His Excellency into Smyth's hands.

The Government Secretary Reg Leydin had served in the RAAF in Australia and New Guinea during World War 2 and after the war returned as Chairman of the Darwin Advisory Town Planning Committee; in 1948, he was required to act in the capacity of Administrator. In his Annual Report, Driver said of him: "*I must congratulate Mr R S Leydin, the Government Secretary, on his loyalty, diligence and devotion to duty whilst he was Acting Administrator during my absence on leave from September to December, 1948. Mr Leydin*

*carried out his duties in an excellent manner, and I cannot speak too highly of his control of the Branches and the soundness of his decisions”.*

During these immediate post-war years, a number of staff were provided by the Commonwealth Employment Service at Bonegilla, displaced persons from Europe seeking employment and a new life. Born in Austria, Maria Kaplan was a survivor of the war who met her future husband Antonin Halir in Czechoslovakia in 1947. They made their individual ways to Australia, Maria arriving on 17 November 1948 and Antonin on 24 December. By April 1949, the Commonwealth Employment Service had sent Antonin to Darwin to work as a cook at the QANTAS Hostel at Berrimah, while Maria had been sent to Tasmania. After some urging by Antonin, Maria’s transfer was approved and she arrived in Darwin in November 1949 – coincidentally, on the same aircraft with Mr Driver and his new wife Marjorie (Mardi), returning from their honeymoon.

On her arrival in Darwin, Maria (‘Mitzi’) Kaplan was introduced to the Manager of the QANTAS Hostel, who knew the new Mrs Driver and introduced Mitzi to her. Soon after this, Mitzi commenced employment at Government House as cook. She lived in the staff quarters at the back of the house, in a comfortable room with her own bathroom and shower, and earned £11 per week, less £1 for board. She was assisted in the kitchen by a number of young part-Aboriginal boys, who also served at the dining table. On 26 November 1949, she married Antonin, although Mrs Driver continued to refer to her as Miss Kaplan.

Miss Joy Miller, originally from Scotland, had been recruited from Adelaide during 1949 to be Mrs Driver’s secretary, on a salary of £9 per week less £1 for board. Also living-in was Samuel, the laundry-boy, who earned £4 per week less £1 for board. Mrs Kefford, the laundress, earned £6 per week and did not live in, while the other laundry-boys received thirty shillings per week and also found their own accommodation. Charlie Talbot, a part-Aboriginal of Larrakia descent, was employed by Parks and Gardens as the Head Gardener at Government House until his retirement in 1961, and among the staff was Herbie Butler, son of Charlie Talbot’s successor as Head Gardener.

In 1949, the Acting Superintendent of Police had advised that, strictly according to instructions, the Administrator’s official car should have Commonwealth ‘C’ plates which did not require registration fees. Driver wrote: *“I do desire that no’s 1 & 2 be retained on the cars. I do not see why financial adjustment is necessary. If the previous Administrator requested his vehicles retain the no’s 1 & 2 and it has been carried out for 11 years I can’t see why any change should now occur. If the Supt of Police entered in the Motor Vehicles Register the understanding that the registration fees are not required, surely that is sufficient”.* The Acting Superintendent so entered the vehicles in the register and thus, since 1938, the Administrator’s two official cars have continued to be known as NT1 and NT2, although NT1 actually dates back to the early 1930s.

On the southern and south western extremities of the grounds there was some considerable area shared with the Navy, particularly along the southern area where there were a number of Navy flats. In addition, there was a pathway and steps leading from the driveway, which ran along the eastern side of the House, down towards the Navy’s Boom Wharf flats on the Boom Wharf Road. Alongside this pathway, on the southern, seaward slope behind Government House, was the chauffeur’s cottage which was vacant at this time. Driver lamented about his inability to find a driver: *“It appears to be impossible that I shall ever get*



*a married employee to work at Government House, and there does not seem any point in employing a chauffeur at the present time.”*

Consequently, in early 1951 when Leading Seaman G W Connor applied, through the Naval Officer in Charge, to occupy the cottage, his application was looked upon favourably by the Administrator. The rather run-down building was refurbished and Connor was permitted to occupy it, paying only the costs of his electricity. Within a few years however, Mr Danks was employed as Handyman/Chauffeur. He had married Lindy Roman, a housemaid during the term of Colonel Weddell, and they now occupied the cottage, Lindy Danks being employed as laundress. By 1957, however, the Director of Works reported that the cottage, little more than a lean-to, was 90% destroyed by white-ants and that several large palms in its vicinity had more than half of their trunks at ground level eaten away. They and the cottage were accordingly demolished and burned.

Driver resigned with effect from 30 June 1951, and was the Chief Australian Migration Officer in Italy and then Central-Northern Europe, being appointed Chief of the Department of Operations for the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration in Geneva in 1956. He returned to Australia and briefly resumed engineering work, before taking up directorship of the Resources Development Branch of the Victorian Employers' Federation (1963-70). He was Managing Director of Communicator PR in Queensland and of Mirrabooka Rural Resources Pty Ltd from 1970, and died in Buderim, Queensland after a long illness on 18 May 1981.



## **R S Leydin, Acting as Administrator**

In 1950, Leydin had been commissioned to report upon the future of civic administration in Darwin, his report recommending the establishment of local self government authorities at Darwin and Alice Springs not later than 1 July 1953. He again found himself the senior Government officer in the Northern Territory in 1951 upon the departure of Mr Driver. On 2 July, during the interim period before the arrival of the new Administrator, Leydin and his wife Millie occupied Government House to prepare it for the impending visit by the Governor of South Australia and Lady Norrie in July and, after that, for occupation by Mr Driver's successor.

Leydin was appointed by the Governor-General in Council "*to act as Administrator*" during the absence of the Administrator on and from 16 July 1951. While he carried out the functions of the office there soon arose some discrepancy over the title he should use – because he had been appointed to act **as** Administrator, he signed documents as *Administrator*, correctly interpreting that he had not been appointed *Acting Administrator*. He was eventually authorised to use the title Acting Administrator as a convenient means of expressing "*that he promulgates the document by virtue of his authority to act as Administrator*".

Leydin again came to prominence during the absence from the Territory of the Administrator in April 1954 when Government House unexpectedly hosted a unique house-guest. When

Vladimir Petrov, Third Secretary and Security Representative at the Russian Embassy in Canberra, went into hiding in early April 1954, his wife, also an embassy official, was recalled to the USSR. Embassy Second Secretary Mr Kislitsin took Mrs Evdokia Petrov on board the BOAC Constellation 'Galak Brentford' which departed for Moscow via Darwin. Prime Minister Menzies, meanwhile, issued an offer of asylum and contacted Territory authorities. At 5.15 am on Tuesday 20 April, the aircraft arrived in Darwin to refuel and was met by the Acting Administrator Mr Reg Leydin, the Crown Law Officer, the Police Superintendent and some sixteen men and two security officers. The KGB escorts Karpinsky and Zharkov were disarmed by NT Police Superintendent Littlejohn and Sergeant Greg Ryall as they came off the plane. Leydin had been directed to ascertain whether Mrs Petrov wished to remain in Australia, which question he put to her in the privacy of an airport office. Fearing that she would be blamed and punished for her husband's defection, Mrs Petrov chose to seek political asylum and remain in Australia. She was taken to Government House and given temporary sanctuary there for two days, dining with the Leydins, and was later reunited with her husband.

Reg Leydin was the longest serving public servant in the NT, for which he was listed as one of '200 Remarkable Territorians' by the Australian Bicentennial Authority NT Council in 1988. While he was never officially appointed Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory, Reg Leydin did eventually attain quasi-vice-regal status in his own right, firstly as Administrator of Nauru (1954-58, and again in 1962-66) and as the eleventh Administrator of Norfolk Island (1958-62).



## **F J S Wise, 6th Administrator**

Driver's successor was the Honourable Frank Joseph Scott Wise, who was appointed Administrator and Chief of Police on 1 July 1951. Born at Ipswich, Queensland on 30 May 1897, Wise had received his education at Queensland State School and Gatton Agricultural College, following which he worked as a farm hand at Roma State Farm, as a Field Officer and Assistant Agricultural Instructor, as a Commonwealth Agricultural Advisor in Western Australia and then as an advisor in tropical agriculture for the WA Agriculture Department.

He was elected as the ALP Member for Gascoyne in the WA Legislative Assembly in 1933, and held the portfolios of Agriculture, Education, Police and the North West (1935-39) and Lands and Agriculture (1939-45), while from 1945 to 1947 he was Premier and Treasurer of Western Australia. He held the notable appointment of Chairman of the Federal Commission for Post-War Rural Reconstruction and was then, with Sir Thomas Playford, the Australian representative at the final British Empire Conference in London in 1948.

Upon his arrival in Darwin, Mr Wise found the town suffering from a significant lack of reconstruction – Sir Paul Hasluck later recalled that Darwin was still an untidy town because the rubbish of war had not yet been totally cleared from the Esplanade, Doctors' Gully or the harbour, and none of the war-scarred buildings in town had been repaired. Further, he related: *"The skyline of Darwin was dominated by the vandalised bulk of the meatworks which had been started but not completed by Vestey's before the war and extensively*

*vandalised during the war. Both electricity and water supply for the town were inadequate. Government House, the Administrator's residence, was untidy. Wise started to change all this."*

In particular, Sir Paul said of Wise: *"In my estimation, Wise had a triple achievement. The first was that he gave the people of the Territory a better conceit of themselves. The second was that he set them an example of normalcy. The third was that during his term numerous material improvements were either completed or inaugurated .....As President of the Legislative Council Wise elevated local politics to share in parliamentary traditions"*

Mr and Mrs Wise ordered some major renovations to Government House, particularly following a large earth tremor which left the roof leaking badly. Following a survey by the Deputy Director of Health in 1951, Mr Wise directed that all measures were to be taken to minimise the breeding of mosquitos within the grounds of Government House. All water and septic tanks were to be made mosquito-proof, and the ornamental pond in the front garden near the Esplanade fence was stocked with fish which would eat any larvae. The fishpond was used in this manner until the Notts used it as a flower bed, complete with flamingo and large bullfrog, while in the late 1960s the Deans had it filled in and converted to an ornamental garden bed.

There had been considerable difficulty in rendering the roof watertight prior to 1950, while matters were made worse by severe cracking of the internal walls following the sharp earth tremor in that year. During each of the three following Wet Seasons, the interior of the House became increasingly damaged by the often substantial leakages which the Department of Works' artisans fought valiantly but unsuccessfully to stem. During the rains of 1952/53 in particular, valuable furnishings and artworks had to be specially protected, and Mr Wise was becoming increasingly of the opinion that the entire structure faced the risk of irreparable damage. This was verified by the Director of Works and the Principal Architect who advised, during the first week of January 1953, that unless the building was re-roofed completely the inner walls would be weakened by water penetration and that the entire roof could be removed by a strong gust of wind.

Accordingly, in June 1953, approval was given for the expenditure of £4,250 to have Government House, including the verandahs, completely re-roofed – in contrast to the earlier quote of £2,000 by the Architect of the Department in 1951. While this was being done it was realised that the cypress pine principal rafters and transverse purlins had become overstressed with age and were now brittle and dangerous, so they were replaced with hardwood principals and purlins. The House was also completely rewired electrically at this time. Mr Wise considered that, with the necessary re-roofing and normal attention to maintenance, Government House could continue to serve as the Administrator's residence for at least another twenty years. Nevertheless, he recommended to the Secretary of the Department of Territories in Canberra that there be no abandonment of the suggestion that a new House be erected on Myilly Point.

A town plan, created by the Northern Territory Department of Works and Housing at the end of the war as the basis for the post-war development of Darwin, was approved by Cabinet on 18 January 1946. Plan CD855, entitled Zoning Plan and Land Use Plan, shows that Myilly Point was set aside as the future Government House Reserve. This area was

occupied at that time however by Flagstaff House, the residence of the Commander of the 7th Military District, although it was not a proclaimed defence reserve.

The Administrator and Mrs Wise received a letter from Mrs Hilda Abbott in December 1954, offering her services as an interior designer. It would seem that Mrs Abbott so enjoyed the re-decorating of Government House both on arrival in 1937 and nearly a decade later upon return from their war-time exile in Alice Springs that she afterwards went into business. One of her most recent accomplishments was Government House in Australia's Pacific territory of Nauru, where her old friend Reg Leydin was now Administrator. Mr Wise regrettably had to decline the offer however, for Mrs Wise had already well taken care of Government House Darwin.

In February 1955, new end-gable louvres were installed and fitted, while at the same time the leaking roof over the kitchen was repaired and the whole House received treatment against white-ants. Mr Wise went on an overseas tour for six months during 1955 and was relieved during his absence by Mr James Clarence Archer, a Commonwealth Public Servant since November 1916 and then Deputy Secretary of the post-war Department of Territories. In this case, as had been the situation with Holtze, Evans, Giles and Leydin, Archer was not an Acting Administrator, but rather, he acted by virtue of his official Government position. Similarly, subsequent post war Government officials, including Marsh, Atkins and Dwyer, were empowered to act as Administrator by virtue of their seniority in the public service. Archer would later return as an occupant of Government House, as Administrator in his own right, on 1 July 1956.

In 1955, Roy and Ella Blomfield were Manager and Manageress of the MacRobertson-Miller Airlines hostel in Derby, WA and were looking for a change in climate. They arrived in Darwin on a Friday afternoon and checked in at the Victoria Hotel, and on the Monday morning were stopped in Smith Street by an Administration official and asked if they were looking for work – the Administrator's driver and laundress had just walked out and there was a vacancy for a married couple. After an 11.00 am interview with His Honour on the western verandah of Government House, Mr Wise told Mr Blomfield to take the Holden and collect their luggage, he wanted them to move in by 4.00 pm. Roy Blomfield served through Mr Wise's term as his driver, while his wife Ella was the cook. They lived on the grounds, in the old chauffeur's cottage on the southern, seaward slope behind Government House, towards the Navy's Boom Wharf flats, with two mosquito-netted single beds as furniture. Mr Wise had three official cars, with registration plates bearing the numbers 1, 2 and 3. His Oldsmobile was replaced by a black Humber, with black trim inside, as NT1 and a biscuit-coloured Ford Mainline as NT2, while NT3 was a light green snub-nosed EF Holden, one of the first models in Australia.

Following the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the Government House, Darwin crest was changed to have the GHD surmounted by the St Edward's Crown. The crockery bearing the coat of arms of the Commonwealth of Australia continued to be used until 1978 when it was replaced with the crest of the self-governing Northern Territory. During luncheons and dinners, Blomfield recalled, guests would be amazed that certain actions by the staff would take place on cue, without a word or gesture from Mrs Wise. They did not know of Mrs Wise's 'secret button' under the table which sent an electrical pulse to the servery.

Blomfield recalls that he did not spend all of his time driving – when necessary, he was also required to assist with the provision of official hospitality. Prominent in his recollections is the time in the early 1950s when he stood on the eastern verandah, with glasses and bottles at the ready, to pour celebratory drinks once the American millionaire Allen T Chase had signed the paperwork establishing the Humpty Doo rice project. Interestingly, the black soil plains chosen for cultivation by Territory Rice Ltd were on a cattle property owned by the sons of one of the Territory's last Government Residents, the Honourable Charles Herbert SM.

A number of staff lived permanently at Government House during the term of Mr Wise's incumbency. Mrs Wise's Personal Secretary lived within the House itself and the Blomfields lived in the chauffeur's cottage, while also living within the grounds in the 'native's quarters' were old Ruby Arryat and two part-Aboriginal houseboys. Roy Blomfield recalls Ruby as being "*shy, pleasant and always smiling. She was the supervisor of the native staff at Government House*". The boys were mischievous but never caused any trouble; Head Gardener Charlie Talbot asserted his authority over the boys and kept them in line.

There were five part-Aboriginal girls as housemaids, wearing a uniform comprising a blue and white checked blouse with a plain frock; they had white bands in their hair and were bare-footed. The girls had rooms in the native quarters for during the week, and every Friday afternoon at 5.00 pm, Roy Blomfield would drive them to the Bagot Compound where they would spend the weekend with their families. Then, every Monday morning at 7.00 am, he would collect them and deliver them to Government House for the week's work. He recalls that not once was one of the girls late on the Monday morning, and there was never the occasion where one would try to slip away to Bagot during the week.

A start to reducing Darwin's isolation was effectively made on 10 December 1919 with the arrival from England of Ross and Keith Smith in their Vickers Vimy. Successive flights arrived in Australia with Darwin as the first point of contact, while the Queensland and Northern Territory Air Services (QANTAS) joined with the British Imperial Airways to form QANTAS Empire Airways, running mail services from Darwin in 1934. Passenger flights came through Darwin for the first time in 1935, and by 1937 there were weekly flights to Adelaide by Guinea Airways. Between the wars there had been an increasing number of warships and other Naval vessels calling into Darwin and, until 1934 – with the reopening of the Naval Reserve Depot and the creation of the post of District Naval Officer for Darwin – the Administrator was responsible for all hospitality and other arrangements for such visits. Post-war developments saw Darwin increasingly used both as refuelling depot and as a stop-over point for visitors in transit between Australia and Europe, as well as a Dry Season destination for visitors escaping southern winters.

Where Darwin had previously been something of a colonial outpost, World War 2 had brought sealed highways and a long-distance telephone system to the Top End, and Darwin would increasingly become Australia's front door. Through the 1950s there was a steady flow of Ministers and Service chiefs, members of the Federal Parliament, State Governments and the diplomatic corps, and innumerable other high-ranking officials – all of whom anticipated some measure of Government hospitality in the Territory. And where such visits in the past had been notable by their scarcity, the time was fast approaching when Darwin, and therefore the Administrator, would play host to heads of state and royalty.

The Federal Minister for Territories had made provision in the Administrator's entertainment allowance to cover such hospitality, but of continuing inconvenience, and almost embarrassment, was the lack of suitable accommodation in Darwin. There were the Don Hotel (known as 'the bloodhouse'), the Victoria Hotel and the Darwin Hotel, but these were still trying to repair the wartime damage inflicted by both enemy and allies alike. The QANTAS hostel was later established at Berrimah on the outskirts of town for passengers during their overnight stopover in Darwin and, in 1955, the Minister for External Affairs wrote to the Prime Minister recommending the establishment of an air-conditioned VIP suite at this hostel:

*"Most visitors, official or otherwise, get their first impressions of Australia from the Qantas Hostel at Berrima near Darwin. The accommodation, by European or other standards, is primitive. The Administrator of the Northern Territory is extremely good in meeting and accommodating official visitors of whom he has knowledge but the strain on his time and household must be considerable, and I don't believe that he should continue to be asked to provide the hospitality and courtesy that he has done in the past".*

The Minister discussed this with his colleague, the Minister for Territories the Honourable Paul Hasluck, who considered that the most appropriate form for such VIP accommodation would be as a small annexe to Government House. This concept had already been considered, as early as 1944 when plans were drawn up for rebuilding the administration offices at Government House: these plans incorporated offices for both the Administrator and Crown Law Officer, and a Suite comprising two bedrooms, a lobby and an office dedicated to visiting officials. Sir Paul Hasluck also wrote to the Prime Minister on this matter:

*"The conditions at the local hotels are so crude that the Administrator often feels constrained to provide accommodation at Government House and, as you know, his capacity to do so is limited. There would, however, be no real relief to him unless something in the nature of a guest bungalow, which was self-contained both in its accommodation and its staffing, were provided. Such a guest bungalow would clearly have to have its own staff or the consequences of providing it would simply be to increase the burden on the Administrator".* Such a guest bungalow or annexe was not approved, and so the Administrator continued to provide accommodation for high-ranking dignitaries visiting Darwin.

Wise resigned with effect from 30 June 1956 due to ill-health. He returned to politics as the Member for North Province, in the WA Legislative Council (1956-67), serving as Minister for Industrial Development, Local Government and Town Planning in 1958-59 and as Leader of the Opposition in 1963-66. He retired in 1971 and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in the General Division (AO) in 1979. What had been the CSIRO's Kimberley Research Station in Kununurra, WA since 1945 was in 1986 renamed the Frank Wise Institute of Tropical Agriculture Research, transferred to the WA Department of Agriculture, honouring Wise who had first investigated the possibility of cropping in the East Kimberley in 1928.

## **J C Archer, 7th Administrator**

The day following Wise's resignation, on 1 July 1956, Mr James Clarence Archer was appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory and, on that same day, Mr Reg Marsh was appointed Assistant Administrator in the Commonwealth Public Service. Marsh worked closely with Archer and it was later recorded that, while Archer made government more efficient, Marsh helped to make the community more progressive. With this experience behind him, Reg Marsh followed what had become something of a trend and was appointed the fourteenth Administrator of Norfolk Island, serving in this capacity from 1966 to 1968.

At Government House, Mr Archer brought many of his own staff with him. Notably, about six weeks after assuming office, Mr and Mrs Blomfield were replaced as driver and cook by Mr and Mrs H H Brown. The Browns moved into the chauffeur's cottage, but in 1957 the Director of Works reported that the cottage, really little more than a lean-to, was 90% destroyed by white-ants and that several large palms in its vicinity had more than half of their trunks at ground level eaten away. They and the cottage were accordingly demolished and burned.

In preparation for the forthcoming visit of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Mr Archer immediately directed that numerous small projects should be undertaken. One of the more notable of these was the installation in August of decorative lighting in the grounds to illuminate the trees and shrubs. The Duke of Edinburgh stayed at Government House as a guest of the Administrator and Mrs Archer for two nights, 14-16 November 1956, and was guest of honour at a dinner which was also attended by Service chiefs, Mr Justice Douglas, the Honourable Paul Hasluck MHR and Senator the Honourable William Spooner MM.

Born in Victoria on 28 July 1900, Clarrie Archer had risen through the ranks of the Commonwealth Public Service, serving with the Attorney-General's Office in New Guinea. In 1938, he was the Delegate of the Custodian of Expropriated Properties of New Guinea and, during World War 2, was a Lieutenant in the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles at Rabaul; he led a party of citizens across the island to escape the Japanese as they landed on New Britain on 21 January 1942. After the war, he was selected as Deputy Secretary of the newly-formed Department of Territories and for his work there, was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire; Sir Paul Hasluck, who recommended Archer's appointment as Administrator, said of him:

*"J C Archer had a deep and varied experience of administration both in New Guinea and Australia and had risen to senior levels of the Commonwealth Public Service. In my judgement he had both the professional qualifications and the experience needed to consolidate the improvements already made".* He well knew Government House as he had acted as Administrator for six months during 1955, relieving the Honourable F J S Wise when the Administrator went on an overseas tour. He and his wife Nina arrived in Darwin on 17 July 1956. Sir Paul Hasluck recorded:

*"The growth in activity started in the term of Wise was accelerating... While Wise had experience in politics, Archer had deeper experience in the routines of administration. His expertise and diligence brought not only an improvement in public service efficiency in general but a more practical and convincing preparation of claims on the Budget.*

*Knowledgeable, practical, quiet in method, he brought a transformation of a different kind. The Territory administration became a reliable and workmanlike part of government”.*

He was primarily responsible for the establishment of local government and the institution of the City of Darwin in 1957. In that year also, Archer established the first Administrator’s Council which comprised certain members of the Legislative Council, and until 1961 held special powers which enabled the Administrator to direct and control the Northern Territory Administration as its Chief Officer. These were reduced over a period of time however, as the Territory’s administrative structure continued to change.

The Administrator’s Council was renamed Executive Council with the passing of the *Northern Territory (Administration) Amendment Act 1976*. Archer acquired the nickname ‘Cautious Clarrie’ from his practice of not hesitating to seek advice on important matters from this Council, a precedent for which Dean and Chaney were subsequently criticised for not following.

Mr Archer’s official vehicle was a new black Fairlane on loan from the Navy, arranged by the recently appointed Transport Manager for NT Administration, Mr J D Farrell. Six years later, his son Jimmy joined the staff of Government House as the Administrator’s chauffeur, later becoming House Manager. In late 1957, the Administrator reported that the Visitors Quarters adjoining the kitchen had deteriorated considerably – to such an extent that they were no longer suitable for use by guests. Among various reconstruction works initiated at this time, the tennis court on the eastern aspect was completely covered with concrete and converted into a courtyard, to be used as an outdoor entertainment area for receptions and other functions. There were, however, holes strategically placed for posts to hold a net, and tennis was still played. Large red pots brought colour to the western driveway.

In 1955, Mr Deric Thompson had commenced employment as Personal Clerk to the Administrator, but in 1958 the duties of the position were divided and he chose to continue on as Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, while Mr J R Wood was appointed Official Secretary. On 4 December 1958, Hilda, an Aboriginal Ward of the Territory, commenced work at Government House as a house girl, and on 17 July the following year, her husband Nipper joined the staff, both earning £3/10/- per week.

On the morning of 12 March 1959, a message was received at Fire Station Darwin to proceed to Government House to release the flag from the pulley atop the flagstaff. This was still the original two-piece flagstaff which was erected after the 1897 cyclone and appears in so many early photographs of Government House. Halyards on each side were replaced, and the boy responsible for flying the flag was instructed on the correct method of making the halyard fast. Further, it was recommended that the flagstaff be rehabilitated, with a pivot to allow it to be lowered for maintenance.

On Sunday 27 March the following year, the fire brigade were again called out to release a flag caught in the pulley. Acting Station Officer Coffey was only able to reach the top of the lower portion on a painter’s ladder, and shinned up the top portion to free the flag. This was becoming an annual occurrence because the sash cord used as a halyard was only lasting twelve months in the tropical conditions.



The Official Secretary, Mr John Wood, obtained a roll of Naval Signal Halyard from the Yeoman who recommended the use of hemp rather than nylon. The Yeoman also suggested that the original two-piece flagstaff should be replaced by a Naval pipe staff, but the Administrator did not feel that such a staff would be in keeping with the House and grounds.

The Chief Fire Officer also suggested rehabilitation of the flagstaff, although his was somewhat more of a strong recommendation than a suggestion. Accordingly, action was taken for the installation of a single flagstaff with yardarm, pivoted at the base to allow its easy lowering for maintenance or for release of caught flags, Station Officers never again having to shin to the top. This flagstaff lasted a little over a decade, until the next major cyclone.

A significant event during this period was the visit to Government House by Field Marshall Sir William Slim and Lady Slim in July 1959, and on 26/27 September 1959, Her Royal Highness The Princess Alexandra stayed overnight at Government House. The concrete verandahs at this time were covered with two-tone honan matting. In 1960, the Laundress, Mrs E Coonan, had her electric coppers replaced by washing machines.

The accountant Mr Maurice John Moore received a temporary transfer to the position of Official Secretary on 19 December 1960 and was promoted into the position substantively on 27 July 1961, serving until 17 February 1967 under three Administrators. He was an officer in the CMF, having been commissioned in Queensland, and had moved to Darwin in 1954; he transferred and served in NT Command with the 407th Signals Squadron as a Lieutenant and Captain.

Among the notable visitors to Government House during the term of Mr Archer are included John and Daphne Clunies-Ross from the Keeling-Cocos Islands and the Honourable Roger Nott MLA from NSW. Archer retired on 31 March 1961, and died in Canberra on 23 December 1980.



## **R B Nott, 8th Administrator**

The Honourable Roger Bede Nott was born in Gulgong, NSW on 20 October 1907. He was a shearer turned farmer and grazier at Dunedoo before he was elected to the NSW Legislative Assembly as ALP Member for Liverpool Plains in 1941, and there held the portfolios of Agriculture, Lands and Mines from 1954 until his retirement to take up the appointment of Administrator of the Northern Territory on 1 April 1961. It was hoped that Nott's pastoral background might be of benefit to the various projects underway in the Territory, such as at Humpty Doo where desperate men with Bren guns were trying to grow rice.

Mrs Mary Nott was described as "*a picture of charm and fashion*" upon her arrival in Darwin. One of Mr Nott's first official duties was to attend a civic reception held in his honour in the Darwin Town Hall, where he took off his coat and thereby instituted 'Darwin Rig' as a form of

dress. They moved in to Government House with their eighteen year old son Ashley and, after two weeks settling in, the Administrator and Mrs Nott held their first social function at Government House, a garden party for 250 Darwin residents.

Dick Butler succeeded Charlie Talbot as Head Gardener in 1961 and was employed by Parks and Gardens until his retirement in 1978. One of Dick Butler's tasks during his early years at Government House, which had been carried out by gardeners for decades gone by, was the ritual watering of the drive-ways and carriage-loop to keep the dust down. While most of Darwin's dusty streets had been sealed in 1938-41, the Government House carriage-loop and driveway were not sealed over with bitumen until the term of Mr Dean. Dick Butler is readily recalled for his impromptu performances with the mouth organ, particularly during corroborees held in the Botanic Gardens.

Butler enlisted in the Darwin Mobile Force in 1939, serving with other Aboriginals from the Territory including Stewart Kurnoth, Samuel ('Smiler') Fejo, Juma ('Jim') Fejo, Willy McClennen and Victor Williams. The Darwin Mobile Force was raised in Liverpool, NSW in November 1938 and arrived in Darwin on 28 March the following year, establishing itself in the disused Vestey's Meatworks. They were artillerymen tasked with providing mobile protection for the Headquarters of the Army in the Northern Territory, known then as the 7th Military District, armed with 18-pounders, 3-inch mortars and medium machine-guns, while there was also a rifle group giving the unit a surveillance capability.

Under the command of Captain Francis, Dick Butler's little band of Aboriginal coast watchers based at Peewee Camp at East Point called themselves 'the Australian Black Watch'. Butler served periods totalling twelve years with the Army in Darwin after the war until 1961, wearing as a patch on the sleeve of his jacket the black buffalo head within a yellow circle on a green square, which was still the insignia of the 7th Military District until the late 1980s (though not as a uniform insignia). He has the distinction of being the first soldier to earn the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal for service completely in the 7th Military District.

On occupying Government House, the Notts ordered a number of renovations – the cypress pine floors were polished, the ceilings in the Drawing and Dining Rooms were replaced, the power points were lowered from a metre and a half up the wall to just above the skirting boards, and a servery cupboard was installed. Mrs Nott obtained chandeliers for the Dining and Drawing Rooms, and a distinctive '4-Seasons' clock. Mrs Nott selected a wallpaper mural to be applied at each end of the Dining Room wall, but was advised by the Assistant Administrator and Director of Works that in Darwin's humid tropical climate, the wallpaper adhesive would undoubtedly fail. The walls were painted instead.

Later in the year, a second vehicular access to the grounds was created in the vicinity of the pedestrian entrance eastwards along the Esplanade from the driveway; this is today the only entrance to Government House. Until this time the cellar had been used as a long-term store room. In its earliest days, the Resident had had little success in using the cellar for storing wine, announcing that the white ants "*had invaded his cellar, perforated the metal tops of bottles, polished off the corks*".

Half a century later, the Administrator was a keen horse rider and saw the cellar as an ideal place to store his saddlery; some time later when he went to use his saddle however, he

found that white-ants had eaten their way up through the wooden horse and into the leather, there being nothing left in the cellar but a pile of sawdust and metal fittings. Another problem with the cellar was the high temperature – recovering some expensive wine glasses which had been stored in the cellar for years, they were found to have turned white from the heat.

In August 1961, some 500 people marched on Government House to demand that Prime Minister Menzies and Immigration Minister Alex Downer withdraw deportation orders against three Malayan pearl divers. At a hurriedly-called public meeting it was decided to hide the three, who had lived in Darwin for some time, after which the residents marched to Government House led by North Australian Workers' Union leader, Bert Graham. The Administrator agreed to meet with a deputation of six and the barrister Dick Ward put the case to a sympathetic Mr Nott. He agreed to pass the opinions of the group to the Government and the marchers dispersed without further incident.

Mr James Sydney Farrell came to Government House from NT Administration in 1961, replacing Mr Halford as chauffeur. He wore a uniform of khaki shirt and long trousers, with a black tie and khaki peaked cap with a large gold crown badge. The Administrator's official car, NT1, at that time was a comfortable but bulky black 1957 Dodge Desoto, with red interior, while NT2 was a Holden Special, also black with red interior. Farrell's first official duty was to drive Mr Nott to the new Paul's depot in Bishop Street, which Mr Nott was to officially open. He recalls that Mr Nott had a glass eye, and *en route* to a function, Mr Nott would pop out his eye to polish it, returning it to the socket just as they would be arriving, which Jim Farrell found somewhat disconcerting. The Desoto was replaced later that year with a 1960 Ford Fairlane, also black.

Among the housemaids at Government House at this time were two Aboriginal girls, Betty Taylor and Marjorie Whinphil, and a part-Aboriginal girl Miss Yvonne Butler. All three turned eighteen in 1962, and made their debut at a Mayoral Ball held at the Town Hall on 19 June that year. Among the other staff were an English Housekeeper known only as Gillie, and two part-Aboriginals, Florence Barrow and Beryl Holtze. As was the case with many such part-Aboriginal babies taken from their mothers by patrol officers, Florence received a surname denoting her origin – she had been born at Barrow Creek – and was later taken to Croker Island where she grew up with Molly Shepherd. Mrs Nott recorded that Florence was “*a girl blessed with four wonderful talents: an artistic hand, patience, a silent tongue and kindness for her fellow beings*”.

In anticipation of the impending Royal Visit, Mrs Nott had both the roof of Government House and the verandah rooves painted light blue. A large St Edward's Crown was crafted from wood and affixed to the front of the House, adding an impressive element to the two end-gables. Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh visited Darwin in March 1963 but stayed on board HMY *Brittania* for the two nights they were in harbour. This was a significant stop-over as it was the first visit to the Northern Territory by a reigning Monarch.

The Administrator and Mrs Nott hosted a dinner party at Government House in the presence of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness on the evening of 17 March, followed by a reception on the courtyard at which movies on the Territory were shown. The convoy of eight vehicles, with NT Police Force motor-cycle escort, entered and departed the grounds through the western driveway nearest the garage, alongside which was one band while the other was

positioned on the flagstaff lawn. The two bands in attendance were the Pacific Islands Regiment Band and the Royal Papuan and New Guinea Constabulary Band, a total of some eighty bandsmen. In appreciation of their hospitality, Her Majesty and The Duke of Edinburgh presented the Administrator and Mrs Nott with signed portraits. During this visit, the Administrator's chauffeur Jimmy Farrell was detached to the Royal Visit Car Unit, driving the Lady-in-Waiting in a black Daimler.

Sir John Williams, the Managing Director of Herald and Weekly Times Ltd, and Lady Williams were entertained at Government House in December 1962 during a visit to Darwin. They were so taken with the historic house, and in view of the fact that at that time there were discussions of building a new Government House at East Point and converting the old House into an art gallery, that they expressed their desire to present a painting. Consequently, an Australian landscape by Melbourne artist Charles Bush was sent to His Honour the Administrator and Mrs Nott, arriving in Darwin on 13 May 1963.

The Notts had the pleasure of hosting visits by two serving Governors-General during their term at Government House, Their Excellencies the Right Honourable 1st Viscount Dunrossil and Lady Dunrossil in July 1960, and Their Excellencies the Right Honourable Richard Gardiner Casey CH DSO MC and Lady Casey in July 1966. In 1963, the Administrator acquired the first air-conditioned car in the Northern Territory, purchasing from the Federal Government a 1961 Pontiac Laurentian, black with tan leather upholstery, as the new NT1. This vehicle was one of a fleet which had been used by the Commonwealth during the Royal Tour for off road travel, this particular Pontiac having been used to transport The Queen during her visit to Alice Springs.

The practice of having a senior Government official acting in the role of Assistant Administrator dates back to the time when the separate Territories of Northern and Central Australia were reunited. When the *Northern Australian Act* 1926 was repealed by the Scullin Labor Government as an economic measure on 11 June 1931 and Lieutenant Colonel Weddell was, on the following day, appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory, Victor George Carrington (formerly Government Resident for Central Australia) was appointed District Officer at Alice Springs and by virtue of this Government position was also appointed Assistant Administrator – a personal appointment by the Administrator and not by the Governor-General. Carrington held this dual appointment from 1931 until 1942, and continued to reside in the Residency at Alice Springs during this time.

Following on from the appointments of Carrington and Marsh, other public service Assistant Administrators over the years have been Alan Atkins, Frank Dwyer and Martyn Finger, while Alan O'Brien was a Deputy Administrator. In 1963, the Northern Territory Administration was arranged with the Administrator directly responsible for the Administrator's Branch and the Police Force, as well as being President of the Legislative Council, while the management of the various branches was shared between two Assistant Administrators, as follows:

1. Assistant Administrator (Administration, Services and Finance): responsible for Administration, Finance, Local Government & Community Services, Stores, and Transport Branches.

2. Assistant Administrator (Economic and Social Affairs):responsible for Forestry, Fisheries, Wildlife & National Parks, Animal Industry & Agriculture, Lands & Survey, Mines & Water Resources, and Welfare Branches.

Mr Alan Vincent Atkins was Assistant Administrator (Economic and Social Affairs) from 1963 to 1967, under Administrators Nott and Dean. As Assistant Administrator, he was the Senior Official Member of the Legislative Council and was therefore, in effect, leader of the Government. The Senior Official Member was also required to act in the capacity of Administrator during the Administrator's absence. Mr Eric Francis Dwyer transferred from the central office of the Postmaster General's Department to NT Administration in 1964 as Assistant Administrator (Administration, Services and Finance).

From 12 November 1967, following the death of Alan Atkins, Frank Dwyer acted in both positions of Assistant Administrator and, as the Senior Official Member, was promoted to become the Leader of Government in the Legislative Council, assuming office the following day. He held this position until the appointment of Martyn Finger in 1968, and then continued serving as Assistant Administrator (Administration, Services and Finance) until the Department of the Northern Territory was created in early 1973 when he became a First Assistant Secretary.

Replacing Atkins in late 1968 as Assistant Administrator responsible for Economic and Social Affairs was Mr Martyn Rudolph Finger. He had previously been an Assistant Commissioner (Methods) in the Commonwealth Public Service Board, and held a degree and diploma in mechanical engineering and a diploma of industrial management, and was a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management. He served as Senior Official Member of the Legislative Council from December 1968 until September 1974, and was a member of the Administrator-in-Council during that period. He later became a First Assistant Secretary in the Department of the Northern Territory while, after Cyclone Tracy, he was Acting General Manager of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.

In December 1974, Finger was to have been seconded to the new fully elected Legislative Council to assist in establishing Executive Government in the Northern Territory, by planning and developing the new legislative, financial and organisational responsibilities of the Legislative Assembly. This secondment was delayed by Cyclone Tracy however, until January 1977 when he was seconded to the then Majority Leader, Dr Letts. He became Director-General and Secretary to Cabinet on the granting of Self-Government on 1 July 1978, a position he continued to hold until November 1984 when he retired. Meanwhile, in 1980, he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire "*for public service*".

Mr Nott's Official Secretary, Mr Maurie Moore, continued his service as a CMF signals officer during the early 1960's, but he transferred to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery on 25 September 1964 upon the raising of the 121st Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. Because of the changing situation to our near north – Indonesia's clash with the Dutch in Irian Jaya (Western New Guinea) in 1961 and then 'Confrontation' with the newly formed Federation of Malaysia from 1963 – the 121st LAA Battery was raised in Darwin in 1964, armed with twelve 40mm Bofors guns, to provide a measure of low-level air defence.

The Notts lived in a square fibro construction attached at the rear of Government House. It comprised one room, a bedroom, and a verandah which they used as their dining area, attached to the store-room at the southern end of the House. This room stood where the Servery and Administrator's living room are today, and access was through the double doors which today provide access to the Servery. It was little used except to store bottles of ginger beer. Works considered for Government House at this time included an extension to the Administrator's room, man-proof fencing around the boundary of the property, lighting on the paved terrace, and the installation of a swimming pool.

There was no action taken however because, rather than spending money maintaining and repairing the old House, it was deemed more expedient to erect a new Government House at East Point, a modern structure which would provide privacy and security. Mr Nott had four plans drawn up for his new Residence at East Point, although it was to actually be built at Dudley Point, the southernmost tip of the East Point precinct. Retaining the idea of the carriage-loop, each plan had the Residency on the Point overlooking Fannie Bay with an open area and car park to the north, and staff quarters to the north again. Each design comprised a two-storey building incorporating a large Reception Hall with high ceilings and a mezzanine floor on the upper level. Some of the designs were quite progressive for the early 1960s.

Due to the prohibitive cost of having sewerage pipes laid, this plan did not eventuate so plans were instead made to have the existing House upgraded. Again under Mr Nott's direction and close scrutiny, plans were drawn up for an administrative building. The House was to be extended eastwards from the vicinity of the Dining Room with a large Function Room, externally retaining the gable design. There was to be a car park beneath the courtyard, and a walkway from the courtyard leading down to the administrative offices set in the eastern hillside. On the western side of the carriage-loop, where Aubrey Abbott had erected his office building some twenty-five years earlier, was to be built a VIP guest wing, again reviving the concept of a Visiting Officials' Suite first drafted in 1944. This grand and progressive plan did not eventuate either.

Nott's term concluded on 30 September 1964, and he again held vice-regal office, as Administrator of Norfolk Island in 1964-66 after which he retired. Nott was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the General Division in 1977.



## **R L Dean, 9th Administrator**

Mr Roger Levinge Dean CStJ was born in Sydney on 10 December 1913. He was employed on the administrative staff of Rylands Bros (Aust) Pty Ltd from 1935 to 1949, with a brief interlude of commissioned service in Australia and overseas with the Australian Imperial Force during World War 2. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1949 as the Member for Robertson in NSW, serving until 1964 and had an introduction to the Territory when he was Chairman of a Parliamentary Select Committee inquiring into grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines regarding the Arnhem Land Reserve in 1963.

Appointed Administrator on 1 October 1964, the Deans occupied the old fibro bedroom, while the store-room at the southern end of Government House was converted into a bedroom for their two children, Michael and Julie; the Deans also regularly dined on the verandah. Later, this room had a false wall installed across its width to create a long narrow room adjacent to the Dining Room which was used as a Servery.

The Deans used the remaining space as their bedroom, while two bedrooms were built on the verandah for the children and the old fibro room was used as a sitting room. To see the Administrator, his staff would have to wind their way from the Eastern Verandah, through his bedroom into the old sitting room.

During Mr Dean's incumbency, the small breakfast room adjoining the main guest bedroom at the front of the house was fitted with an air-conditioning unit, requiring the installation of doors. Until now, this room simply had pairs of 'batwing-doors' in the doorways, as was the case with all of the rooms. After it was air-conditioned, guests to the House at this time would rush for this room in preference to the main Drawing Room. The other rooms were not air-conditioned until after the arrival of Commodore Johnston nearly twenty years later.

Mrs Dean's Secretary was Miss Lois Shipley, their Housekeeper was Mrs Gladys Woebke and her sister, Mrs Flo Ward, was the chef. Hilda and Nipper left Government House at this time and were replaced by Bathurst Islander Greg Tapwalipwawingti and his wife Katherine Tipilaramu. While Greg was occupied with taking out the honan mats and sweeping the verandahs daily, as well as serving drinks to guests, Katie was a house girl and kitchen assistant. At first, they lived with their son Brian in the tin staff quarters (where the three flats are today) but later moved into what had earlier been the Chauffeur's Cottage facing Hughes Avenue, and had for some time been used as a storage room. Their home was later described as "*well appointed*". Greg and Katie went back to Bathurst Island during the term of Mr Chaney.

In 1964, the Deans obtained as their new NT2 a 1964 EH Holden Premier station wagon, light metallic green with a white roof and light tan leather upholstery within. The Pontiac was transferred to the official car pool and as his new official car, Mr Dean obtained a black 1964 Austin Princess – an automatic 4-litre, 6-cylinder saloon with an aluminium limousine body and a 28-horsepower engine (as compared to Dr Gilruth's 15 hp in 1912). Custom made in England at a cost of \$7,000, it was unloaded on the wharf, wheels were attached, fuel poured in, and it was driven away. This purchase of a new car was notable as the previous policy of NT Administration had been to obtain older models and have them repaired and refurbished locally, to support local industry

The Princess was an inch under 18 feet in length and was described by the press as "*2 tons of glamor*". Driver Jimmy Farrell reportedly "*found the car a beauty to handle, and full of intriguing gadgets*". Among its refinements were included air-conditioning and a radio, both controlled from the rear seat, and a built-in jacking system which could raise the vehicle 18 inches. The air-conditioning worked so well that it would spray a fine mist of cold condensation; Farrell remarked that "*VIP travellers often thought this was a good, if unexpected, extra for Darwin's hot weather*".

Upon his departure from the Northern Territory, Mr Dean was presented with one of the registration plates of the Princess, which he had framed and hung on the wall of his drawing

room at the Australian Consulate in San Francisco. He later said that it was "*often remarked upon*", notably by visiting Territorians such as Bruce Perkins and Gus Trippe.

Mr Dean flew the Australian Flag from a flagstaff at the front of NT1, but upon being visited by the Governor-General or Prime Minister, had to relinquish the pennant to the more senior dignitary. On such occasions, Mr Dean flew a pennant bearing his family crest. In 1966, he had the distinction of being the official representative of Australia at the independence ceremonies of the States of Botswana and Lesotho.

Their Excellencies the Governor-General Baron Casey and Lady Casey visited Darwin in 1966, staying at Government House from 2 to 7 July as guests of the Administrator and Mrs Dean. During this visit to Darwin, as well as sketching a portrait of Greg Tapwalipwawingti, Lady Casey apparently mentioned to Mr Dean that there was a collection of photographs of State Governors on display in Government House, Canberra, and she expressed her desire to add Northern Territory Administrators and Government Residents to this display.

There then followed a flurry of activity by the Administrator's staff to identify and obtain suitable photographs of his predecessors but by February 1968, however, they had collected only about a dozen photographs. The matter then rested until the term of Commodore Eric Johnston who, following the opening of the Administrator's Office on the Esplanade (the old Naval Headquarters building) in December 1981, was responsible for having installed a fine Honour Roll in the Reception lobby, listing the incumbents appointed by both the South Australian and Commonwealth Governments. Having already been included in a 'rogues' gallery' in the new Supreme Court building, the Honourable James Muirhead determined that a similar display was required for the Administrator's Office and accordingly, on 19 November 1992, the gallery was 'unveiled' by the Administrator.

In late 1966, Captain Maurie Moore transferred from the 121st LAA Battery to the Command and Staff Training Unit (NT Command), but in January 1967 he returned to the Battery on promotion, as its first CMF commander. Moore's battery was given the task of firing salutes at noon on Darwin Oval (now Bicentennial Park) on special occasions. This created an interesting and possibly unique association – the Administrator's Official Secretary commanding the battery responsible for firing ceremonial salutes.

In May that year, Major Moore took the battery on exercise to Tianjara, NSW, and on 28 June 1967 had the privilege of commanding the battery when it was granted the Freedom of Entry to the City of Darwin by His Worship the Mayor, Alderman Harry Chan. The following year, Major Maurie Moore received the Efficiency Decoration (ED) for long service in the CMF. By 1974, without a significant role, the 121st LAA Battery had become moribund and, although there were suggestions for its replacement, following Cyclone Tracy the battery was disbanded. Maurie Moore maintained his involvement with artillery and was one of a small group who helped establish what is now the Royal Australian Artillery Association Museum at East Point. His service is commemorated with a photograph in a display gallery within one of the 9-inch gun housings.

Maurie Moore was succeeded as Mr Dean's Official Secretary in 1967 by Mr Geoff Loveday, a civil servant. Meanwhile, after Lois Shipley married Maurie Moore, she was replaced as Personal Secretary to Mr Dean in June 1968 by Miss Ann Waters, who continued to serve at Government House until August 1976. HRH The Prince Philip was an overnight guest at



Government House on 4-5 June 1968, and Prime Minister John Gorton and Mrs Bettina Gorton were guests the following night. The Administrator and Mrs Dean had hosted The Duke and Duchess of Kent (Prince Edward and Lady Katharine) on the occasion of the Centenary of Darwin in August 1969; the NT Director for this Royal Visit was the Administrator's Official Secretary Mr Loveday. It was also during 1969 that the glamorous Austin Princess was succeeded by a black Pontiac Parisienne as NT1, the Princess transferring to the Department of the Northern Territory's Transport depot. For its last twelve months of service, 1975-76, the Pontiac Parisienne was repainted white.

One year during Mr Dean's term, the annual NT News Walkabout was again held, the event finishing at Government House. Ruby Arryat, a wife of Billy Shepherd, was a regular walker, together with her close friend and famous Territorian Nellie Flynn, who had been born at Powell Creek south of Elliott in 1881, the daughter of Lindsay Crawford, a Maori working on the Overland Telegraph Line. Ruby was always beaten by Nellie, but on this particular occasion Nellie again walked, but not as a competitor. This allowed Ruby to take out the prize, and a photograph of Ruby appeared in the *NT News*, holding a £20 note over her head. Her daughter Molly had just returned from Croker and, on seeing the photograph, rushed to Government House to an emotional reunion with Ruby whom she had not seen for some years.

Towards the end of Mr Dean's term, the old rainwater tank, which stood on a stand directly over the old well, was removed and the well was sealed over with concrete; Ann Barrett (Waters) recalls that this took place in late 1968 or 1969, as she swam in the well with the Dean children. This old well was the original source of water for the Douglas family when they had the Residence built in 1870-71. The Administrator in 1993, the Honourable Austin Asche, recalls that, as a child some sixty years earlier, he had played around this well. Jim Farrell recalls that when the well was to be sealed over, the Fire Brigade had to be called to pump the water out and it was then filled with rubble.

As it had been fired a century ago to welcome the Government Resident, the Government House cannon was again fired in 1970 to farewell the Territory's ninth Administrator Mr Roger Dean and his wife Ann. He was farewelled from the Larrakeyah Barracks Officer Mess by the members, a notable contingent of these having an association with artillery, either as serving officers, such as Major Maurie Moore, or veterans of earlier days, such as Lieutenant Colonel Jack Haydon. Later in the night, a gun crew was formed by the gunners and ex-gunners and they proceeded to Government House where the cannon was ceremonially fired. After service as the Australian Consul-General in San Francisco, Mr Dean retired to Yarralumla, ACT. He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Civil Division in 1968 and was a Commander Brother of the Order of St John although he was later promoted to Knight of the Order.

The Housekeeper during the Dean's time at Government House, Mrs Wuebke, went to America with the Deans to be a nanny for their children. Upon this change of Administrators, it was deemed appropriate that there should also be a change of Official Secretary and so, accordingly, upon the departure of Mr Dean, Mr Loveday was succeeded by Mr Ron Weepers. Geoff ('Lovers') Loveday moved on to be District Officer at Gove and later, in 1974, as a Labor candidate, unsuccessfully contested the new seat of Stuart Park against Joe Fisher (who had been the Member for Fannie Bay since 1969) and Marshall Perron.

## **F C Chaney, 10th Administrator**

The Honourable Frederick Charles Chaney CBE AFC was born in Perth on 12 October 1914 and educated at Aquinas College and Claremont Teachers' College. Mr Chaney was an employee of the Western Australian Education Department from 1936 to 1955, with time off during the war when he saw active service as a pilot in the RAAF, including a period of service seconded to the secret Z-Special Unit of the Services Reconnaissance Department.

He was the Western Australian State President of the RSL from 1952 until 1955 when he was elected to the House of Representatives as the Liberal Member for Perth. He was Government Whip in 1962 and Minister for the Navy from 1964 to 1966. As Navy Minister designate, he accompanied the Navy Minister Dr Forbes on an inspection of damage following the collision of HMA Ships *Voyager* and *Melbourne* off Jervis Bay on 10 February 1964.

Appointed Administrator on 4 March 1970, he and his wife Mavis and daughter Jill (the youngest of their seven children) moved in to the Deans' accommodation at the back of the House. White-ant damage to the structure, however, necessitated their move into the old detached four-bedroom house which had previously been used as staff quarters, south of the House near the cliff, while a new apartment (the present apartment) was designed and built.

Their student sons, John, Michael and Richard, visited often, as did their married son and two married daughters, this family situation prompting Mr Chaney to quickly make plans for a four bedroomed private apartment annexed to the southern end of Government House. A Government House booklet, produced at this time by the Department of the Interior, remarked that *"The warmth of family life has permeated the formality of Government House and added to its charm. This charm has been enhanced by the soft furnishings introduced by Mrs Chaney, satisfying the needs of modern tropical living yet enriching the 19th Century surroundings"*.

In the Drawing Room stood a glass-fronted cabinet containing china pieces and a carved mahogany bookcase holding six red copper measuring jugs, found in the cellar by Mrs Chaney when she first explored her new home. These jugs are a set of imperial measures, and each is stamped with the volume, 'NT', the Tudor Crown, and the cipher of King George V – dating the jugs to the period 1911-37. Their origin is uncertain but they have certainly belonged to Government House, Darwin since the 1950s: long-serving Government House driver and then Manager, Jim Farrell, remembers that they were present when he commenced in 1961 and, similarly, Roy Blomfield confirmed their presence when he commenced work as a driver in 1955. Also in the cellar, Mrs Chaney had found some old Bavarian plates. In the dining room, the chairs were upholstered in ivory silk treated for tropical living.

Mr Chaney's Official Secretary was Ron Weepers, his Personal Secretary was Ann Waters, the Housekeeper was Mrs Mary May, and the official car was the 1969 Pontiac Parisienne which was resprayed white, Government House acquiring as NT2 a Valiant Sterling Special in white with a black vinyl roof. During the upgrading of Hughes Avenue, a large tree had its roots heavily damaged and, during a fierce storm, toppled over and crushed Greg and Katie Tapwalipwawingti's cottage. A newspaper photograph of the time showed Greg clambering

out of one of the windows. In 1973, towards the end of Mr Chaney's term, Greg and Katie returned to Bathurst Island.

A swimming pool was installed in the courtyard area, this becoming a popular place to find, not staff in their off-duty hours, but rather the goannas from the grounds who would dive in and lay submerged at the bottom. More than one house guest was bemused at the thought of the Government House swimming pool being a haven for local 'crocodiles'. The position of the swimming pool raised some security concerns in October 1972 when HRH The Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon were guests of the Administrator and Mrs Chaney, the pool being in full view from the windows of the Government offices across the Esplanade. Another notable guest was HRH The Prince Philip on 12-13 and again on 28-29 March 1973.

Through the course of 1973, construction proceeded on the private apartment, but the Chaney's did not see its completion. By 1971, NT Administration had been organised with Mr Alan O'Brien appointed as Deputy Administrator, responsible for co-ordinating the activities of three Assistant Administrators responsible for Lands & Community Development, Welfare, and Resource Development Divisions. Following the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972, all Deputy and Assistant Administrator positions were abolished and, in April 1973, O'Brien became the first Secretary of the Department for the Northern Territory (DNT).

The creation of the DNT by Labor, with its Darwin-based Secretary, was widely seen as an effort to further undermine the role of the Administrator. Chaney recalls that he requested that the Federal Government withdraw his Commission: "*I requested to be relieved of my position because of a complete lack of understanding and complete disregard of my position by both Alan O'Brien and the Minister Kep Enderby*". Accordingly, on 1 August 1973 Chaney's Commission was withdrawn by the Honourable Kep Enderby QC, Minister responsible for the DNT. At the same time, upon the Administrator's departure, the positions of Official Secretary and Personal Secretary were also abolished.

Mr Chaney was subsequently Chairman of the Territory Building Society and Chairman of the Home Building Society from 1973 to 1987. After serving as Lord Mayor of Perth from 1978 to 1982, he retired to Claremont, WA. He had received the Air Force Cross for gallantry in the air during the war and had been appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Civil Division in 1970 for his services to the Federal Government, although he was later knighted, receiving promotion in the Order to Knight Commander in 1982.

As Secretary of the Department, Alan O'Brien officiated as Administrator from 1 August until the appointment of Mr Nelson on 10 December 1973. O'Brien was not empowered to assent to legislation however, this task being passed to the Governor-General in Council; the enormity of this task had not been fully appreciated it would seem, for by December some thirty unassented bills had accumulated. O'Brien served as Secretary of the DNT until December 1975. During this period without an Administrator, Mr Malcolm Bottrall was seconded from pay section as a live-in caretaker and supervisor at Government House.

## **J N Nelson, 11th Administrator**

The appointment of John Norman ('Jock') Nelson as Administrator on 10 December 1973 was an ironic twist of fate for, as a child in a Government House tree, he had watched his father leading the demonstrations against Dr Gilruth in 1918. Born in 1908 at Mt Perry, near Bundaberg in Queensland, he was the son of Harold Nelson, a staunch unionist and the Northern Territory's first federal MHR. Educated at Pine Creek and Darwin, he was a jackaroo and drilling contractor in the Territory and, during the war, served as a Corporal (later Sergeant) in the Royal Australian Engineers sinking bores in the NT and on islands of the South West Pacific. After the war, he was the foundation ALP Member (elected) for Stuart in the first NT Legislative Council (1947-49), ALP Member for the NT in the House of Representatives (1949-66) and Secretary of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (1956-66). It has been recorded that: "... *he was unable to exert much influence on government policy... His position was strengthened somewhat in 1958 when the Territory member was accorded the right to vote on all matters concerning the area*" (full voting rights were not given until 1968).

He was a member of the delegation representing the Commonwealth Parliament at the inauguration of the Papua-New Guinea Legislative Council in 1951, of a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Voting Rights of Aborigines in 1961, and of a Select Committee on grievances of Yirrkala Aborigines regarding the Arnhem Land Reserve in 1963 (of which Mr Roger Dean was Chairman). Having been the first MLC for Stuart, he became the first Mayor of Alice Springs, serving from 1971 to 1973. He was the first to be appointed to the office of Administrator who could call truly himself a Territorian.

Ron Weepers was succeeded as Official Secretary by Brian Sedgewick for a very brief period, and he in turn was succeeded as Mr Nelson's Official Secretary by Ann Waters (re-appointed after her position as Personal Secretary was abolished upon the departure of Mr Chaney), who served until August 1976. Mr Nelson and his wife Peg were the first to occupy the four-bedroom private apartment at the back of Government House, which is still in use by the Administrator today. The current Drawing Room of Government House was divided into two offices – one for the Administrator and another for the Official and Personal Secretaries. Staffing levels increased during Mr Nelson's time to include an Executive Assistant and a Clerical Assistant; their office was the Bedroom between the Dining and Drawing Rooms, today known as the Prince of Wales Room.

Her Majesty The Queen arrived by Royal Aircraft at Darwin RAAF Base on the morning of Thursday 7 March 1974 and was received by Mr and Mrs Nelson and Captain Eric Johnston OBE ADC RAN, Naval Officer Commanding North Australia and an Honorary Aide-de-Camp to His Excellency the Governor-General. HRH The Prince Philip arrived at the Darwin RAAF Base on Saturday 9 March 1974, while on Sunday 10 March there was assembled at the Civic Centre a 100-man Guard of Honour for Her Majesty, who was accompanied by The Prince Philip and Lord Louis Mountbatten; amongst the soldiers on parade were gunners from the 121st Light Anti-Aircraft Battery commanded by former Official Secretary Maurie Moore.

Government House suffered some major damage from Cyclone Tracy on Christmas eve 1974, but the louvres enclosing the verandahs on three sides are considered to have saved the main building itself from damage. Most of the outside doors and windows gave way

under the force of the cyclone, and the aluminium pergola over the western verandah double-doors (the original front entrance) was destroyed. The roof was generally loosened but stayed in place except over the second guest suite where sheets of iron were torn off. Wall and floor coverings were damaged by the rain which poured in, and several valuable paintings on loan from the National Gallery were afterwards returned for restorative treatment. Further, the flagstaff was snapped off and dropped to the ground.

Early the following year, on 1 May 1975, Government House was visited by HRH The Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips during a Royal Tour in which they inspected cyclone damage in Darwin and spoke with residents. The Department of the Northern Territory's official newsletter recorded of the visit, "*The Royal standard flew from a cut down street light pole at Government House when Princess Anne and her husband, Captain Mark Phillips visited the Territory*".

The detached four-bedroom house used as staff quarters, south of the House near the cliff, was demolished as was the nearby laundry building. The semi-detached kitchen was unroofed and suffered severely from water damage. The garage was also damaged at one end, apparently from flying debris. The Administrator's four bedroom private apartment was completely unroofed and all of its windows were blown out. Fortunately however, the Administrator and Mrs Nelson were in Alice Springs for Christmas so the apartment had been unoccupied when the cyclone struck.

Later in 1975, a two-bay garage with gardener's hut behind was established on the site of the original garage on the western side of the grounds. This western garden and the entrance to Government House were well shaded by large tamarind trees, reminders of the earliest visitors to the northern Australian coast, the Makassans. Travelling south to the great island they called *Marege* in search of trochus, pearl shell and especially *trepang* or *beche-de-mer*, the seamen from Makassar discarded tamarind seeds around their camps. Many of the old tamarind trees around Darwin, including one which still stands in the grounds of Government House today, have their origins in these early days, when the *trepang* collectors would gather on our northern coasts. An historic connection was forged in 1993 when the Governor of South Sulawesi, Major General Zainal Basrie Palaguna visited Government House and, at his express invitation, the Administrator soon after returned the visit to Ujung Pandang, formerly Makassar.

In the clean-up after the cyclone, the Administrator's driver, Jim Farrell, found that there was considerable water-damage to an autographed photograph of The Duke and Duchess of Kent which he had received from Their Royal Highnesses after he had driven them during their official visit to Darwin in August 1969 (during which they stayed two nights at Government House). A number of years later, Michael Barrett, the Official Secretary, forwarded this damaged photograph to Kensington Palace with a request for a replacement. Some months later, a replacement was received, with an apology for the delay as the Duke's staff had endeavored to locate a photograph from the same era to exactly match the damage done. Further, the Official Secretary was informed that the damaged photograph was to be retained on display at Kensington Palace as a memento of Cyclone Tracy.

In the Federal Cabinet reshuffle of 5 June 1975, Dr Rex Patterson became Minister for Northern Australia. His Department, an amalgamation of the Departments of the Northern Territory and Northern Development, had responsibility for all of Australia north of the 26th

parallel and had Alan O'Brien as its Permanent Head. In June 1975, when Mr Nelson went on two months leave, Alan O'Brien was again Acting Administrator by virtue of his position as head of this new Department of Northern Australia.

Frank Dwyer, meanwhile, an administrative officer with extensive experience and some time as an Assistant Administrator, was promoted in 1974 to become the first Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Northern Territory and, later, of the Department of Northern Australia. Upon Alan O'Brien relocating to Canberra where he would be better positioned to participate in vital discussions, in July 1975 Frank Dwyer took charge in Darwin. He was also Deputy Chairman of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and was appointed Acting Administrator by the Governor-General, to act during any vacancy in that office. He retired in 1978 and died in Queensland in 1981.

At the southern end of Government House, the apartment was rebuilt for the Administrator to live in. This was also used as the Administrator's Office, the sitting room being divided into two offices, with access from both the apartment and the verandah. Mr Nelson gained little benefit from this improvement however, retiring on 12 November 1975 to contest the Territory's federal seat for Labor following the dismissal of the Whitlam Government. Following the retirement of Mr Nelson, Frank Dwyer, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Northern Australia and also Deputy Chairman of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, acted in the capacity of Administrator. Unsuccessful in his bid to re-enter federal politics, Nelson settled in Alice Springs and there died on 21 June 1991.

The Darwin Reconstruction Commission meanwhile, had been established by the Federal Government in early 1975 to rebuild Darwin, at a cost then expected to rise as high as \$650 million. In January 1976, it was reported that the DRC had set aside \$40,000 for immediate protective work on a number of historical buildings damaged by the cyclone, including the Naval Headquarters building and Government House, although a further \$31,000 would be needed. One of the main tasks at Government House was replacing the roofing timbers which, during the course of replacing the roofing iron, were found to be infested with white ants yet again.



## **J A England, 12th Administrator**

Mr John Armstrong England ED was born in Clayfield in Brisbane on 12 October 1911. He saw significant military service during the war, in Dutch New Guinea and at Morotai, Labuan and Sarawak with the 52nd and 2/3rd Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiments from 1943 to 1946, notably as a Lieutenant Colonel commanding Sandakan Force and Kuching Force, and was responsible for accepting the Japanese surrender in North Borneo.

After the war, he was a Member of the House of Representatives for Calare in NSW, from 1960 until his retirement on 11 November 1975. Appointed Administrator on 1 June 1976, Mr England and his wife Polly were the first to fully enjoy the benefits of the rebuilt private apartment annexed to Government House. Arriving in the wake of devastation, Mrs England later recalled: *"People were busy rebuilding their homes after the cyclone and we watched*

*as Darwin slowly came together. Government House was still a bit of a mess and it was hard to accommodate visitors”.*

England held office during the rebuilding of Darwin following Cyclone Tracy, and then served through the transition to Self-Government which was attained on 1 July 1978. The Administrator had, since 1957, been advised by an Administrator’s Council but, with the evolution of the Territory’s administrative structure, the Administrator’s Council was renamed Executive Council with the passing of the *Northern Territory (Administration) Amendment Act 1976*.

Succeeding Ann Waters in 1976 as Mr England’s Official Secretary was Miss Adel Olga Friman, who was to have a long and significant association with Government House Darwin. She had first worked in Darwin as a secretary in 1958-61 for Mr Harry Giese when he was Director of Welfare Branch in Northern Territory Administration. After an overseas holiday, she returned to work in October 1965 for Mr Giese, by now an Assistant Administrator in Northern Territory Administration, who had been appointed a Member of the British Empire in that year’s Queen’s Birthday Honours List. In 1970-73, while still working for Mr Giese, at about the time Welfare Branch was renamed Welfare Division, she had much to do with the then Administrator Mr Chaney.

In 1973-74, she transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, working first for Northern Territory Regional Director Ray McHenry and then Creed Lovegrove, himself a former Patrol Officer. On 5 January 1975, after Cyclone Tracy, she was appointed to the Secretariat of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, working for Deputy Administrator Alan O’Brien until August 1976. Adel Friman served as Mr England’s Official Secretary from August 1976 until March 1979, and in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List of that year, her long and dedicated service in the Territory was rewarded with an appointment as Member of the Order of the British Empire, “*for public service*”. She continued to serve at Government House for another fourteen years as Deputy Official Secretary, retiring on 3 June 1993, having worked for five Administrators.

Mr England purchased for his official car a white 1976 Ford LTD V-8, while as NT2 he obtained a Holden Premier Sedan, also in white with a tan interior and honeycombed mag wheels. His chauffeur, Jim Farrell, thought that such wheels on a 5-litre V-8, together with a twin-exhaust, was a little too sporty for an Administrator and installed standard dress rims instead. He was soon ordered by Mr England to restore the honeycomb mags.

Among the items listed in a Department of Northern Australia inventory account as being present at Government House in November 1976 are a glass fronted china cabinet with cabriola legs, Mosleys as well as Grosvenor cutlery crested with the Australian coat of arms, Royal Doulton and Noritaki china, and a china ornament, featuring two figures and a snow sled, dated 1850. The bedheads obtained for the main VIP suite were in Queen Anne style to match antique furniture in the room.

The Regional Director of the NT Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs at this time was Les Liveris, who had begun his Public Service career in the NT as a messenger between the Government offices and Government House. He was subsequently promoted to Junior Clerk in 1939, transferred to the Commonwealth Public Service in September 1939, went to Sydney on leave late in 1941 (and therefore missed the bombing of Darwin),

and served with the RAAF in New Guinea and in the Philippines from 1942 to 1946. Les Liveris returned to Government House in a more official capacity on 5 May 1980 to receive the insignia of the Medal of the Order of Australia from the Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen. From his humble beginnings as a graduate of Darwin Primary School and NT Public Service messenger, he had risen to hold the post of Regional Director of the NT Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs for a total of nearly thirty years, while he had also served as Australian Consul in Madrid (1965-68) and Counsellor (Immigration) in the Australian Embassy in Athens (1980-82), the first Australian-based officer of Greek origin to be so appointed.

In his capacity as the senior Immigration officer in Darwin, from 1949 to 1965 and again from 1968 to 1980, he regularly came to Government House to brief the Administrator, particularly during the rush of refugees in the 1970s. He recalls that during one such call on Mr England, a little while after Cyclone Tracy, the Administrator mentioned that he had workmen replacing worn, damaged or white ant infested roofing timbers: *“One of the workmen in the roof had found a timber truss with a name painted on it, and had asked Mr England whether they should remove it or paint over it. The Administrator said the name was ‘N. Liveris’ and asked me if it was any relation of mine”.*

The name was that of Nicholas Liveris, Les’ oldest brother, who had been born in Greece and emigrated to Darwin with his parents Andreas and Maria from Kastelorizo in 1919. In the 1930s, he had worked for Charles M Clark who had a contracting yard, office and residence near Government House, on the north side of the Esplanade between the Government offices and the Police barracks. Presumably at this time Nicholas had been contracted for structural work in the roof at Government House, probably as ongoing repairs to damage caused by white ants, and left his name to be found four decades later as a reminder of his service.

The Englands also supervised the construction of new staff quarters in 1977 – three flats which were built on the eastern slope adjacent to the main building. The lower-level vehicle maintenance and storage areas, House Manager’s and Housekeeper’s offices, generating room, cool-room and staff-room were also built at this time, with a service road. Later, in 1980-81, the swimming pool was relocated from above this ‘bunker’ to the southern end of the House behind the private apartment and the old courtyard area above the bunker was filled in and converted into an open terrace. This terrace became an entertainment centre, for receptions, afternoon teas and the occasional dinner during the Dry season.

Within the House itself, new ceilings were installed in the State rooms and the entire building received a new metal-framed fibro roof which faithfully retained the historic seven gables; this work was completed in 1979. When the labourers had begun working on the new roof they had found that all the original timber had suffered extensively from white-ant damage. Also at this time, the floor of the Drawing Room was replaced with cypress pine from Melville Island and, during 1978, a local company was engaged to apply a 7-coat waterproofing to the rendered brickwork on the exposed gable faces to prevent seepage.

The Administrator and Mrs England continued the traditional use of the GHD (Government House, Darwin) monogram on their silverware and the Australian coat of arms in gold on their Royal Doulton crockery. In the Dining Room was a Javanese jungle scene painted by



the Indonesian artist Soebroto. The main guest bedroom contained furniture in the Queen Anne style.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited Darwin on Saturday 26 March 1977 as part of their Royal Silver Jubilee Visit to Australia. Later in the year, the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal was presented to Jim Farrell, Mr England's driver and Government House Co-ordinator. In an interesting family connection, a cased Royal Visit Medal had been presented to Jim Farrell's father in recognition of his services as Transport Officer for Queensland during the Royal Visit, 1953-54. Jim Farrell was later the Manager of Government House, Darwin.

Another significant visitor to Darwin was the Honourable Evan Adermann MP, the last Minister of State for the Northern Territory, whose signature was recorded in the Government House Visitors Book of the time on 16 May 1978. Later that year, HRH The Princess Alexandra and the Honourable Angus Ogilvy were overnight guests at Government House on 2-3 October 1978. In commemoration of this visit they presented Government House with a framed, signed portrait.

Since the transfer of control over the Northern Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth, proclaimed in Darwin by Mr Justice Mitchell on 2 January 1911, the flag of the Commonwealth of Australia has flown from the Government House flagstaff. Upon introduction of the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978*, which became the Territory's new constitution and brought self-determination to the Territory on 1 July 1978, Government House, Darwin became the residence of the Administrator of a self-governing Northern Territory. With this Act came the outlines for the powers of the Administrator, which in some ways were similar to those of the Governors of the States. With this attainment of Self-Government, Mr England continued to fly the Australian National Flag from the yardarm, with the new and distinctive Northern Territory flag alongside.

Subsequent Administrators have continued this practice of flying both, although for most of his incumbency Commodore Johnston flew the Northern Territory Flag alone at the masthead. He recalls that he made this decision early in his term and, at the same time, decided to fly the NT pennant from the flagstaff of NT1: *"Indeed, the practice was reinforced by the Commonwealth during the 1988 Australia Day weekend in Sydney. All Governors and Administrators attended and moved in individual cars supplied and outfitted by the protocol section of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. My car always flew the NT pennant which I took to be tacit approval by the Prime Minister of the day"*.

The Administrator of the self-governing Northern Territory is appointed by the Governor-General of Australia by Commission under the Seal of Australia, based upon provisions in the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978*, on the advice of the Government of the day, and holds office at the Governor-General's pleasure. In practice, this appointment occurs through consultation with the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory who advises the Federal Minister, who in turn advises the Governor-General. This appointment differs from the appointment of a Governor of a State which is effected with the authority of Letters Patent issued by the Sovereign, based upon provisions in the *Australia Act 1986*.

The Administrator is charged with the duty of administering the government of the Territory, but can only perform and exercise the duties that are set out in the *Northern Territory (Self-*

*Government) Act* 1978, and in accordance with the advice of a local Minister. The Administrator performs functions for both the Territory and Commonwealth Governments and, in respect of Territory functions, he is advised by an Executive Council in relation to matters in respect of which the Ministers have executive authority.

This Executive Council comprises all Government Ministers, with the Administrator as its President. The *Interpretation Act* provides that the term 'Administrator' shall mean the Administrator acting with the advice of the Executive Council. The Administrator is the watch-dog of parliamentary democracy and responsible government in the Northern Territory, providing independent, non political authority to the parliamentary process. Every proposed law (bill) passed by the Legislative Assembly is presented to the Administrator for assent; only once the Administrator, with the advice of Executive Council, accepts the bill and his assent is gazetted, is it transformed into law.

Through the early 1970s there was much local criticism of the practice of appointing a senior public servant to act during an absence of the Administrator. These arguments were effectively silenced upon the attainment of Self-Government and by the consequent appointment of the Chief Justice of the Northern Territory Supreme Court to act as Administrator when required by virtue of a dormant commission.

The *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act* 1978 contains provision for a deputy or deputies to be appointed by the Administrator, while the appointment of an Acting Administrator is to be made by the Governor-General: "*The Governor-General may, by Commission under the Seal of Australia, appoint a person to act in the office of Administrator and to administer the government of the Territory during any vacancy in the office of Administrator or whenever the Administrator is absent from duty or from the Territory or is, for any other reason, unable to perform the powers and functions of his office*".

In pursuance with this section of the Act, there was established a dormant commission to act during the absence or inability of the Administrator, and this dormant commission was conferred upon the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court: the first holder of such a commission was Mr Justice, later Sir William, Forster. On those occasions when both the Administrator and Chief Justice were not available, once in 1980-81 and again in 1982, the next most senior Judge – Justice James Muirhead – had to be specially appointed and sworn in on each occasion to fulfil the obligations of an Acting Administrator. When this situation arose again in early 1983, Justice Muirhead was given a dormant commission, to act in the office of Administrator when there was no other person acting in that office.

From this time on, there has been a dormant commission held by the Chief Justice to act in the absence of the Administrator, as well as a second dormant commission to act only in the absence of both the Administrator and Chief Justice, which situation does not arise very often. The holder of such a commission has generally only been called upon to assent to legislation or to authorise commencements, or to host functions at Government House – the Chief Justice and Dr Asche in 1992, for example, were required to host an Open Day instigated well in advance by the Muirheads but who were out of the Territory when the day arrived. None of the post-Self-Government Acting Administrators have actually taken up residence at Government House. During Mr Nelson's time in office, secretarial duties for the

Executive Council had been fulfilled by the Office of the Administrator but, late in 1978, they were transferred to the Chief Minister's Department.

Among the changes which came with Self-Government came changes in the appointment held by the Administrator within the St John Ambulance organisation. The St John Council had been first formed in Darwin in November 1965, as a Branch of the St John Council for South Australia, and Mr Roger Dean CBE KStJ had been the first President. Upon the establishment of an autonomous St John Council for the Northern Territory (Inc) on 16 July 1977, Mr England was invited to become Patron, and with this position came appointment to the Order for Mr England. In a private ceremony conducted at Government House, Darwin on 2 April 1978, Mr and Mrs England were invested with the insignia of Commander Brother and Commander Sister, respectively, in the Order of St John (CStJ) by the Prior in Australia, His Excellency Sir Zelman Cowen AK GCMG KStJ QC.

Commodore Johnston was similarly appointed CStJ on taking up office in 1981 and accepting appointment as Patron of the Council. Following amendments to the St John Council's constitution in consequence of the Territory attaining Self-Government, Mrs Johnston was appointed Commander Sister by virtue of being Patroness of the Council. Further constitutional changes in 1987 saw the Administrator appointed Deputy Prior of the Order of St John in the Northern Territory, and his consequent promotion in the Order to Knight of Grace (KStJ). Each of the subsequent Administrators have also been appointed Knights of Grace, and Dr Val Asche was the first Patron to be appointed Dame of the Order of St John (DStJ), in 1993. One of the prime responsibilities of the Deputy Prior each year is to conduct investitures in the Order of St John at Government House.

Dick Butler retired as Government House's Head Gardener in 1978 after nearly eighteen years' service in which he had served under five Northern Territory Administrators. His wife Louisa was killed during Cyclone Tracy, and her name was later commemorated on a memorial plaque outside the Darwin City Council offices which was unveiled by The Queen on 26 March 1977 during Her Majesty's Silver Jubilee tour. In recognition of Dick Butler's long service, the Administrator and Mrs England hosted a party to mark his retirement.

During 1979 the National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory) responded to the Territory Government's decision to restore several of Darwin's older buildings. Among the ideas the Branch proposed was the rebuilding of the old Town Hall, which had been opened by Government Resident E W Price on 5 March 1883, for use as an office by the Administrator. This did not eventuate however, the Town Hall ruins being instead preserved in their demolished condition and the Administrator's office being established a little while later in the reconstructed Naval Headquarters, the original pre-WW2 courthouse. Prior to this time, the Administrator and his staff had offices on the first floor of the NT Government's Stuart Building (previously known as Block 1), immediately opposite Government House, where the NT Supreme Court building today stands, except during Jock Nelson's time when the office was within Government House.

Extensive works were carried out in the grounds of Government House throughout the late 1970s, particularly involving the removal of the ubiquitous coffee-bush which had come to dominate parts of the gardens. With its removal, the acacias, poincianas and palms thrived and the view across the harbour was opened up. This extensive landscaping plan included the concept of Knight's original terracing and the planting of additional tropical plants and

palms, particularly on the hillsides facing the sea, and the terraced lawns were extended down the eastern slope to the boundary fence along Hughes Avenue. Near the garage, a Giant South American Fern Tree was planted in 1989 in honour of Mr England.

In March 1979, Major Michael Weir Barrett (ret'd) commenced duty as the Administrator's Official Secretary, a position he held until 1991. He had seen active service as a soldier in Malaya during the Emergency and in Borneo during Confrontation, was commissioned in 1967, and served as an officer in South Vietnam with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. Later, returning to the Royal Military College, Duntroon as Adjutant, he was known privately amongst the Staff Cadets as 'Bear'. At Government House, Darwin he is recalled for his military drill lessons for the female staff who were taught to curtsy to regimental timing in readiness for the visit of Her Majesty The Queen in 1982.

There was a considerable refurnishing of the House at this time. A pair of Victorian grandfather and grandmother chairs with matching settee, all *circa* 1870, were purchased in June 1979, as well as two French mahogany open armchairs. Also purchased for the Drawing Room at this time was a 19th Century bookcase in mahogany with a carved pediment at the top and bearing the Victorian Crown and Royal Cipher 'VR' (*Victoria Regina*) on the metal fittings. During Commodore Johnston's incumbency, this case contained three cups and saucers which had been amongst the crockery in use during the terms of Mr Wise (1951-56) and Mr Archer (1956-61). At some stage, through breakages, the set became incomplete and some of the saucers were used to hold pot-plants on the verandahs. Mrs Johnston discovered that these saucers were Wedgwood and had them refurbished for display.

Having a cannon sitting outside Government House in the late 1970s was quite appropriate, the occupant being a veteran of the World War 2 campaigns in Dutch New Guinea and Borneo, although Mr England was in actual fact an anti aircraft gunner. In an interesting connection, upon his departure from the Territory in December 1980, the Darwin RSL President Mr L G 'Lofty' Plane presented Mr England with a miniature brass cannon, complete with tamping rod and balls which had been produced by local craftsman Kurt Mussiger.

During 1980, in preparation for the new Administrator, the specialist services of interior decorator/designer Mr Thomas Gillies were sought to furnish and decorate the State rooms in a style to complement the character and function of Government House. He came well recommended after earlier refurbishing The Lodge in Canberra and Old Government House in Parramatta. The fabric on the dining room chairs was replaced and Gillies also selected quilted pelmets and was responsible for the decor throughout. The outcome was a successful blending of antique and modern furniture and the graceful use of pastel and floral fabrics to create a comfortable but still dignified atmosphere.

Also in this year, the historical significance of Government House to the heritage of the nation was recognised by the fixing of a plaque on the wall just inside the front, or flagpole, door by the Northern Territory Branch of the National Trust of Australia in March 1980. In 1984, Government House was entered on the Register of Significant European Cultural Sites in the NT by the National Trust of Australia. While in March 1996 Government House received legislation heritage protection by the NT Government on the recommendation of the Heritage Advisory Council.

After serving his contracted three year term, Mr England was requested by both the Chief Minister and the Federal Minister for Home Affairs to remain as Administrator for a further year, in recognition of his significant contribution to the government of the Territory in the important transitional period during which the Northern Territory achieved Self-Government. It was for this service that he was created a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George in January 1979.

Seen by some, particularly Chief Minister Paul Everingham, as a legacy of the Commonwealth era, Mr England retired due to poor health to take effect from 31 December 1980 and, in pouring rain, departed Darwin by RAAF VIP Mystiere jet for NSW on 17 December 1980. The Englands retired to their property 'Wilga' at Grenfell in NSW where Mr England died on 18 June 1985. In addition to his CMG, he had been Mentioned-in-Despatches during the war and held the Efficiency Decoration, and was appointed a Commander of the Order of St John in January 1978.

Justice Muirhead of the NT Supreme Court was specially appointed and sworn in as Acting Administrator upon the departure of Mr England, to act from 19 December until the arrival of his successor in January the following year.



## **E E Johnston, 13th Administrator**

Eric Eugene Johnston retired from the Royal Australian Navy in December 1980 with the rank of Commodore after more than three decades of distinguished service, during which time he had received appointments in the Military Divisions of both the Order of Australia and of the Order of the British Empire, while he received a further appointment to the Order of Australia (in the General Division) as well as to the Order of St John during his eight and a half years as Territory Administrator. Appointed Administrator on 1 January 1981 and re-appointed for a second term in March 1986, he was the first Honorary Colonel of the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) upon the raising of that regiment in Darwin on 1 July 1981. He has the further distinction of being the only Resident or Administrator not to have been born in Britain or Australian, having been born in Shanghai, China on 29 July 1933, the son of Captain V V Johnston of the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve.

Educated at Frankston High School in Victoria, he joined the RAN in 1947 and, after further education at the Royal Australian Navy College and the US Naval War College on Rhode Island, saw extensive maritime service between 1950 and 1967. He had served off the Malay Peninsula during Confrontation, and was Commanding Officer of HMAS *Vendetta* off Vietnam in 1969-70, earning a US Commander-in-Chief-Pacific Commendation and appointment as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1971.

His association with the Territory began in 1973 when he was appointed Naval Officer Commanding North Australia. He was caught in the rubble of Naval Headquarters following Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve 1974 and was responsible for leading Operation 'Navy Help' in Darwin in the wake of Tracy. He was then Commanding Officer of HMAS *Perth* and was promoted to Commodore, and was the Australian delegate to the United Nations Law of

the Sea Conferences in New York and Geneva in 1978 and 1979. His final appointment was as Director of Public Information for the Department of Defence, from which position he retired from the Navy in December 1980.

At first, Commodore Johnston occupied the first floor office in Stuart Building opposite Government House but, at the end of 1981, he and Mrs Johnston and their staff moved into new offices, with a historical connection for both Darwin and Commodore Johnston – the rebuilt Naval Headquarters which had been Darwin's first substantial courthouse. The courthouse, police station and cell block on the Esplanade overlooking the harbour are believed to have been designed by John George Knight who had come to the Territory as Government Secretary in 1873 (later Government Resident, 1890-92). In addition to designing the courthouse complex, Knight was also responsible for designing several other stone buildings during this early period of South Australian administration, including Fannie Bay Gaol, the public sea-baths, the old Town Hall, Brown's Mart and the extensions to the original Residence.

The courthouse and police station stood on Lot 0533 on the Esplanade, one of ten lots reserved by Surveyor-General Goyder for government buildings. The stone courthouse replaced the Territory's first courthouse built on the same site in 1870, a timber, weatherboard and bark structure which was identified for replacement in the 1882 estimates. Erection occurred during 1883 and was completed by January 1884, costing some £2,509, and was carried out by Chinese labourers under Jeremiah (Jerry) Ryan. The project was under the supervision of the Senior Surveyor and Supervisor of Works, Gilbert McMinn, who also had much to do with the majority of Darwin's earliest buildings, and was Acting Resident from March 1883 to May 1884. The complex, with an overall frontage of 77 feet, was part of an impressive administrative precinct which extended westwards along the Esplanade.

The new courthouse was made entirely from locally quarried porcellanite stone and cypress pine, and was encircled by wide verandahs, with simple gable rooves. There was a large courtroom, 50 feet by 30 feet, with four smaller rooms at the back for the magistrate, clerk, jury and witnesses. It had high ceilings and recessed windows, with the timber panelling throughout highly polished. The editor of the *North Australian* was not very complimentary toward this new structure, following on from a series of abusive attacks on the local judge, Thomas Kennedy Pater, regarding what he saw as mismanagement of the Territory's judicial affairs. His commentary on the opening of the courthouse read:

*"The new courthouse was opened on Tuesday last without any ceremony whatever, except that of trying a man for cattle stealing. The interior of the building is pleasing enough but we cannot say that a view of it from the streets is suggestive of anything more than a grocer's shop. The cells we did not inspect – we are likely to do that at any time".* The lattermost comment was perhaps in reference to the editor's feared consequences of his earlier contemptuous writings.

The Courthouse survived the Japanese raids of February 1942 and, on 1 October 1942, was occupied by the Navy as Naval Headquarters, HMAS *Melville*, as the Navy took full control of all facilities between Bennett Street and the port. The buildings continued to serve this purpose until their partial destruction by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas eve, 1974. The Naval Officer Commanding North Australia (NOCNA) at that time was Captain Eric Johnston

OBE. Cyclone Tracy had been detected by satellite photography on 21 December 1974 and alerts and warnings were being issued regularly while, at 12.30 pm on Christmas Eve, flash cyclone warning number 16 was issued indicating that the threat to Darwin had become imminent.

In his office, Captain Johnston received a warning call at 2.00 am on the 25th, Darwin received the full fury of Tracy at 3.00 am (217 kilometres per hour before the airport's anemometer was destroyed), and by 4.30 am his Operations Room was totally destroyed, with NOCNA and three staff trapped within the ruins. As Naval Headquarters was falling down around him, Captain Johnston crawled out of the rubble to take refuge in the Cell Bar (a mess established in one of the original cells behind the building) – its roof was torn off but still Captain Johnston stayed. The walls later came down and he was trapped in the rubble for some considerable time. All but one escaped, the other being extricated at first light.

The damage which Tracy wreaked on the city of Darwin was exceeded in magnitude only by the Navy's clean-up effort under the capable guidance of Captain Johnston. He was appointed a Member in the Military Division of the Order of Australia (AM) on 17 June 1975 for his services as NOCNA, particularly following the cyclone. Little wonder then, that he should be so eagerly welcomed back to Darwin after his retirement from the Navy in December 1980, to be appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory.

The damaged Naval Headquarters buildings stood vacant for nearly six years, the remaining walls braced against further collapse – the ruins used only by squatters. In 1979, the Director of the National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory), Mr Peter Forrest, suggested to the Territory Government that Naval Headquarters on the Esplanade, the original pre-WW2 police station and courthouse, should be rebuilt for use by the Administrator. Peter Forrest recalls that the Chief Minister, the Honourable Paul Everingham MLA, was receptive to his proposal, although it was strongly resisted by the Coordinator of Works in the Department of Transport and Works; Everingham was apparently advised by a senior public servant that *“the old stone building was a ‘heap of rubble’ and it would cost way too much”*. The proposal was also resisted by the then Administrator, Mr John England, who *“thought that the plan would prejudice his personal security”*, fearing an attack from a speeding car, deliberate or otherwise, whilst crossing the Esplanade from Government House to his office or *vice versa*.

The Chief Minister was firm that the proposal should proceed: the public servant was overruled, Mr England's term expired, and the Department of Transport and Works was duly directed to implement Peter Forrest's suggestion. In early 1981, therefore, the Minister for Transport and Works the Honourable Nick Dondas MLA announced that a contract valued at \$1.5 million had been awarded to W R Bradley & Co Ltd to carry out the rebuilding of the structure to its original appearance, under the supervision of architect Alan Hammond. A detailed architectural and archaeological study was undertaken as the ruins were carefully cleared. A large quantity of the original stone was saved and stockpiled on site while particular items such as doors and windows had been stored for reference, while sections of original roof trusses and some original verandah posts still remain even today. On the seventh anniversary of Cyclone Tracy, the rebuilt courthouse/Naval Headquarters was officially opened by the Chief Minister to be the new Administrator's Office for Commodore Johnston and subsequent Administrators.

Michael Barrett was Official Secretary, and Commodore Johnston's Aide was Rodney Quong, a son of Eddie Quong OAM who had been a baker in Darwin's post-war days, Chairman of the Darwin Hospital Advisory Board for over seventeen years and a member of the Reconstruction Commission after Cyclone Tracy. The Quongs are more Territorian than most Europeans who have lived in the Northern Territory, the family having been present since before Federation. Rodney was born in Darwin, Eddie was born in Pine Creek and was educated at Darwin Primary School (and also in Longreach in Queensland), and his parents were Ethel Low-Oy and Henry Chin Shue Hong Quong, both born in 1900 at Arawonga and Pine Creek respectively. Henry was a son of Chin Wah Too who had been born in Lower Canton in China in 1858 and had come to the Northern Territory as a gold miner late in the nineteenth century.

Jim Farrell, the Administrator's chauffeur since 1961, had in August 1979 been promoted by Mr England to the position of Government House Co-ordinator, but was also retained as his driver. On assuming office in 1981, Commodore Johnston promoted Farrell to Government House Manager, and Mr Brian Payne was enlisted as the Administrator's driver. Commodore Johnston purchased as NT1 a 1981 6-cylinder Fairlane LTD in gold, succeeded by another of the same model in 1988, and as NT2 throughout Commodore Johnston's incumbency was a white Holden Calais.

Upon his arrival, Commodore Johnston was, "... *horrified to find that there was not one item of silverware which allowed a matching set for a formal lunch or dinner. Indeed table sets for twenty or more were made up of over five different designs, an indication of previous financial neglect*". During the period 1984-89, by courtesy of an annual grant from the Northern Territory Government, he managed to build up a matching set of silverware sufficient to entertain up to 36 people. In 1981, a modern and fully-equipped kitchen, operating on both gas and electricity, was established within the framework of the original kitchen according with the wishes of the National Trust relating to the external appearance of the House.

During 1981-82, the terrace was completed and the verandah roofing was replaced and upgraded to comply with the Cyclone Code. In 1982, ongoing renovations to the House were completed to prepare the House for the visit by Her Majesty The Queen: an amenities building was erected, staff showers were installed, and a major landscaping exercise was finalised: the gardens on the eastern aspects of the property were extensively landscaped and these works undertaken in the gardens were rewarded in 1982 by a Darwin City Council Civic Commendation awarded by the Lord Mayor. In the Office of the Administrator's 1982/83 Annual Report, Official Secretary Michael Barrett concluded: "*It is reasonable to comment that the Government House buildings and grounds are looking the best they have since the Residency was established in 1870*".

The Prime Minister of Tonga HRH Prince Fatafehi Tu'ipelehake KBE was a guest of Commodore and Mrs Johnston at dinner on the evening of Monday 12 October 1981. In the following year, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Darwin on her way to Brisbane where she was to close the Commonwealth Games. Her Majesty was, for the first time, an overnight guest at Government House, staying on the night of 5-6 October in the main guest bedroom which was for this occasion known as the Royal Suite. In commemoration of this visit, this front room of Government House, which has previously served as accommodation



for Government Residents, an office for Administrators and as a guest bedroom since the time of Abbott, has been known as the Queen's Bedroom.

On the evening of 5 October, Her Majesty was a guest of the Administrator and Mrs Johnston at a Dinner held at Government House. The dining room was as resplendent as ever on this evening, with Stuart Crystal on the sideboards and Orrefors glassware on the table. The three silver flower-bowls used as centre-pieces had been presented to Government House by Ballieu, Bowring, Marsh & McLennan in August that year. The silverware was embossed with the Government House, Darwin monogram.

The Wedgwood crockery, just purchased that year, was in the 'Connaught' pattern with a single gold band and badged in gold with the Northern Territory crest; the pieces are also stamped on the reverse with the Government House, Darwin badge. In the Drawing Room the following morning Her Majesty presented the Royal Humane Society Bravery Award to Miss Peta-Lynn Mann SC. Following the Investiture, Her Majesty toured the Mall, opened Darwin Naval Base and visited the NT Museum of Arts and Sciences before departing for Brisbane.

The exposed southern and western aspects of the grounds have always presented a threat to the House, particularly following the removal of Fort Hill. In December 1950, the retaining wall on the western side of the House had partially collapsed and had to be rebuilt to prevent erosion of the hillside. With the removal of coffee-bush in the late 1970s, there was extensive planting of additional tropical plants and palms particularly on the hillsides facing the sea, to assist in stabilising these slopes. Heavy rains in March 1983 caused severe erosion of the cliff in the southern area of the grounds, and a report on slope stability recommended remedial action which was incorporated in Stage 3 of the landscaping programme.

Responsible for the grounds at this time was Steve Lambert of the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory (CCNT), who had come to Government House as Head Gardener. In about 1985, when the CCNT surrendered responsibility for maintaining Government House's gardens, Lambert stayed on as Head Gardener until 1987. One of his most distinctive memories relates to the historic tamarind tree which stands near the garage in the north-west of the grounds. Required to remove an overhanging bough, his hand-saw first caught on something and then the chainsaw also caught. Once the bough was removed, two large pieces of iron were removed – shrapnel from the Japanese bomb which had exploded in the driveway some forty years previously, demolishing the Administrator's office. In August 1994, a piece of this shrapnel was presented to Government House to keep on permanent display. Steve Lambert was succeeded as Head Gardener by one of his staff, Leon Doyle, who was tragically killed at Rapid Creek on 2 December 1989 aged 36. Appropriately, a plaque was installed in the gardens near the western driveway in Leon Doyle's memory.

Dick Butler had come to be so well respected while he was Head Gardener that, on the morning of 28 August 1987, his funeral cortege detoured *en route* to Darwin General Cemetery and the hearse was driven to the gates of Government House. The gardeners and those staff who had known Dick were lined up outside the front gate, and the House Manager Jim Farrell placed a wreath on the coffin on behalf of all the staff of Government House. Friends and family were especially pleased at this tribute to a man who had spent so

many years maintaining the lush tropical garden in perfect order through the terms of five Administrators.

A Territorian in every sense of the word, Butler had grown up in difficult times. He struggled through life at Kahlin, the Depression and the cyclone; his early life certainly toughened him and made him a notable boxer and football player (with the Buffaloes), while the Government Secretary had undoubtedly directed Dick towards a military career. He narrowly missed death at the Naval Oil Fuel Installation at the time of the first Japanese raid and was witness to all subsequent raids, and suffered personal tragedy at the time of Cyclone Tracy when his wife Louisa was killed. He was a life member of the NT Football League and Darwin Football Club, and a member of both the RSL and the Royal Australian Artillery Association. It is not surprising then, that Government House should be chosen by the Butler family as an appropriate repository for his service medals, insignia and photographs, a framed display being presented to Government House on 2 December 1993.

Commodore Johnston holds the distinction of having been the first Honorary Colonel of the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) – having, on occasion, exchanged his Naval whites for military khaki and slouch hat for regimental ceremonies. On 1 July 1981, the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) was raised– an integrated Army Reserve regiment responsible for reconnaissance and surveillance in the Northern Territory and Kimberley. To the successive Commanding Officers of NORFORCE – Lieutenant Colonels John George OBE, Doug Gibbons AM, Neil Weekes AM MC and Bruce Osborn, Commodore Johnston was popularly known as ‘Colonel Eric’. On being dined-out from the regiment, on 26 June 1989, Lieutenant Colonel Osborn reflected that Commodore Johnston had been, “*a magnificent ambassador for the unit, both in the Top End and wherever he has travelled, and the unit’s staunchest supporter*”.

While he had a Personal Aide – a Public Service employee paid by the Northern Territory Government like any other Public Servant – Commodore Johnston would be provided with an officer, alternately from each of the Services, to be his Aide-de-Camp (ADC) for ceremonial occasions such as investitures. This was particularly so when he was required to fulfil a ceremonial role in his capacity as Honorary Colonel of NORFORCE on such occasions as the granting of a Freedom of Entry.

In 1988, Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales visited Darwin and were guests of the Administrator and Mrs Johnston at Government House overnight on 2-3 February, and an official dinner was held at Government House that evening in their honour. In the Drawing Room the following morning, His Royal Highness presented the Prince of Wales Trophy to representatives of St Philip’s College, Alice Springs. In commemoration of this visit, the second guest suite has since been known as the Prince of Wales Room.

Upon his retirement after the longest post-war period in office, Commodore Johnston maintained a firm Territory involvement as a resident of Nightcliff and Chairman of such bodies as the NT Grants Commission, the Redistribution Committee and Batchelor College. He had been appointed a Commander of the Order of St John in 1981 but was promoted to Knight of Grace in September 1984. He received appointment as an Officer of the Order of Australia in June 1988 for his service as Administrator of the NT and, as this was an

appointment in the General Division, he had the relatively rare distinction of an entitlement to wear the insignia of both his AO and his military AM.

*[Commodore Johnston was diagnosed with cancer in 1996 and died in 26 February 1997. His ashes were scattered over the Arafura Sea and the Territory honoured him with the tribute of a State Funeral on 4 March 1997.]*



## **J H Muirhead, 14th Administrator**

Commodore Johnston's successor was former NT Supreme Court Judge and Royal Commissioner, the Honourable James Henry Muirhead QC. Since 1980, he had at various times been an Acting Administrator, at first specially sworn-in when he was required to act but from 4 February 1983 under a dormant commission.

Mr Muirhead was born in Adelaide on 24 April 1925, and saw active service in 1943-46 with the 57th/60th Infantry Battalion in Bougainville, New Guinea and with the 37th/52nd Battalion in Rabaul, New Britain. He was a barrister and solicitor in Adelaide from 1950, appointed Queen's Counsel in 1967, and a Judge of the Local and District Criminal Court of SA. He established the Australian Institute of Criminology in Canberra in 1973-74 and then came to Darwin as the second Residential Judge of the Supreme Court of the NT, 1974-85 and was Acting Chief Justice in 1985. He had been a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia (1977-86), was then a Resident Judge of the Federal Court of WA (1986-87), and then Commissioner of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. After releasing the interim recommendations, he resigned in 1989, being appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory on 1 July 1989.

Soon after assuming office, the Administrator and Mrs Muirhead began using the western verandah more extensively for official functions – this side of the House enjoys a clear view of Darwin Harbour and, particularly during the Dry Season, refreshing sea breezes. It had, since its design by Knight, been the 'front' of the House (a plan of the "New Residence, Port Darwin, NT" held by the State Library of South Australia shows the western aspect of the house as the 'Front Elevation'), and during Her Majesty's visit to Darwin in 1982, Queen Elizabeth recalled that it was at this western doorway that she had been welcomed on a previous visit.

The Administrator obtained as NT2 a white 1989 Holden Calais, while the gold LTD continued in use as NT1 until 1991 when it was replaced by another V-8 LTD in white. On departing the Northern Territory, the Muirheads purchased the Calais from the NT Government and took it to Perth with them for use in their retirement.

In the earliest days of the Residence, the carriage-loop was a circular dirt path which allowed an opportunity for the horse-drawn wagons and buggies to turn around. From 1989 'Coop & Co' provided the opportunity to view the city's attractions from a horse-drawn buggy, and included amongst the sights was Government House. Among house-guests who have availed themselves of this service are included Mrs Polly England, wife of an earlier

Administrator, and Dame Roma Mitchell, Governor of South Australia and grand-daughter of Judge Mitchell who, as the first Acting Administrator, had presided over the transfer of control of the Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth. This regular carriage visit, in which the Clydesdales entered the grounds and completed a circuit of the carriage-loop, left the bitumen considerably hoof-scarred – further adding to the historical charm of the House of Seven Gables.

Quite appropriately for a retired Judge, Mr Muirhead moved into the office on the Esplanade which had previously been Darwin's courthouse. Sitting at his desk looking out across the harbour, he could well envisage the events of 19 February 1942 when Stipendiary Magistrate Mr C K Ward similarly sat, presiding over the Darwin Court of Summary Jurisdiction. As the Japanese planes swarmed in towards Darwin, court was in session: they usually sat at 10.00 am but the court clock was twelve minutes fast. At 10.10 am (by the court clock) barrister Dick Ward heard the sirens and saw aircraft sweeping in over the harbour towards the courthouse. The Magistrate adjourned proceedings and together with counsel and staff ran to a slit trench at the rear of the courthouse.

The courthouse was also used for Church of England services until Christchurch was built in 1902. Ruby D'Ambrosio and her husband Ted, for many years an Alderman and at one time a Deputy Mayor of Darwin, celebrated their wedding anniversary in the Administrator's office on 17 November 1990 – the same room in which they had been married exactly fifty years earlier. Ted D'Ambrosio came to Darwin in 1939 and opened an electrical store, Ruby becoming one of his customers; later, Ted pronounced his interest in marriage but Ruby's foster mother took her to Singapore to marry another. Ted had some RAAF mates fly her back to Australia at his expense and they married immediately.

For much of the 1980s the concrete flooring of the verandahs had been covered with a loosely woven seagrass matting which required replacing every twelve months. In late 1990 it was found that the matting then in use was deteriorating with age, the buckled squares and loose braids causing both staff and visitors to trip or fall. Early the next year this matting was removed, the exposed concrete surfaces tiled, and lengths of red carpet laid as walkways around the hundred metres of verandah.

In early 1991 the Administrator established an Advisory Committee to play a part in the decorating of Government House. The honorary members of this committee represented organisations including the Chief Minister's Department, NT Museum of Arts and Sciences and National Trust of Australia (NT). Mr Muirhead expressed his view to a gathering of Rotarians: *"We take the view that Government House, that unique old building known as "The House of Seven Gables", with such an interesting history, belongs to the people of the Territory – it is their house and should be utilised as such. It is to the credit of Governments of all persuasions that the old place has been repaired and reinstated, not demolished, despite severe damage resulting from both war and cyclone".* On another occasion, he said, *"I like to think that people have as much access as practicable to Government House and its grounds – one of the few truly historical buildings which remain in Darwin. Thanks to our staff it is, I know, a source of interest and pleasure to many".*

On 15 October 1989 the Administrator and Mrs Muirhead had opened Government House to the public for the first time in a decade, hosting an Open Day for the NT Branch of the National Trust of Australia. In addition, the Muirheads used Government House extensively

for official engagements and courtesy calls, entertaining more than 13,000 guests. This represents an average of 16 guests per day, *every day* of Mr Muirhead's three and a half year incumbency.

Among the artworks was *The Flag Raising* (1985) by Heather Riley, which depicts the flag-raising ceremony held on the lawns of the Residence on Monday 2 January 1911 following the transfer of administration of the Northern Territory from South Australia to the Commonwealth. There is also a 1982 portrait by Frank Hodgkinson of the Honourable Justice Sir William Forster, the Territory's first Chief Justice (1979-85), its first Knight (Knight Bachelor, 1982) and the first holder of a dormant commission as Acting Administrator (1978-85). In late 1991, some Central Australian Aboriginal paintings were purchased for Government House, including *Emu Dreaming* by Leslie Daniels of Yuendumu and *Women's Initiation Ceremony* by Linny Nambatyimba of Mt Allan Station. These complemented two paintings by Oenpelli artists, *Ngalyod –the Rainbow Serpent* by Bobby Bardjuray Nganjmirra and *Yirawadbad and Nadulmi* by Thompson Yulitjirri.

A walnut Vienna wall clock was purchased for Government House by the Administrator and Mrs Muirhead during a visit to Perth in 1991, and was installed in the Dining Room. Built in 1880, it is an eight-day clock that strikes on the hour and half-hour, and has a brass pendulum and weights. The following year, Government House purchased from a South Australian clock gallery a long-case clock of German manufacture, *circa* 1920, with a brass dial and mahogany case which was placed in the Drawing Room. This clock can be set for Westminster chimes (chiming on the hour and every quarter-hour) or silent operation (chiming on the hour only). An early 20th Century mantle clock with French movements was purchased by His Honour and Mrs Muirhead in early 1992 from a clock gallery in Hyde Park, South Australia.

In January 1992, Government House replaced its stock of Krosno glassware with a collection of Waterford crystal in the Lismore style. Among the other additions to Government House are a descriptive plaque cast in gun-metal, which was installed beside the small side-gate to Government House in March 1992. With the building of the new Parliament House and the commencement of construction work on State Square, the Esplanade was opened up and considerably more tourists and visitors were found to be walking past Government House than ever before, this plaque becoming a regular feature in their walking trails around Darwin.

Like his predecessor, Mr Muirhead had a Public Service employee on his personal staff as his Aide, but for ceremonial occasions such as investitures, an officer would be supplied from Larrakeyah Barracks to be his ADC. This was especially so when he was required to officiate in his capacity as Honorary Colonel of NORFORCE, such as at the granting of the Freedom of Entry to the Shire of Kununurra. With the growth in NORFORCE which brought a relative abundance of young Regular Army subalterns not seen in the unit before, these Lieutenants were generally chosen to fill these isolated ADC appointments – and were unfortunately noted for pinning Mr Muirhead's service ribbons onto his Safari Suit jacket the wrong way around! From 1991, Mr Muirhead was uniquely placed, having as his (Public Service) Aide a serving Army Reserve officer of NORFORCE, who was accordingly seconded by the Department of Defence as the Administrator's ADC.

For the dinner party and reception hosted by the Administrator and Mrs Nott in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh during the Royal visit to Darwin in 1963, two bands were in attendance at Government House – the Band of the Pacific Islands Regiment and the Royal Papuan and New Guinea Constabulary Band. Particularly during the term of Mr Muirhead, musical support was increasingly provided at Government House functions by a range of local musicians, including individual violinists and pianists, a saxophone quartet, and various local bands, including the Darwin City Brass Band, the St John Ambulance Cadet Band, and the Caledonian Pipe Band which dates back to its official raising in 1959, although it had unofficially existed since 1948.

For the departure of the Muirheads in particular, a lone Caledonian piper stood beside the flagstaff and played *Auld Lang Syne* as they progressed along the northern verandah being farewelled by their staff. The most notable occasions when musical support has been sought have been investitures, Queen’s Birthday receptions and, during the term of Mr Muirhead, Open Days. Perhaps the biggest supporter of such functions has been the local Army Reserve band, known through Mr Muirhead’s term as the Band of the 7th Military District; by the time the Asches occupied the House, this band had been redesignated Australian Army Band – Northern Command.

Mr Muirhead retired on 4 December 1992 and moved to Perth. He had been created a Companion of the Order of Australia in the General Division on Australia Day 1991, for public service and service to the law, while in 1989 he had been appointed a Knight of Grace of the Order of St John. The Honourable Chief Justice Keith John Austin Asche of the Territory Supreme Court had held a dormant commission as Acting Administrator since 21 December 1987, upon succeeding Mr Justice O’Leary as Chief Justice on 1 August, and had acted on a number of occasions during temporary absences of the Administrator. Upon Mr Muirhead’s departure, he again became Acting Administrator on 5 December 1992.

*[Mr Muirhead died on 20 July 1999, he was visiting his children and grandchildren in the Territory at the time. Mr Muirhead was given a State Funeral at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral on 24 July 1999. A press release stated: “Justice Muirhead was a leading advocate for reconciliation both in what he practised as well as preached. He was strongly committed to justice for all Australians and was highly regarded and respected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people all over Australia”.]*



## **K J A Asche, 15th Administrator**

The Honourable Chief Justice Austin Asche was sworn in as Administrator by the Governor-General in Canberra on 1 March 1993. Upon their return to Darwin the following day, His Honour and Dr Valerie Asche officially took up residence at Government House. They were welcomed by a Royal Guard of Honour from Navy, Army and Air Force units based in Darwin. This was the first occasion a Royal Guard of Honour had been mounted within the grounds of Government House.

Austin Asche was born in Melbourne on 28 November 1925 and gained his early education at Darwin Primary School. After serving with RAAF radar units 1944-46, notably on Bathurst Island and in the northwest, he was a barrister in Queensland and Melbourne, a Judge (1976-86) and Acting Chief Judge (1985-86) of the Family Court of Australia, and was then Judge of the Supreme Court of the NT (1986-87). He was elevated to the position of Chief Justice in 1987, an appointment he held until 1993. He also held three senior academic appointments during his career: President of the RMIT Council (1981-83), Chancellor of Deakin University (1983-87) and Chancellor of the Northern Territory University (1989-93), while he had also been Chairman of the University College of the NT from 1986 to 1988.

Again occupying the Administrator's office on the Esplanade, the retired Chief Justice took an interest in his office's earlier history as a courthouse particularly as he now sat where some fifty years previously his father had appeared as Crown Law Officer. Notably, as a child, he would climb the hill from his parent's home, 'Knight's Folly', and play around the back of the courthouse.

A considerable refurbishing of Government House had taken place in the three months from the departure of the Muirheads, in readiness for the Asches –overgrown portions of the gardens were cleared, some of the larger trees dangerously overhanging the House were cut back, and red and yellow grevilleas were planted alongside the House down the western driveway. Adding the final ouch to the carriage-loop area and flagpole lawn in readiness for the ceremonial welcome, a plug was obtained for the old cannon, crafted from jarrah and bearing the Northern Territory crest.

After having served as Official Secretary from 1976 to 1979, Miss Adel Friman had been appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours of 1979 "for *public service*". She continued to serve at Government House for a further fourteen years, notably as Deputy Official Secretary, retiring on 3 June 1993 having served five Administrators.

Austin Asche had a particularly special connection with both Darwin and with Government House. His father, Eric Asche (1894-1940) was the Crown Law Officer in Darwin and the family home was the grand old residence of John George Knight known variously as 'Knight's Folly' or 'The Mud Hut' which had been built in 1883 and 1884 by prison labour under Knight's supervision. A concrete structure in the Norman style with a flat roof and embattled parapet, built on a steep bank facing the sea, it was Palmerston's first two-storey building. It had a double verandah with "*massive piers and arches all formed in concrete*". During the period when Austin Asche was a Judge and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the NT, he had one of the original concrete pillars standing beside the driveway outside his official residence at Fannie Bay. In preparation for his taking up residence at Government House, in February 1993 this historic pillar was positioned outside the private apartment, at the end of the western driveway.

Government House today is staffed much as it has been since the establishment of the office in the old Naval Headquarters in 1981. Although the staff are answerable directly to the Administrator, they form a unit entitled Office of the Administrator which is funded and supported by the NT Government's Department of the Chief Minister. Like Mr Muirhead before him, Mr Asche had as his Aide a serving NORFORCE officer (Army Reserve) seconded by the Department of Defence as ADC.

The resignation of Jim Farrell as House Manager on 15 July 1994 saw a wealth of knowledge and experience depart the grounds of Government House. He had commenced his service in the Northern Territory as a driver with NT Administration in 1959, had then served as the Administrator's chauffeur from 1961 to 1981, and then as Government House Manager for a further thirteen years. His long association with Government House is reflected in the fact that, after nearly 34 years, many senior Territorians still referred to him as 'Young Jimmy'. As a chauffeur, he had driven official cars which range from a comfortable but bulky 1957 Dodge Desoto, through a 1960 Ford Fairlane, an air-conditioned 1961 Pontiac Lorencien, the glamorous 1964 Austin Princess, a smart 1970 Pontiac Parisienne (all black), to Mr England's white 1976 Ford LTD, while his service to a total of nine Territory Administrators is an achievement of some distinction. He has also had the privilege of having driven seven successive Australian Governors-General (from Sir William Slim to Sir Zelman Cowen), and four successive Australian Prime Ministers (Gorton, McMahon, Whitlam and Fraser), during visits to the Territory. He received a crested lapel badge from The Princess Margaret in 1972 and, following the Royal Silver Jubilee Visit to Darwin in March 1977, was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal.

Among the artworks at Government House have been a Balinese woodcarving, presented to the Administrator by Major General Soewardi, Commander of the Indonesian 9th Military Area Command, Nusa Tenggara Timur, and a glass-cased sandalwood plaque presented by a group of exchange students from Nusa Tenggara Timur. Another item from Indonesia was an Indonesian sailing vessel in silver wire – a *perahu pinisi*, the traditional fishing boat of the Makassans from Sulawesi – presented to the Administrator and Dr Asche by the Vice-Governor of South Sulawesi during their official visit to Ujung Pandang (formerly Makassar) in October 1993.

The Administrator was appointed a Knight of Grace of the Order of St John in 1993, and a Companion of the Order of Australia on Australia Day 1994 for service to the law, to tertiary education and to the community, particularly the people of the Northern Territory. He was invested with the insignia of both awards by the Governor-General, the Honourable Bill Hayden, at Government House, Darwin on 17 June 1994; Dr Asche received the insignia of her appointment as a Dame of Grace of the Order of St John in the same ceremony.

A significant acquisition after the Asche's first year at Government House was a pair of polished oyster pearl shells bearing pictures on the inner surfaces painted by a Japanese artist commissioned by John George Knight in 1890 whilst he was Government Resident. One shows a view of Knight's Folly (the 'Mud Hut'), while the other shows a view of the Residence itself. Knight described them in a letter to his daughter-in-law: *"I send you a pair of pearl shells with sketches in oil of my late residence and my present one. The paintings are only rough but are not bad in their way, they are by the Japanese what painted the panels of my dining room. and anyhow, they are original and I suppose the colour will not fly unless the lime of the shell does not act upon them. You may observe the flag flying which indicates that I am at home"*

These pearl shells, commissioned by Knight to show his two homes in Palmerston –both of which he was instrumental in the design and construction of, were presented to Government House by Mrs Lawre McCaffrey and Miss Margaret O'Brien, great grand-daughters of John George Knight, in a ceremony held on 4 August 1994. It is interesting that, having been lost



to the Territory for a century, they should return from Melbourne during the term in office of the only other man to have lived in both buildings, the Honourable Austin Asche AC QC.

*[Austin Asche's term as the Administrator finished on 16 February 1997. He and Dr Asche continued to live in Darwin and to support many community organisations. His reputation as an outstanding orator also continued. On 29 January 2007, Mr Asche was awarded the highest acclamation a city can bestow upon one of its citizens. He was declared a Honorary Freeman of the City of Darwin in recognition of his service in an exceptional capacity.]*



Government House, Darwin has a history unique in Australia. It was not built to vice-regal standards with a vice-regal budget, but as a functional house and office for the representative of the distant colonial Government of South Australia, a modest centre of Government in the north yet a landmark in comparison to the other early buildings and meagre residences of Palmerston's first citizens. It has suffered under the constraints of distance and financial restrictions while enduring some of the worst extremes of climate. Nevertheless, it has withstood the best efforts of Wet Season and Dry Season, cyclones and white-ants, and stands proudly opposite the Northern Territory's Supreme Court and new Parliament House.

This building will remain as a symbol of the Territory's long struggle, from New South Wales' attempts to give it life, through South Australia's parentage to what many have called 'domination' by Canberra under Commonwealth rule, finally reaching Self-Government. While successive Government Residents and Administrators have played their part in this progression, so too have the many other personalities played their part in the history and development of Government House, being as much a part of this historic building as those who have occupied it during their incumbency.

The various Government Residents and Administrators and their changing roles have combined to produce an interesting and diverse continuum of Territory history, the one constant throughout all of which has been Government House.