

## Acton

**Written by Frank Dunshea and reproduced with his permission.**

These are my recollections of life in Acton and the surrounding areas of Canberra. The years are from 1926 to 1946. I have not carried out any research in writing this record and have not attempted to report my memories in any chronological order. These being but random memories I wish to record.



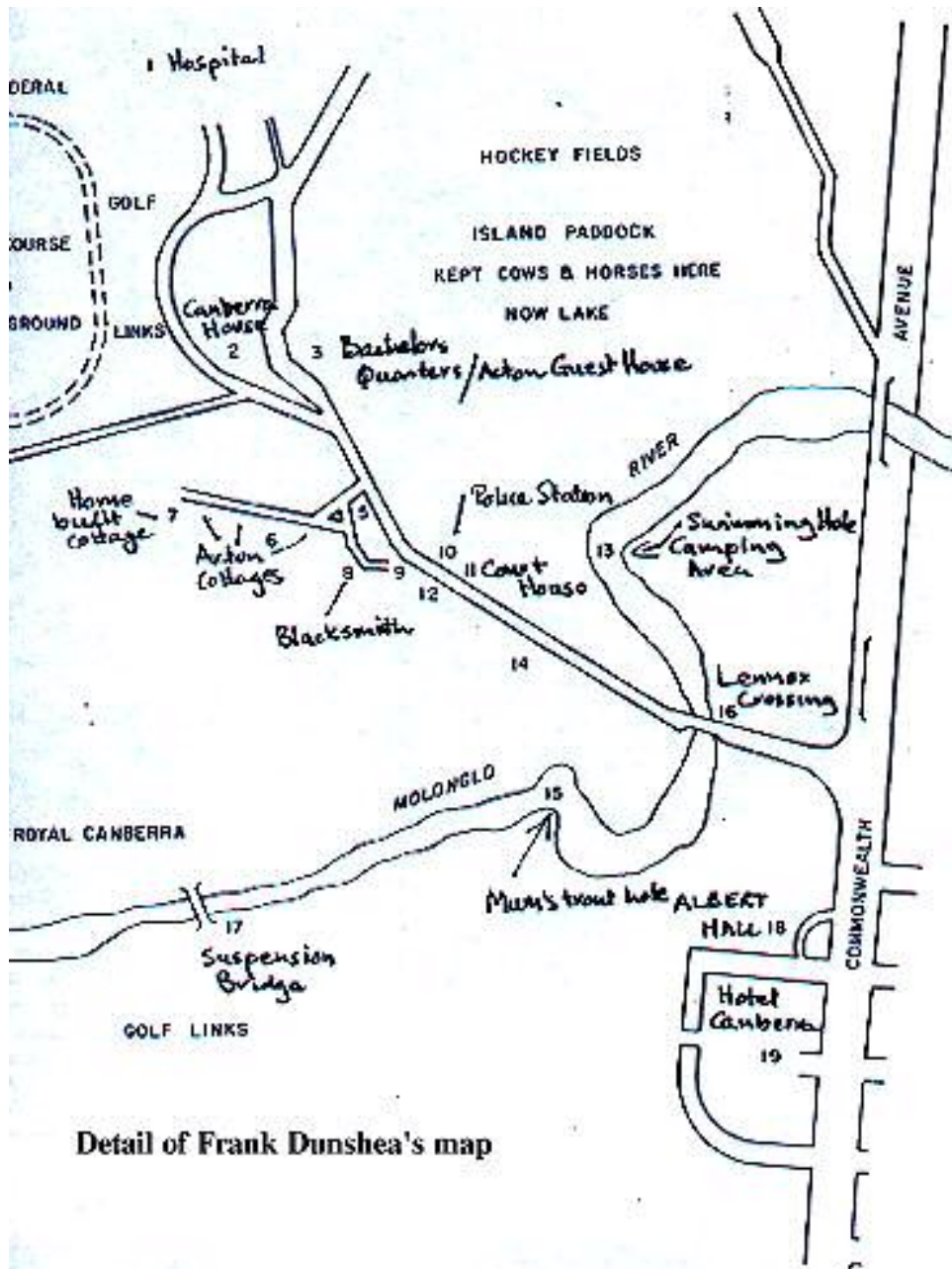
Above detail of aerial photograph circa 1926 showing the Acton Workmen's Cottages built in 1924. All the cottages with the exception of the one known as *The Big House* (fourth from left). These cottages designed by HM Rolland first constructed at Westlake. They were unlined timber cottages.

### Our Community

The heart and soul of the Acton that I knew consisted of fifteen small weatherboard cottages in a single row with galvanised iron roofs, known as Acton Cottages. They were situated in an area extending from the present wharf on Acton Peninsula, near Sylvia Curley House, heading west in the direction of Springbank Island. This area is now covered by the water of Lake Burley Griffin. All the cottages, with one exception, were basically the same and were built as temporary worker's accommodation. They were the same design as the houses at the Causeway in Kingston and at Westlake which was a community situated in an area between the present American Embassy and Lake Burley Griffin. Westlake, was known locally as *The Gap*. The one exception to this design among the Acton Cottages was number 12. It was a different shape with a front porch and was bigger than the others and was known to us as the *big house*. The occupant of this house during my early years was a fairly reclusive woman called Addie, and the only

name I can recall her being referred to was *Addie Big House*. This house was later occupied by the McNamee family

**Map of Acton by Peter West (nephew of Frank)**





Above Dunshea's 1919 cottage at Acton and below Dunshea Children outside the 1924 cottages



**Dunshea children and friends at Acton**



Above: No 4 Acton Cottages. The Dunshea family moved into this house in 1924. Prior to that they lived in one that they had built – see photograph of 1919 cottage.

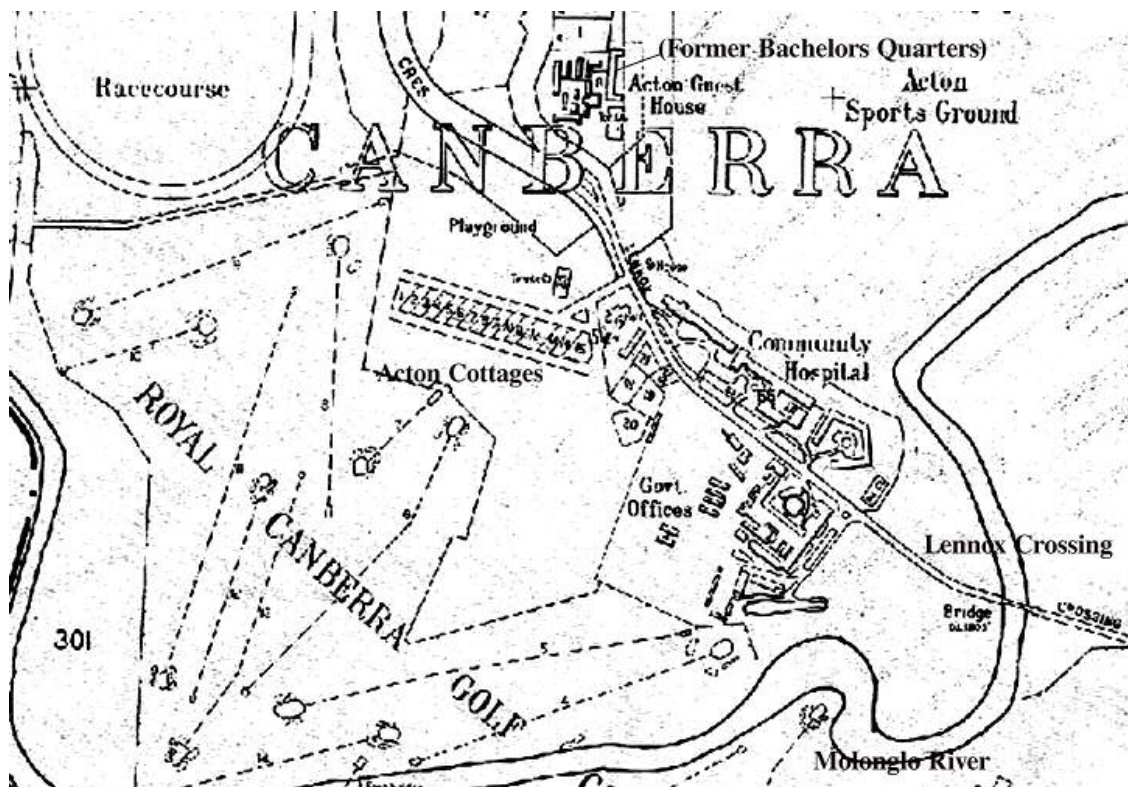
The house my family occupied, number 4, originally consisted of two bedrooms, a sitting room (always referred to as the front room), kitchen, combined laundry and bathroom and a toilet. There was no hallway. The front door went straight into the front room with the main bedroom off it, then through to the kitchen with the second bedroom straight off that, and the backdoor with the laundry outside. The toilet was attached to the house with the door to it being outside at the rear of the house, so you would have to go outside via the backdoor and down the back steps and walk past the laundry windows to go to the toilet. But, we considered ourselves lucky as we were connected to the sewerage system and had both running water and electricity, which is something our grandparents in Queanbeyan did not have. The laundry/bathroom consisted of a fuel copper, concrete tub and a flat bottomed tin bath with a cold water tap and no shower. In later years the baths were fitted with wood fuelled bath heaters. These heaters consisted of a heavy steel cylinder with a removable conical fuel feeder also used as an air intake in the top in which the fire was established. It was surrounded by a water jacket fed in at the bottom and coming out the top. They were known as *Puffing Billys* as when they were really going (especially when fed with pine cones from the pine plantation behind the cottages) they puffed like a steam train and seemed to be rattling the whole house. The water coming out would be almost at boiling point.

The kitchen had a fuel stove and a porcelain sink surrounded by a wooden bench. The stove was almost continuously kept alight with a large kettle simmering away at the side ready to be pushed on to a hotter section at any time to boil the water for a cup of tea should a visitor arrive. The only power point in the house was in the kitchen. It was a porcelain two pin outlet with a switch that had a brass cover and toggle.

We had an open wood fireplace in the front room around which on winter's nights you would be able to alternatively roast the front of your body while the back froze or put

your back to the fire while your front froze. The houses were originally unlined and in some places you could see outside through the gaps in the weatherboards. The houses were lined with canite after many years and this made a big difference. My father insulated our ceiling by fastening flattened out reinforced cardboard cartons to the ceiling rafters. This was long before the days of *pink bats*.

My parents slept in the front bedroom and my two sisters in the other bedroom. My elder brother and myself slept in the leanto, built by my father at the rear, which only had a rollup canvass blind covering the large open window space, flooring laid on the ground and no lighting. The house was extended by the addition of another bedroom and a small verandah at the front of the house when my paternal grandparents moved in with us. My brother or myself then slept on this verandah with only canvas blinds to keep out the winter cold. The cottages were fenced in by wire netting with a small gate at the front and large farm type gates at the bottom of the backyards. These faced onto a track that ran between the cottages and a pine plantation established in a paddock, with the Royal Canberra Golf Course on the other side of the plantation.



We had, like most people in the street, a large vegetable garden in the backyard, some fruit trees, a wood heap, fowl yard and a shed built out of mostly scrap material. The road in front of the cottages was unsealed and without kerbing or storm water drainage. There were only two street lamps which were mounted on the electricity poles that ran

alongside the road, one between the front of number 12 and 13 and one in front of Seton's place - number 5.

### **Our Little Community**

A lane ran between the lower end of the cottages and a dwelling constructed of scrap material which was occupied by the Llewellyn family and later on when the Llewellyn's moved into number 7 by an English couple Harry and Bessie Chatham. After the Saunders family moved elsewhere the fences alongside this dwelling were also the boundary fence alongside the 8th fairway of the Royal Canberra Golf Course.



Above: Alan Gane in the backyard of his house 12 Westlake seated on one of Mrs Llewellyn's horses. Photograph courtesy of Alan and Harold Gane.

Alec Llewellyn married a well known horsewoman named Bobby Lee and she established a riding school in the area behind number 7 and the pine plantation. The riding school became a very popular Canberra facility. Bobby Llewellyn's Riding School moved to a location near Yarralumla Woolshed on the Cotter Road after many years at Acton.

There were other residents who were also considered part of our little community in Lower Acton. The Thurbon family lived in a cottage alongside the main road across from the Acton Hall and overlooking the agistment paddock. The Hospital Superintendent's house was later constructed almost exactly on the same block and was occupied by Dr Lewis Nott, who was to become the first Federal Member of Parliament for the Australian Capital Territory. Dr Nott was a great dog fancier and owned some large red

setters. He was a familiar sight standing on the hill behind the house watching the dogs run across the agistment paddock for exercise.

There was a Police Cottage on the Lennox Crossing Road on the same side as the Acton Hall where Sergeant Cook, his wife and daughter, Bessie lived, followed by the Brodribb family with daughters Joyce and Pat. The Samuels family lived in a Cottage attached to the Acton Offices. [Prior to that they lived at Westlake.]



Above: Lennox Crossing in 1926

A cottage next to the entrance to the Acton Nursery was occupied by Sid Griffiths who worked for the Parks and Gardens and his family and with two other cottages nearby - one occupied by Ned Ryan and family. Some of the people from Upper Acton along Liversidge Street took part in many of our activities - the Hiltons, Carraucans, Boltens and Makins are ones that come to mind. The Kayes, Bates and Cullen families from Springbank were also considered a part of the community.

There was also in the early days a shack on the other side of the pine plantation from the cottages right opposite our house which was actually in the boundaries of the Royal Canberra Golf Club, built mostly of galvanised iron occupied by an old German man whom we called Bill Smith. He lived a hermit like existence and us kids were all scared of this probably harmless old man. I remember during one flood the water was about a foot deep around his shack and the police arrived in a car and removed him while he struggled and protested. I think he knew more than the police because the water didn't come up much further that time.

## The Acton Offices

The Acton offices were a group of mainly weatherboard buildings situated on the southern side of the main road in the present area where the multi storey hospital buildings are situated. These buildings, which were added to quite a lot over the years contained most of the administration funding for the ACT during Canberra's early years - the Housing - Department of Interior, Works and Housing and quite a few other Government Branches and also included a Branch of the Commonwealth Bank in the early days. The buildings were built piecemeal and were fairly disjointed and rambling affairs and covering a large area, being virtually all single storey buildings. They were occupied by government architects, draughtsmen and surveyors and all types of planning and administration for Canberra were carried out in these offices. The Motor Vehicle Registrations were also carried out there. The inspections usually consisted of a visual inspection of the tyres and the lights, wipers and horn. (If there was no canvas showing on tyres they were considered okay.) There was a facility for looking under a car which consisted of a track that went across a low bridge with a gap between the planks that were spaced at the width of the wheels. This was usually overgrown with weeds and rarely ever used.

For testing of the brakes the inspector (usually a chap well known locally as *Boofhead* after a comic strip of the time) would climb into the car with an instrument that he would clamp on to the dashboard if possible. If not he would try to hold it firmly in his lap. When the car reached about 20 mph he would shout **NOW!** and the driver would hit the brakes and the inertia would move the needle on the instrument. The hand brake was tested by rolling slowly down a slope and the driver applying the hand brake which would have to stop the car. The inspector watched to see that the driver had not used the foot brake and that he removed his hand from the hand brake after application to ensure that the ratchet system was working.

Some of this type of testing was later carried out from the Transport Workshops at Kingston. I had an amusing incident there involving this testing at Kingston. It was after we had left Acton to live at Manuka. I took my 1926 Buick Tourer to be tested and the inspector was an old Scottish mechanic named Jimmy Johnson. We went out onto Wentworth Avenue and I hit the brakes. Jimmy looked at his instrument and said, *That's not good enough for a Buick and you had better get them adjusted and come back.* So my good mate Bert Brown adjusted the brakes up to the Nth degree. The canvass straps that held the rear of the back seat were broken, but I was not concerned about this and took the car back for testing of the brakes. We got out into Wentworth Avenue and I wound the old Buick up to about 20 mph and Jimmy shouted **NOW!** and I hit the brakes with all of my fourteen and half stone. The back seat flew forward and hit us both on the back of our heads driving us into the windscreen. Jimmy said, *the brakes are alright now (without looking at the instrument) but you'd better get that seat fixed.* But he passed the car for registration. Registration of guns, dogs and other functions were also carried out at Acton.



I also remember the plan printing section at Acton Offices where the work of architects and draughtsmen was turned into blue prints. This was carried out in a very large room with large vats of chemicals and a rack at least five metres long with ultra violet lights moving along it and lots of lines like clothes lines where the prints were hung up to dry. The original transparencies had to be made into a negative print and then reprinted out as blue prints in which the details appear as white lines on a blue background. Eric Crisp and Archie Thurbon worked there producing prints, wearing leather aprons to protect them from the chemicals. It is certainly different today with the Xerox and other duplicating machines available.

### **The Bachelors Quarters**



Above: Bachelors' Quarters December, 1912.

Situated on a hill over the parkland down to Acton Cottages on one side and onto the agistment paddock on the other side, was the Bachelors Quarters, later known as Acton Guest House and later still as Lennox House. The Bachelors Quarters consisted of a group of weatherboard buildings with long corridors and small rooms gathered around a kitchen and dining room area. In line with the name it had male guests only in its early days and us children were warned that we should not go near the place and have nothing to do with the inhabitants. After some years females also resided there and the name was changed to Acton Guest House. During the war years the building was taken over by the United States Navy for a period. They also had the first use of the Canberra Hospital when it was built. The buildings were added to over the years and facilities included some clay tennis courts.

## **The Canberra Community Hospital**



Above: Old Hospital late 1990s. Now part of ANU.

Situated on the hill above the racecourse and with Springbank Creek running behind it, the area now occupied by the Australian National University's Research School of Physical Sciences Building, Geology Building and the John Curtin School of Medicine was the Canberra Community Hospital (now Earth Sciences). The hospital consisted of several wooden buildings joined together by covered walkways. At the front, facing Balmain Crescent, and set well back from the road, was the administration and outpatients section with separate buildings for the male, female and isolation ward. These wards were long multi-bed type with beds on each side and nurses station in the centre. This hospital served the Canberra community for many years. The bus service did not go past the hospital, the nearest stop being at Liversidge Street and visitors would have to walk several hundred metres through an unsealed lane to the hospital from the bus stop, I have memories of being treated there at the Outpatients with a burnt backside, having backed up against a red hot stove and of spending some nights in the old hospital with concussion after a bike riding accident.

My father suffered from a badly ulcerated leg and periodically he had to have his leg encased in plaster. When this was necessary he would ride his bike up to the old hospital for treatment and one or two of us kids would walk up to the hospital. After the plaster was applied he would come out of the outpatients section with the wet plaster on his leg assisted by the nurses and us kids on to his bike would wheel him home with his leg sticking out to the side.

## **The Canberra Hospital**

The first stage of Canberra Hospital, later named the Royal Canberra Hospital and now to be demolished [in the process of], was built opposite the Acton offices in the late 1930s. The original hospital did not include the large multi-storey building which was

later constructed on the Acton Offices site and its ancillary buildings or Sister Curley House, later constructed on the site of the Acton Hall.



The Royal Canberra Hospital around 1963 when the lake began to fill. Photograph taken from the north side of the Molonglo River.

The original buildings were the administration section and operating wards on the ground floor of the main building with the wards in the upper floors. The Isolation Ward which was built on the site of the old Acton House (Police Station site) with the Maternity Ward and the Nurses and Staff Quarters were built towards the river. These buildings were first occupied and used as a hospital by the United States Navy, and later in the war years, became the Canberra Hospital replacing the Canberra Community Hospital. The hospital was considered very modern and state of the art for its time and served Canberra people well for many years.

### **The Acton Hall**

A plain timber building with galvanised iron roof and large wooden doors, the Acton Hall was one of the main centres of entertainment and meeting places for the large number of community organisations for many of Canberra's early years. Situated on a site near where Sister Curley House now stands, with pine plantations on one side and fringed to the rear by a large prickly hawthorn hedge with the Lennox Crossing Road running past

its front door less than 100 metres away was the start of the Acton Cottages - No 15 being occupied by the Gardener family.

The Acton Hall was used by church organisations of all denominations for services and functions. It was the meeting place for nearly all of Canberra's unions and the Trades and Labour Council and political parties and was used for many social functions by sporting groups and various social clubs. In its later years part of the hall was taken over by the Trades and Labour Council and was known as the *Trades Hall*. The Canberra Workman's Club was established in the rear of the building and operated there for many years before moving to Turner. The first manager of the club was Claude Fisher.

As children at Acton we learnt a way to gain access to the hall by climbing a pine tree and getting on to the roof and gaining entry through a skylight that was easily opened. Once inside the doors could be opened to let others in. We often played in the hall as kids and I don't think the hall management ever suspected it because we always left the place tidy, and probably the only damage we did was knocking the piano out of tune.

### **Acton Police Station**

The old Acton House which was the original homestead in the area, which I remember as a white plaster building probably built of mud bricks or stone and plastered over, was situated on the top of the slope above the Tourist Camp and agistment paddock and was demolished to make way for the Canberra Hospital. The Isolation Ward, now the Hospice was constructed on its site. In all the time of my memory, Acton House was used as the Police Station.

The Police Station had a lockup of several cells and a walled-in yard. For some years my mother had the contract to supply meals for the prisoners in the lockup. Mostly drunk and disorderly cases and mostly weekends. A policeman from the station would come to our house and let my mother know how many meals were required - no telephones in those days. Myself or my brothers or sisters would take the hot meals in round steel dixies wrapped up in thick linen cloths to the Police Station. I often heard one of the policemen say, *Those prisoners are getting better food than I am.*

I can recall some of the policemen from those days. There was Sergeant Cook who was probably Canberra's first Sergeant of Police [he was the second and was stationed at Molonglo before being moved to Acton], followed by Sergeant Roy Brodribb, Constable Bob Hilton, later Sergeant Hilton, lived in Liversidge Street with his family just down from the Bachelors Quarters and Ted Bresnan who boarded with the Carrucan family just around the corner. Some were George Groves, Perriman, Hughes, Sgt Bailey and Gus Weise come to mind. I would like to recall an incident involving my brother Eric and Sergeant Cook at the Acton Police Station. Eric worked for many years in his teens for Gordon Kaye delivering milk before school. Gordon and Eric later became life long friends. Even though he was only about fourteen years old Gordon taught him to drive

the milk truck and as Eric was big for his age no one took any notice. When he turned sixteen Eric decided that it was time to get a driving licence so putting up his age to seventeen on the application form he arrived at the Police Station in the milk truck. The Sergeant said, *What are you doing here young Dunshea?* Eric explained that he had come for a driving licence test. The Sergeant said, *What! I've seen you driving that truck around for a couple of years. Do you mean to tell me you didn't have a licence?* Eric explained that he was too young to get a licence before (actually he was still too young). The Sergeant got into the truck with him for the driving test but before they even reached the station gate he said, *Stop! This is bloody silly. I know you can drive* and went back into the Station and stamped Eric's licence application.

The police motor fleet consisted of a couple of touring cars and a motor bike and side car - mostly driven by Ted Bresnan or Bob Hilton.

Across the other side of Lennox Crossing Road from the Police Station was the Police Cottage. It was first occupied to my knowledge by Sergeant Cook, his wife and daughter, Bessie. Later on Sergeant Roy Brodribb, his wife and daughters Joyce and Pat lived there. It was a fairly large (by our standards) weatherboard cottage with a large yard and a small plantation of trees between it and the Acton Hall. I can remember that the occupants had a large fowlyard and lots of fowls and ducks and pullets. Next door to the police cottage was a building that resembled a cottage and was probably originally built as one that housed the Canberra Community Library which for many years was, I think, Canberra's only public library.

Behind the library, separated from it by some hedges and trees, were two cottages. One was occupied by Ned Ryan and family and the name of the other resident has escaped my memory.

Another building of the time was situated opposite the Acton Hall on the same side of Lennox Crossing Road as the Police Station. This building was the headquarters of the Canberra Parks and Gardens Section of the Department of the Interior and contained the offices of Mr Bill Bruce when he was head of the section and of his supervisor Mr Alf Southwell (nicknamed *Sack-Em*). There was a small yard and sheds where some equipment was kept.

### **The Acton Nursery [established 1913]**

The nursery was situated on the western side of the Acton offices and was bordered by the RCGC [Royal Canberra Golf club] on one side. Most of the nursery site would now be covered by the waters of Lake Burley Griffin and would have covered an area of about twenty acres. It consisted of many exotic and native trees established in square sections with borders of low hedges around each section and with tracks between them large enough for a truck to get along. It was a lovely quiet aspect with many beautiful trees and shrubs some of which, I think, are quite rare in Australia.

One tree in the nursery comes to mind. We were told it was called a *Monkey Pola Tree* and that it was the only tree covered in spikes with razor sharp edges on all its branches that a monkey could not climb and was. I have never seen a similar tree since, anywhere in Australia.

The nursery was a great place to play in and many a game of hide and seek was held there. With its wide straight sandy paths bordered by hedges it was also a great place for riding bikes in as you could get up a bit of speed on a long straight stretch and broadside in the sand around the 90 degree bends and if you did not succeed in getting around you had a reasonably safe landing in one of the hedges.

Next to the gate to the nursery on the side nearest Acton Cottage was the house of Sid Griffiths and family. Mr Griffiths worked for the Parks and Gardens and drove one of their lorries - perhaps it was the only one at the time.

The main track through the nursery from this gate was used as a short cut when walking from Acton Cottages to the Acton Offices. A small part of the nursery was fenced off from the well established area and was used for growing young trees and shrubs.

### **The Commissioner's Residence [Canberra House]**

Situated on the hill overlooking the cottages, the race course and Springbank, across the road from the Bachelors Quarters, was the residence of the Federal Capital Commissioner, Sir John Butters, surrounded by spacious grounds and an imposing fence and gates. This building was later to become the Residence of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom and is now occupied by the ANU Staff as a recreational facility. There was also another cottage within the grounds occupied by the caretaker and his family. I think his name was Ernie King.

The hill on which the residence was situated was always known locally as *Butter's Hill* - usually pronounced as *Butterers Zill*. A road ran up the hill around the grounds and back on to Liversidge Street. [John Butters – later Sir John was the First Commissioner and lived at Canberra House 1925-1929.]

The hill was a favourite place for billy carts, the main road was a fairly gentle slope. There was another track that curved around the side of the hill on the cottages side that was more adventurous and another very rough track that went straight down the steepest part of the hill. It was only after many dares that anyone attempted to go down this track and it usually resulted in a broken cart and many bruises.

Folowing: Two youngsters on the right are the children of AE Bruce, second Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. The family lived at Acton. Photograph courtesy of Jessie Gibbs (nee Bruce).



The hill also looked over the Acton Racecourse and offered a view of the finishing post and on race days a group of small punters would gather on the hill where an SP bookie would take bets as low as threepence or sixpence on a race.

### **The Acton Race Course (Federal Golf Course)**

Situated on the flat between Butter's Hill and Springbank Dairy and with the Community Hospital looking down on it from the hill where the ANU School of Physics building stands was the Acton Race Course which also included about 7 holes of the 9 hole Federal Golf Course within its boundary. A lane ran between the Racecourse fence and the RCGC Boundary down to Kaye's Springbank Dairy and the Bates residence.

As well as the Golf Course there were also some football fields with very rough surfaces included inside the race track. Kaye's Dairy Farm also used the race course area to graze sheep which had to be rounded up and transferred to other paddocks on days when the track was in use. To keep the sheep from straying onto the sand greens of the golf course each green was surrounded by a low fence which the players would have to chip over to the green then step over the fence to putt out. The other holes of the golf course outside the racecourse boundaries were in Kaye's cow paddocks and in playing these holes it was necessary to twice hit over Springbank Creek. Paddling for and finding golf balls in Springbank Creek was a useful source of pocket money for the Acton kids, balls that didn't clean up too good were repainted with white paint and sold to golfers for a few pence. I remember one lady golfer who was a cook at the Butter's residence who would often buy some balls from us if we went to the kitchen door. Springbank Creek was actually the end of Sullivan's Creek before it entered the Molonglo River but it was always called Springbank for this section was fed by a spring which covered a large area on the bank below the community hospital, and this creek never stopped flowing even when Sullivan's Creek was dry further up.

The Golf Club had a small weatherboard building inside the race track, later on a larger building was built on the slopes of Butter's Hill still inside the race course boundary before the Federal Golf Club moved to its present site behind Red Hill.

The race course had a fenced off section with some huts in it for the stewards and jockeys, a betting ring and stables etc. On race days marquees would be erected for the bar and refreshment booths and troughs and pans surrounded by a hessian covered fences would be erected for the toilets with plenty of sawdust scattered around. The hill provided a good view of most of the track and straight for the spectators. There was very little in the way of seating and no stands.

On race days myself and several other Acton boys would sell race books to punters at the gates. This activity was controlled by a man named Martin nicknamed *Deaffy Martin* because of his hardness of hearing. A race book which gave the punters information about the starters in each race cost one shilling and we got one penny for each book we sold.

On the day after the races we would be down at the track early to collect bottles to sell to the *Botlo* who came around regularly. In those days we also searched for dropped coins around the betting ring and bar area. The bar (or beer tent as it was often called), was run for many years by Murdoch McGregor and a regular crew of helpers. Murdoch McGregor was a supervisor with the Electricity Supply and my first boss when I started my apprenticeship. He was also very prominent as an official in hockey circles in Canberra in those days.

A few of the cottage residents were involved in the racing scene. Pat Dudley a well known country jockey lived with his family in No 8 for some years. His son Arthur is still involved in Canberra Racing. Bert Gardiner who occupied No 15 trained horses and usually had one or two race horses in training. The race course was used for a lot of different activities. The Highland Gathering was held there annually with the pipe bands competing and the highland dancing taking place on a temporary stage. There was racing and other athletic events for all ages in which we used to participate and the traditional Scottish sports such as tossing the caber and novelty events such as getting apples out of a barrel with your teeth. Other events such as wood chopping, sheaf tossing etc and there was also an event called the greasy pig race in which anyone could take part. A young pig was covered in grease so that it was almost impossible to hold and was chased around the area by lots of young boys and men all trying to grab the pig. Who ever finally caught the pig could keep it as a prize. It was quite a scramble with lots of pushing and tripping etc going on.

The light horse brigade used to regularly put on a Gymkana at the race course where these magnificent horsemen and their equally magnificent horses would display their skills. With events such as tent pegging where rows of sharpened wooden pegs about 10 inches (25cm) long and 4 inches (9cm) wide would be shoved into the ground and the



horsemen would hang down the side of his galloping horse and spear the pegs from out of the ground with sword. Another event included the rescue race where one light horseman in each team of two would stand at one end of the race course straight and then the other men mounted on their horses would gallop to them where the unmounted man would grab the saddle and leap up behind the rider at full pace then they would wheel around and gallop back to the winning post. Races where the contestants would weave their horses through a line of poles stuck in the ground then pull out the last pole and race back and place it in a 44 gallon drum then go back and repeat the performance until all the poles were in the drum. There were also displays with horses jumping through rings of fire etc.

They also had mock battles where they would charge through fire and smoke, leap from the horses and fire their rifles while the horses were all marshalled away by a mounted horseman. Our next door neighbour, Charlie Seton, was a member of the light horse and was killed while training with the brigade leaving his wife, two sons (Herb and Roy), and a daughter (Gwen).

The Picnic Races were also an annual event at the race track with the unregistered and amateur riders taking part. I still have memories of Bobby Llewellyn coming down the straight leading the pack on her very big horse *Trooper* which was a favourite at these events.

### **The Agistment Paddock and Tourist Camping Area and Sports Grounds.**

The area now covered by West Basin of Lake Burley Griffin looking from the Acton Ferry Terminal across to the old Royal Canberra Hospital and across to the side of Commonwealth Avenue and including the area where Lawson Drive now runs and the hill above to Lennox House and the boundaries of Lennox Crossing Road and Liversidge Street was occupied by the Agistment Paddock and Tourist Camp. A large area in the middle of the agistment paddock was fenced in and was used for a sporting field which included several hockey fields and a football and cricket oval. The tourist camp occupied the area down a steep hill below the Police Station which was situated where the Hospital now stands and extended down to the Molonglo River. Here there was a big deep hole in the river which was used as one of the main swimming places in Canberra before building of the Manuka pool. [The other main one was near the Power House.]

The tourist camp must have been one of the prettiest tourist camps in Australia. The tent area was particularly pretty with an embankment on which willow trees and other trees grew. A row of poplar trees running through the park attracted many artists and it was very common to see them there, with their paints and easels especially in Autumn.

The camp also included several small one room huts and a few larger cabins with several rooms and a verandah. Jim Banks, the creator of *Ginger Meggs*, was a regular visitor to

the park staying in one of the cabins. He was quite a celebrity as far as us kids were concerned and we went a bit shy around him but he was always very friendly.

There was a pear tree in the tourist camp which must have been one of the largest in the world. It must have been well over forty foot in height and with huge branches covering a large area it still produced fruit but the pears were fairly dry and woody. There was also a couple of mulberry trees which produced a lot of fruit and in season us kids would always be in trouble with our mothers for coming home with mulberry stains all over our clothes, hands and faces. Using the juice from green mulberries was one way of removing the stains.

The agistment paddock was used by people of the area for grazing cows and horses. The Department of Interior charged an agistment fee for each animal in the paddock. Several of the residents of the cottages had cows in the paddock - we usually had at least one. Bobby Llewellyn used to keep some of her riding school horses there.

There was a small yard with a milking bail in it and feeding and water troughs as well that was used by my family and some of our neighbours. The yard was also used for locking in calves overnight so that the cows would have plenty of milk in the morning. My mother used to milk the cows and she had a wonderful way with them. She would just have to stand on the hill overlooking the bailing yard and call out to the cows and they would come running across the paddock to be milked. I often had the job of rounding up the calves to be penned for the night and it was very frustrating at times after chasing them on foot and getting them almost into the gate of the yard they would wheel round past me and go bolting back across the paddock and I would have to start over again.

I recall that one time we had a cow that went dry and my mother arranged with Kayes at Springbank to have her serviced by their bull. My mother, myself and one of my sisters led the cow from the paddock down the lane to Springbank Farm. We arrived at the wrong time just as the cows were being herded into the holding paddock for the afternoon milking and the bull was with them. When the bull saw our cow he started to run around and bellowed and our cow also started to bellow and all the other cows became excited and milled around the yard. George Kaye was very annoyed as he said it would make the cows hard to milk and they would probably give less milk. We had to take our cow who was now a bit hard to handle to a paddock across Springbank Creek and leave her there a couple of days. Apparently she managed to get together with the bull for she duly gave birth to a calf and started to produce milk again.

The entrance to the milking paddock was by a gate near Thurbon's house (where the Hospital Superintendent's house was later built. There was also a style over the fence between Thurbons and Lennox House which is the access we generally used. Often in a dry season we would have to hand feed the cows and we would often go out and cut

branches off the willow trees along the river and in the tourist camp and drag them into the paddock to provide feed for the cattle.

The sporting fields which were fenced in to keep the cattle off were situated in the centre of the paddock. There were several fields which were used for hockey and soccer. Later a further area was fenced for fields which were used occasionally for rugby and cricket. Us kids would often go and play a form of hockey on the hockey grounds as very few of us had a hockey stick a variety of improvised clubs were used such as pick handles and tree branches.

I was involved in later years in playing several games of rugby union and rugby league on these fields. I remember a couple of games of rugby union played during the war against an American Navy Team. The American Navy occupied the Bachelors Quarters (Lennox House) for a period and entered a team in the local competition and our local side which consisted mainly of teenage youngsters like myself plus any former rugby players home on leave played them in their first game. The Yanks arrived in force with enough players for more than two teams many of them dressed in gridiron type gear.

They were very willing but apart from a couple of players who had played rugby in American College had no idea of the rules. They were quite upset when the referee stopped them from exchanging players (no replacements were allowed in those days) and kept getting pulled up for forward passes. We were quite amused by the fact that as soon as anyone of them received a cut or scratch which was quite common on the rough surface of these fields there was an immediate call out for the medic and the wound would have to be treated with antiseptic etc. As the field was almost a cow paddock I suppose they had some cause for alarm but we never worried about these things until after the game.

Once the Americans learnt the rules and some of the different skills required they became very competitive opponents as they had a very big side but we still managed to mostly win against them. Other teams playing in the competition included RMC, Duntroon Staff, RAAF and Australian Navy. We formed the only civilian team.

### **Springbank Farm and Springbank Creek**

The present Springbank Island in Lake Burley Griffin was the site of the homestead of the Kaye family, the owners of Springbank Dairy Farm. Alongside the Kaye's homestead was the home of the Bates family. The Cullen family also lived with Bates in the house.

Both houses were old wooden buildings with big verandahs and had several sheds and outbuildings in their large yards.

The Springbank farm had a dairy building at the rear where the milk was separated from the cream and some homemade butter was made. There was a large barn usually

stacked with hay and the milking yards and large yard for holding the cows waiting to be milked. In the early days the milking was done by hand most of it by the men and women of the Kaye family themselves and in later years milking machines were installed and the milk went off to Dairy Farmers Co-operative at Kingston to be processed. The Kaye's grazing land for the cows was along Springbank Creek below the Canberra Community Hospital and extended up to the foothills of Black Mountain. They also grazed some sheep on the race course, the boundary of which was adjacent to their homestead.

The Kaye's eldest son George and his brother Joe did most of the running of the farm in those days of my memory whilst the youngest son, Gordon was mainly concerned with distribution and delivery of milk.

I have vague memories of Gordon delivering milk in a cart. I can't remember if it was motor vehicle or horse drawn with a tank on the back and people going out to the cart and getting their billy cans filled from the tap. The Kaye's had an orchard at the rear of the dairy with a variety of fruit and nut trees in it. I remember one day when myself and a few other kids from the cottages went over the fence into the orchard and had climbed up some of the trees and were helping ourselves to some fruit when Joe Kaye appeared from behind the separating sheds with a rifle and fired a couple of shots well over our heads in the top of the trees. We scampered out of the trees and ran madly out over the fence and never stopped running till we reached the shelter of the river several hundred yards away. Joe told me in later years that he had never seen anyone move so fast.

Springbank Creek, which was actually the last part of Sullivans Creek, ran through Kaye's property which was part of the Federal Golf Course and gave Kayes a permanent source of water for the cattle as it always kept running even in drought years due to a spring which covered a large area on a steep bank below the Canberra Community Hospital. After leaving the Kaye's property the creek ran through unused rough terrain and then alongside a steep ridge which now forms the eastern side of Black Mountain Peninsula and entered the Molonglo River about half way along the ridge. This area was known as Crane Valley by all the locals due to the large number of cranes, ibis and other long legged wading birds which infested the area. The junction of Springbank Creek and the Molonglo River was also an area rich in water fauna such as water fowl, water lizards, water rats and occasionally you would see a platypus there. It was also a good fishing spot and many good brown trout were caught here by our family, which was unusual in the Molonglo as Rainbow Trout were the most prominent introduced fish in the water. You had to be careful here in the summer as it was also an area with more than the usual share of snakes.

Not far down stream from Springbank the creek first crossed one of the so called fairways of the Federal Golf Club. The creek was very narrow here, only about five feet wide and there was a small footbridge for the golfers. Many golf balls finished in this

creek as it was at a distance from the tee where it could trap a good drive. The water was clear and only about two to three feet deep so that golfers could usually retrieve their balls from the centre of the creek but the banks were overgrown with reeds, so that many a ball was lost there. We used to paddle in the reeds feeling for balls with our feet and recovering them for sale back to the golfers. One of the hazards in this area was leeches and it was quite common to come out of the water with several leeches hanging from your legs. If you pulled them off you could be left with a bleeding sore and methods used for removing them were sprinkling with salt or holding a lighted match under them. If these methods were not available it was best to leave them on until they had their fill of blood and then they would drop off. About one hundred metres down the creek was a great spot for catching yabbies. We could always catch plenty of yabbies there, using string and pieces of meat and yabbie nets made from fencing wire and wire gauze. We sometimes cooked the yabbies to eat but they were not very popular and mostly we caught them for cod fishing bait. The creek widened about one hundred and fifty metres further downstream after a sharp bend and became fairly shallow and here there was a ford with track heading down from the gate in the race course boundary fence which was used by vehicles and cattle to cross the creek. Further downstream the creek again had to be crossed by golfers. The creek was about eight metres wide at this point and crossed halfway along par 3 hole with the tee on a hill above the creek and the green in the middle of the cow paddock on the other side. This section of the creek trapped a lot of balls and was a popular spot amongst us kids for paddling in to find lost balls. Some of the players used a ball called a floater which used to float on the water and could be recovered. There was also a foot bridge across the creek here.

### **The Molonglo River**

The Molonglo River was always a very important part of the Acton scene and the part of the river that I was most familiar with in my younger days extended from the Kingston Power House downstream to Government House Yarraluma. The river wound its way through this area, its banks tree lined mostly with introduced willow trees.

There was a footbridge across the river near the Power House at Kingston and a track wound its way from there across to the flats at Edlington's Farm and Duntroon. The river was fairly wide and deep above the bridge and this was used as a swimming pool for the Kingston area. Large pipes also entered the river here to supply water for the steam Power House.



Above: Photograph of the Molonglo River near Kaye's Klensendorlffe farm cottage near the rear of Hotel Canberra. Photograph taken in the early part of the twentieth century. Loaned by Gordon Kaye.

The course of the river followed fairly closely where the western bank of Lake Burley Griffin is now established, around Bowen Drive.

The narrow road which then ran from Wentworth Avenue along the river around the hill to meet up with King Edward Terrace, following a similar route to Bowen Drive, was known as Sandwash Road because a sandwashing plant was situated on the river downstream from the Power House. The river then took a course that would be close to the centre of the present lake to the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge area. A low level bridge called Scotts Crossing crossed the river between the Power House and Commonwealth Avenue. A winding road ran between paddocks from near the junctions of the Sandwash Road and King Edward Terrace across Scott's crossing and met up with Constitution Avenue near St John the Baptist Church in Reid. The flood plains on both sides of this road consisted of fenced paddocks some with cattle or sheep grazing and quite a few sown with fodder crops mostly lucerne.

Constitution Avenue continued on and became a winding road around Russell Hill and Mount Pleasant to Duntroon with a track leading to the settlement of Russell Hill near the present junction with Blamey Crescent. There were large embankments each side of the road with rails still on them where a railway bridge had been constructed for the railway across the causeway to Civic. In later years a weir was constructed with an accompanying bridge just upstream from the present Kings Avenue Bridge with a road from the Sandwash Road across the river to the present Russell Hill offices side of Duntroon.



Above: The Commonwealth Avenue and bridges taken from City Hill 1929. Off to the right is the Albert Hall. Photograph courtesy of Jessie Gibbs.

The Commonwealth Avenue crossing of the river consisted of two bridges - one called Commonwealth Avenue Bridge which was a substantial wooden bridge on concrete pylons and another all wooden bridge known sometimes as the *Viaduct* and at other times as the *Billabong Bridge* which crossed a billabong on the southern side of the flood plains. The road between the bridges was on a large embankment with footpaths at the sides and lined with tall pencil pine trees. On the flood plain on the eastern side of the bridge was a tall narrow concrete building which housed a siphon on the sewerage system which is piped under the present lake.

After passing under the Commonwealth Bridge the river curved to the south and continued on past the Tourist Camp and the Ridge, that is now called Acton Peninsula, to Lennox Crossing Bridge. Adjacent to the Tourist Camp a large deep hole occurred in the river with a high vertical bank on the far side from the camp a grassy bank on the camp side and a sandy island that made a nice beach on the upstream end of the pool. This pool was used as the main swimming pool on the Molonglo and was still used for years after the opening of the Manuka Pool.

The pool must have had some official rating as lifebuoy was mounted on a wooden frame at the deep end and a diving board was also constructed but the board was broken and was not repaired. The depth of the pool water was not known to us kids. Many competent swimmers tried to find the bottom in the middle but failed. [There are limestone caves in the area and natural springs - this may be part of the reason for not finding the bottom.] The water was fairly deep below the high bank which must have been about three metres high and great fun was had by taking running jumps off this bank.

The water was fairly shallow for a reasonable distance out from the sandy island which could easily be accessed by paddling across a very shallow swift flowing stream and it was the popular swimming spot for children and poor swimmers. Like most water holes in rivers it claimed a few victims to drowning.

I was at the pool one day in the school holidays when a man tourist from the camp disappeared in the deep part of the pool and other swimmers were unable to locate his body and the authorities starting dragging the river with grappling hooks. I stayed there watching from as close as I was allowed. The body was recovered just on dark after the time I should have been home and the authorities had started up a couple of huge carbon arc searchlights to light up the pool and bank. When we returned to school the teacher asked us to write a composition about things we had done in the holidays and I wrote a very detailed account of this affair. I think she was probably horrified and my composition was certainly not one that was read out to the class.

The pool was also the scene of another tragedy although this occurred before I was born. On the bank near the deep end of the pool were stone foundations left of a building. When I inquired about these I was told the story by my parents of its past. There was a cottage there occupied by Ned Ryan, wife and family (who I knew as residents of a cottage next to the Acton nursery). The Ryans were living in the cottage by the pool when their baby boy started screaming and they found a snake in his cot. The snake was killed and the screaming baby searched for a sign of a bite but none could be found until after the child was dead when the punctures were found between two of his fingers. The Ryans abandoned the cottage after this tragedy and it was demolished.

About four hundred metres down stream from the pool the river ran under the low level Lennox Crossing Bridge. Lennox Crossing had a junction with Commonwealth Avenue about half way between Albert Hall and the southern end of the present Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. From the junction it went down a fairly steep slope with vacant land on the right and the practice area for the Royal Canberra Golf Club on the left and levelled out just short of the bridge and continued across the level flood plain for about one hundred and fifty metres before going up a steep slope to the front of the Acton Offices.



The river was fairly narrow where the bridge crossed and normally ran fairly swiftly under the bridge although in drought years it was often reduced to a mere trickle. When the river flooded Lennox Crossing and Scotts Crossing Bridges were very quickly covered leaving Commonwealth Avenue, which only had two lanes for traffic at that time as the only road between North and South Canberra.

The Lennox Crossing and Scotts Crossing Bridges had rails on the sides of the footway and the roadway constructed from steel cables held in place by removable steel posts and these railings were removed when the river was rising so that debris would not get caught in them.

When the river was rising we would go and sit on the hill above the Lennox Crossing Bridge and watch the workmen removing the rails and the water start flowing over the bridge. When the last cars would be let cross the bridge and barriers would be erected. The water would then quickly spread out covering the road on the Acton offices side of the bridge.

Scotts Crossing Bridge was usually closed before Lennox Crossing by the floods which would spread out over all the low lying areas between north and south Canberra and we would have a preview of how much of Lake Burley Griffin would later appear.

The agistment paddock would of course be flooded in its flat area and the cattle would have to be herded up on the hill near Lennox House. Large portions of Royal Canberra Golf Course and Federal Golf Course would also be covered in water.

The Acton Cottages were never seriously threatened by floods in my memory although before my time in 1925 the water entered our backyard and moved some of our woodheap. Downstream from Lennox Crossing the river deepened and split into two streams with an island in between which we called *Jonesy's Island* - named after a workmate of my Dad who made this his favourite fishing spot. My mother once caught a Murray Cod weighing over thirty pounds near Jonesy's Island. Further downstream the river took a turn to the west with a high bank on the south side. About one hundred yards up from this bank was the RCGC Club House which I believe was on the site of an earlier homestead of the Kaye family from Springbank. The river then ran through the golf course between the 3rd and 4th fairways to a suspension bridge that allowed the golfers and general public to cross the river. Early in the war years this bridge was washed away.

The river ran from the corner near the golf club in a westerly direction with the 3rd fairway of the RCGC on the southern side and the 4th fairway on the northern side and under a suspension foot bridge which joined the two sections of the golf course. The suspension bridge was originally not raised far above the banks of the river was carried away in a flood which I think occurred in the early War years. Someone with enough influence convinced the army at Duntroon that it would be a good practice exercise to

build a floating Bailey Bridge across the river just below the site of the wrecked suspension bridge. This floating bridge stayed in service for quite a long period of time until a new suspension bridge was built that was much higher than the original. This bridge survived later floods until it was demolished during the construction of Lake Burley Griffin.

The 15th hole of the golf course was a Par 3 hole across the river just below the suspension bridge with the tee on the northern side and the green situated below a very steep hill on the southern side [hill now called Attunga Point.] The 16th tee off the golf course was for a period situated well up on the side of this steep hill but was later abandoned in favour of a tee at its base.

The river was fairly deep at this point and the banks were steep. Golf balls hit into the water could not be recovered by the golfers. The kids from The Gap (Westlake) swam and dived for the balls in this area and regarded it as their preserve and as they greatly outnumbered us Acton kids we didn't attempt to dive for balls there or look for lost balls in the rough along the fairways on the southern side of the river.

I would like to recall an incident that occurred in this area when I was young which I have often laughed about since but it was certainly not very amusing at the time. This incident involved a young chap a year or so older than me named Clyde Maddigan who was a nephew to Samuels who lived at Acton Offices and was holidaying with them. Unknown to me Clyde had been at the suspension bridge earlier in the day and got into a fight with a smaller and younger boy from The Gap and he had given the kid a belting. The boy from The Gap cleared off yelling at Clyde he would be back with his big brother. Using some pretense which I can't remember Clyde conned me into going back with him across the golf links and across the bridge to near the 15th green. Then we heard a yell, *There he is*, and looked around to see a gang of about eight young blokes heading for us a couple of them waving sticks and it was easy to see they were out for blood. We started to run to the bridge but soon realised that would be cut off before we could reach it so we turned around and headed up the steep hill at the back of the green with The Gap mob in pursuit. We scrambled up an almost vertical section near the top of the hill on to a fairly flat section and found that we were able to keep the mob from following by rolling large rocks down at them and throwing smaller rocks down at them and then we managed to keep them bailed down for sometime until we saw at least three of them coming from above and behind us after they had gone around and come up the side of the hill. Almost without thinking we ran and slipped down the hill through the boys in front of us and amazingly managed to keep our feet and I still have visions of a couple of rocks sailing past my head before we reached the bottom. We raced back across the bridge which fortunately The Gap kids had not thought to keep guarded and headed across the golf course to safety of Acton Cottages. I was very wary of going on any expeditions with Clyde after that episode.

After passing the suspension bridge the river continued in a westerly direction with flat area on the northern side and raised hill on the southern side which is the hill along which the present road, Alexandrina Drive around the lake runs for about one and half kilometres and then it turned south towards Springbank Farm.

One part of the river along this stretch was fairly consistently, about three to five feet deep, for about one hundred yards and had a reasonable bottom so it was often used by us as a swimming hole and as it was pretty isolated we didn't always have to have our swimming togs with us. I remember some girls, including my sisters, seeing us in the river and making off with our clothes and some very embarrassed boys had to sneak home across the golf course wrapped up in branches stripped off willow trees.

The river turned west again about two hundred metres from the higher ground where Springbank Farm and Bates home were located. At this point it was fairly shallow and there was a ford across it with a track leading from a gate off Springbank Lane across the river and across the flood plain cow paddocks to Corkhill's Farm House which was a two storey white stone and clay brick building near the river, in the area now occupied by the Water Police Building at Yarralumla.

Near the ford was a fairly solidly constructed foot bridge which was quite useless as the river must have altered course after its construction and all it crossed was a very small billabong along the side of the river proper. But, as the river was shallow there and easily paddled across, it didn't worry anybody much.

A short distance below the ford was a deep hole with some big shady trees on the northern bank which we always called *Joe Kaye's Hole* as it was a favourite spot of Joe's where he would go to on a summer day after the morning milking of the cows. He would put his fishing line into the pool, set up his rod in the inevitable forked stick and go to sleep in the shade until it was time to get the cows in for the afternoon milking.

The river then wound its way across the flats until it reached the steep ridge that is now known as Black Mountain Peninsula where it joined by Springbank (Sullivans) Creek. In this stretch of the river there was a large hole with a sandy bank called by, our family, *Mum's Trout Hole* because my mother once had a good haul of trout caught at this spot. It was also one of my favourite fishing spots.

From the junction with the creek and the river ran south alongside the ridge to a concrete weir constructed across the river almost adjacent to Corkhills Dairy farmhouse so the weir was always known as *Corkhill's Weir*.

About one kilometre from Corkhill's Farm towards the Brickwork's was the settlement of Westridge (which is now part of the suburb of Yarralumla, the Forestry School and Yarralumla Nursery or Westbourne Woods). My father worked for Weston and assisted in the planting of many of the trees in this section.

The Westridge residents were mainly forestry or brickworks employees. There was also a hall at Westridge situated somewhere near the Cotter Road end of Banks Street.

The river continued around the ridge now known as Black Mountain Peninsula following much the same course as is now occupied by the northern bank of the lake and on to the foothills of Black Mountain. The peninsula was known then as the *old rifle range*. It was not used as a rifle range in my memory but the shooting mounds still existed each one hundred yards along the peninsula with the remains of butts still recognizable at the mountain end - close to where the existing road enters the peninsula area. The river ran along the side of the mountain, and I think, closer to it than the present lake shore and then turned south and headed past Government House to the site of Scrivener Dam.

There were very few trees in this area at the time except for a few along the river bank and the cork tree plantation that still exists away to the west of the river.

It was sad to see the Molonglo River flooded to form Lake Burley Griffin as it holds many fond memories from my early days.

It was a fairly small river with reasonably clear water and grassy banks and trees - mostly willow trees and was good for fishing and swimming and lots of wild life. Many species of waterfowl and ducks, water rats, water lizards, yabbies, shrimps, frogs and tortoises and you would see the occasional platypus. The water though mostly clear was not considered fit for drinking. During the floods we would get a preview of what the lake would look like and in drought it could dry up to a mere trickle that could be jumped over in many places. I remember in one very cold dry winter the river freezing with ice extending several feet from its banks in some very shady spots.

The fishing was good with native fish such as Murray cod, perch and introduced trout available but it never recovered from the ecological disaster caused by the bursting of the tailings dam at Captains Flat which poisoned the whole river and much of the wild life. This event was kept fairly quiet at the time and was not widely reported. We first became aware of the problem when I was walking with my father on the golf links we came to the bank of the river and saw hundreds of dead fish floating on the surface. We followed the river back to Lennox Crossing and saw many more dead fish floating in all the pools on the way. Having no idea of the cause of this tragedy we reported what we had seen to Bert Gardiner who lived at No 15 Acton Cottages and who was on the Trades and Labour Council and I think was a member of the Advisory Council at that time. He was as mystified as us to the cause of this poisoning but we learnt from him a few days later of the bursting of the Captains Flat Dam. Some of the effects of this ecological disaster can still be seen along the banks of the river in Molonglo Gorge and around the Hosking Town area.

## Black Mountain

One of the favourite places to go amongst most of the Acton people and my family especially was Black Mountain. There were no roads or tracks up the mountain in those days so we would climb to the summit from many different angles up lots of different gullies and ridges so we got to know the mountain fairly well. There were no made roads around the mountain and the land sloped out to the mountain base from Springbank Creek on the Acton side and a steep ridge extended almost to the river on the side along which the roads between the lake and the mountain now run. The Acton kids made a slide down this steep slope curving around rocks and trees and we would slide down it on a sheet of galvanised iron, usually two at a time, then drag this sheet of iron back up the hill again for the next couple to have a go. There was a large excavation in the area between the present botanical Gardens and the CSIRO building from an old quarry. This hole usually had water in it except for very dry periods.

Above the quarry there was a lot of old skip rails (small railway rails) and some old steel trolleys that had been used when the quarry was functioning. We tried to set up the rails and make the trolleys run on them but the wheels and axles were too rusty for us to have much success. Probably just as well.

Below: Black Mountain Quarry in the late 1920s.



There was also another quarry in the area above Dryandra Street that was still functioning in the 1940s. A water reservoir was later constructed part way up the eastern side of the mountain and a gravel road built to service this reservoir.

The present road to the mountain summit passes the reservoir but does not follow the route of the original road. The lower slopes and the area around Black Mountain were where we done most of our hunting.

The shooting of hares and rabbits and ducks and some other birds that were considered good eating was an important part of keeping food on the table in my early years in Acton with the Depression still taking effect and my father missing a lot of work through badly ulcerated legs.

Rabbits were not plentiful in the area as the Government pursued a vigorous eradication policy to profit the fledging Parks and Gardens they were establishing so our main source of game was hares which in the main lived in the lower part of Black Mountain and come down to feed in the evening around the river and Springbank Creek.

I can recollect going with my father on a few occasions when the moon was fairly full and in the right position over the mountain - the wind also had to be in the right direction - and waiting in the long grass between the mountain and Springbank Creek for the hares to come over a little ridge, him with his old single barrel 12 gauge and me with a pea rifle (we always called a 22 gauge rifle a pea rifle). The hares would come to the top of the little ridge and sit up and look around and with the moonlight behind them they looked almost as big as kangaroos and would present an easy target. This was probably not very sporting but we didn't shoot for sport - we shot for food. The department paid for some years a bounty on hare scalps. I think it was one shilling each so it helped pay for ammunition.

One of my favourite spots for shooting was around the present Glenloch Interchange area, the cork plantation and the surrounding hills there that we used to call *Green Hills*. The cork trees must be very slow in growing as they don't seem much bigger now than they were then. It seems strange now to think that we used to shoot in areas that are now parts of the ANU Campus, Turner, O'Connor and Lyneham and also used to shoot just across the river from Government House.

My father always insisted that any shooting was done on the town side of the mountain and always in the direction of the mountain so that if a hare or rabbit appeared between us and the populated areas we did not shoot at it and we stayed away from the CS&IR buildings. Kangaroos were very rarely sighted in the areas around Canberra in those days but foxes were often seen in the city area and Black Mountain area. If the opportunity occurred they would try to shoot a fox as they were regarded as pests.

It is good to see that Black Mountain is still largely in its original condition and the Tower and its access road have not greatly detracted from its rugged beauty.

## Buildings in the Acton Area.

### The Albert Hall

One of the important buildings in the area was the Albert Hall which in my early years was the centre of social life in Canberra. The building itself hasn't changed much since those years but the surrounding roads, trees and hedges are very different. A very unkempt high brush hedge was situated on the northern side and a fence at the back of it had a large gate leading onto the Royal Canberra Golf Course with trees on the southern side and a road between the hall and the hedges surrounding the Hotel Canberra.

In the median strip in the centre of Commonwealth Avenue was the statue Bellona which was know to all and sundry as *Titsus* because of the large breasts. Regularly on New Years Eve *Titsus* would have her lips plastered with lip stick and cheeks rouged and a bra made out of old pillow slips or other convenient material fitted. As the statue was mounted on a much higher pedestal than the one it is presently mounted on this required an effort on someone's part.

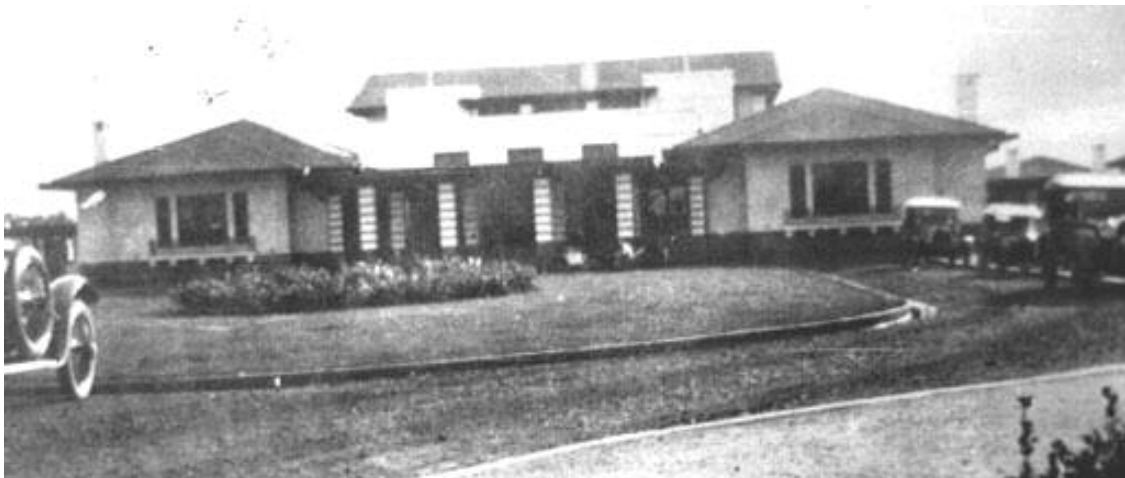


Above: Statue of Bellona. Courtesy of Moya Campbell of Westridge (Yarralumla).

The Albert Hall was the venue for most of the plays, concerts, eisteddfods and touring theatrical companies in Canberra in those days as well as being the home of regular dances and Annual Balls. It was very popular as a dance hall because of its wonderful dance floor and stage for the orchestra. One of the early regular Friday night dances was known as the *Silver Greys* with Wally Higgs Orchestra. This was before I started going to dances but some of the members of his orchestra later formed orchestras of their own - such as Les Pogson, Fred Lawler, Muriel Hartigan and Claude Bensley - and I got to go to many dances at the Albert Hall with their orchestras playing. There was no liquor allowed at dances or balls in Canberra in those times the patrons used to bring bottles

of grog and hide them in the hedges around Hotel Canberra which were much higher than now and other hiding places and come outside between dances and guzzle a few drinks. A few of us young blokes who were apprentices at the time and on very low wages used to go around the hedges giving them a shake and listen for the clink of bottles and get ourselves a few free drinks. *Dud*, Duddly Berry one of my good mates from work was a wizard at finding these bottles. We would also watch the Yankee sailors and soldiers arriving at the dances and see where they planted the grog and knock off some of it. The Yanks always seemed to have plenty of liquor and cigarettes when the local population found them in very short supply. I suppose this is really no excuse for what we did but it seemed OK at the time. At the dances in those days most of the seats which ran along both sides of the dance floor were occupied by the girls and the boys gathered in a group just inside the entrance doors. This was called *The Stag Line*. We would stand there trying to get up the courage to ask one of the girls to dance with us. If you danced with a girl you would mostly take her back to her seat, thank her and rejoin the Stag Line. As I was a pretty lousy dancer it took me a long time to get up the courage to have a dance and mostly needed a bit of Dutch courage from the bottles in the hedges. *Dud* Berry was a very good dancer and used to do a lot of dancing with different girls.

#### **The Hotel Canberra.**



**1927**

Now the Hyatt Hotel. It Canberra's leading hotel and was considered very grand at that time. I remember being told that the tariff was seven pounds per week (which is equivalent to fourteen dollars). That seemed a huge amount to us which I suppose it was because a Tradesman's wage in those days was less than five pounds per week. There were beautiful grounds around the Hotel with many flower gardens and rose bushes. There were Croquet Courts which are still there on the southern side and there were bowling greens on the northern side for some years. The original Public and Saloon Bars for the hotel were situated in a separate building that matched the architecture of



the main building in the front of the hotel on the south side of the driveway that goes to the main entrance. These bars were not very big but I remember the saloon bar as having large comfortable chairs and a log fire in the winter. These bars were later closed and larger brick building built at the rear that was probably more functional but lacked the atmosphere of the original bars. Also at the rear of the hotel was a service station and petrol outlet that functioned for many years. [Hunt's Garage.]

### **The Hotel Acton**

The Hotel Acton situated off Edinburgh Avenue and I think now called Acton House was never a licenced Hotel [except for a short period of time- 1928]. It was in the early years a private hotel with mainly public servants as guests. In those days it overlooked the Agistment Paddock and with Beauchamp House and the Institute of Anatomy was one of the only three buildings situated in that area of Acton.

The Hotel Acton had a varied career acting as well for some years as government offices [Patent] with the Police Station situated in the rear section for some years after the old Acton Homestead was demolished when the Hospital was built on that site.

The Court House was also established there at this time. The Court House and Police Station later moved to the old Jolimont Building at Civic.

### **Beauchamp House [now called Ian Potter House].**

Beauchamp House has not changed a great deal since those days in which it was an accommodation hostel mainly occupied by business people.

### **The Institute of Anatomy.**

This building now houses the Film and Sound Archives and in its day was a very imposing building. It was quite a popular place for us to visit when we were kids and we loved seeing Phar Lap's heart, which was preserved in a jar kept in a glass case, as well as many human and animal organs and many stuffed animals and birds on display.

In the basement of the building not open to the general public but to which I gained access after I started working as an electrician there were stored lots of skeletons and skulls and many Aboriginal and Islanders artifacts. I suppose much of this is now owned by the Australian Museums. Us kids from Acton used to often take animals, reptiles or birds and spiders that we thought were unusual or rare that we had caught to the Institute and show them to the staff there whom we called *The Professors*. They were always very patient with us and would tell us the name of the creature and something about it.

I remember catching an echidna - we called them a porcupine or spiny ant eater - and taking it there and another time it was a strange bird that we did not recognize but the professor told us it was a young mopoke or Boo Book Owl. The professor in these cases and some other cases asked us kids in great detail exactly where we had found the animal and asked us to leave it there with him. It was many years before I realised the significance of this. I think we always hoped that we would have something rare and valuable and they would pay us for it but of course this never happened.

### **The Upper Acton Houses**

As well as the Acton Cottages and the few close by houses there were the houses in the higher parts of Acton some of which are still standing and now are part of the ANU. These houses were mainly in Liversidge Street and Balmain Crescent. Mostly residents in Upper Acton were professional people or high grade public servants. They did not mix socially with the Acton Cottages residents but there were several exceptions and there were families from there who took part in a lot of our *Acton Cottages' Activities*. Some of these were the Hilton Family - Bob Hilton was one of the early policemen in Canberra and the Carrucans. The father of the family was a Belgium immigrant who killed himself with a shotgun in the garage, probably before I was born. I remember Mrs Carrucan as a very pleasant friendly woman. Her two boys Don and Jack became good fishing mates of my brother. Their sister Enid married a US Navy negro who was stationed for a time at Acton Guest House and moved to America after the war. The Makins lived next door to the Carrucans and next door to Jim Bolton who was very skilled at making model aeroplanes which in those days were made from patterns from which you had to cut balsa wood struts and fit and glue them together and cover with stretched rice paper. Motor power was achieved by winding up rubber strips by turning the propeller. Jim made fairly large models that would fly a reasonable distance and usually land successfully. I had some attempts at making smaller models but these usually crashed and were wrecked early in their career. The Stuarts from No 13 Acton Cottages later moved into the Makin's house. George Makin became a top lawn bowler and represented Australia at the sport.

Some prominent Canberra people lived in upper Acton. H P Moss one of the early Chief Engineers of the electricity supply was one - Dr McKellar another and of course CS Daley who I think had the title of Civic Administrator and was also regarded as an unofficial mayor of Canberra. He was an unassuming conscientious and gentle man and I think was generally liked. He had the Number Plate FCT 1. CS Daley used to attend functions at the local schools and usually made fairly lengthy speeches. He had an unfortunate habit of continually punctuating his speech with the word *ERR* and I remember the Ainslie School most of the kids used to count the number of times he said *ERR* during his speech and you would hear whispers in the audience of say 58...59..60... etc and the teachers would turn around and glare at us. After the function not many of us kids would have any idea of what Mr Daley had said but most would have a pretty accurate account of how many time he said *ERR*. The Daleys had a son Geoff and daughter

Margaret who were friendly but as they went to the Grammar School and didn't become involved very much in our local activities we didn't get to know them very well.

### **Life in Old Acton.**

I was born in Acton at No 4 Acton cottages on 4th June, 1926. I have been told that when my mother went into labour my father rode his bike across Lennox Crossing to the Hotel Canberra where they had heard a new doctor was staying. This doctor was Dr John James and he came and made the delivery, so I became one of Dr John James's first patients in Canberra and was possibly the first child he delivered in Canberra. Dr James, who took up practice in Braddon remained our family doctor for many years. He was a wonderful doctor and a real gentleman very dedicated to the care of his patients. My brother Eric and myself were also later involved with Dr James through Rugby Union. He was a great follower of the game and was a patron of the Northern Suburbs Club for which we both played.

Acton was a great place to grow up in those days in spite of the fact that we, like most of the Acton Cottage residents, had very little money. We had an abundance of play areas and facilities for sport and recreation. There was a huge area of many acres of grassland and trees between the road along the front of the cottages and Lennox Crossing Road that was our usual playing area. In the centre of this area there was a playground that had swings, a see-saw, a rail to hang from and a sandpit and there was even a drinking fountain nearby. The swings and see-saw got a lot of use. The swings were two sets, one a lot bigger than the other. It had wooden seats and a solid steel bars suspended from eye bolts in a solid wooden frame and with hard swinging could be swung - standing on the seat - until they reached the horizontal position. My sister Helen who was a bit of a dare devil on these swings used to swing them higher than any of the of the kids and I reckon at times she got it past the horizontal position with the timber frame shaking like mad. The sand pit got pretty overgrown and never got much use.

Between the swings and the cottages was a flat area where we played cricket. The pitch was bare hard packed earth without any grass worn that way by years of use. The bowling was mostly only done from one end and usually only one batsman at a time. The pitch area was surrounded by quite a few gum trees scattered from about thirty yards to fifty yards from the bat. These trees acted as extra fieldsmen and a ball that got past these trees was usually declared a four or a six. The bats were often home made affairs and butter boxes were used for stumps. Quite often some of the grown ups would come and join in the game and some very hard fought matches would result. There was also a fairly flat grassed area close by where we would play pick up games of football - Aussie Rules or Rugby League.

In the cottages about in front of house No 12 we had a very good tennis court with a good red clay surface surrounded by a high wire fence that we could play tennis on at

almost anytime. There was a proper shed alongside the court on a concrete base with lift up seats under which the net line marking gear and roller etc were kept. There were no locks on the court or the seats but I can't recall anything ever being taken away from there.

The maintenance of the court was done by the residents. Mostly by the McNamees, Stuarts, Gardiners and Wares who lived close by and used the courts fairly frequently.

We also had the hockey fields down in the middle of the agistment paddock where we would play hockey and soccer. Most of us kids did not have hockey sticks so we would use pickhandles or other lumps of wood for sticks and probably a tennis ball or a compound cricket ball for a hockey ball.

During the war a military camp was set up in the area in front of the cottages for a period. It consisted of AIF soldiers who had recently returned from the Middle East. We used to have some of the soldiers come to our house for a home cooked meal occasionally. I remember one very tall and big man named Mick who told us he wore size 13 boots with lining removed.

We also had the choice of two golf courses to sneak onto and play a few holes early or late in the day. The Federal on the Race Course and the Royal Canberra. We generally only had two clubs - an iron and a putter - usually hickory shafted but we managed to score fairly well with them. My Mum and Dad and several of the other parents would also go and have a hit on the Federal Course. Bill Ware and his wife Lettie who lived in No 14 were members of the Federal Golf Club.

The 7th Tee at Royal was only about one hundred yards from our back gate through a pine plantation and that is where we would usually go to get onto the course. The 9th Tee was also only a short distance from our front gate. Quite a few of the Royal members would start their rounds from the 9th Tee parking their cars just outside the boundary fence.

The Royal Canberra Golf Course at Acton was a very high standard course with good grass greens and well grassed fairways. I got to know the course fairly well in my teenage years through caddying and after I started working I often played the course with mates Ron Nieberding, George Newport and some others as a Green Tee player on Sunday afternoons. It was a good testing course with very long unforgiving rough beside most of the fairways.

I did a lot of caddying at the Royal. In those days players paid two shillings (20 cents) for a caddy ticket which they would give to their caddy and we would redeem that at the Pro Shop after the round and get one shilling and ninepence for it. The Caddy Master (Assistant Pro) would keep the other threepence. Most golfers would give you a tip of about one shilling after the round if they were satisfied with you. While waiting for a

caddying job the boys would gather on a verandah of the Club House which was situated near the river below the Albert Hall. I believe this was the site of Sam Kaye's - later of Springbank - original house [Correct.]

One of my first days at caddying I was surprised to see all of the others suddenly jump off the verandah and run down and disappear over the bank along the river. I found out why when, being the only boy there, I was given the job of caddying for a well known Canberra grazier who found fault with his caddy all the way round, blamed him if the ball was lost in the rough for not watching it properly and generally making it a miserable round and then did not give any tip. After being caught a few times I learnt to recognise his car arriving and cleared out to the river with the boys leaving some other newcomer to the job. There were a couple of other unpopular golfers that gave no tip or just a threepenny tip but most of the golfers were generous and good to work for. The Easter Tournament was a good time to caddy with the Pros and top amateurs coming from interstate. I caddied for some good Pros - Billy Smith from Melbourne and Sam Richardson former NSW Open Champion and saw top golfers play there such as Norman Von Nida, Eric Cremin, Frank Phillips and Kel Nagle.

With lots of trees and birds around the cottages tree climbing and bird netting were common activities and lots of the kids had bird egg collections. These were obtained by robbing the birds nests of eggs which wasn't considered a terrible thing to do in those days and then you would pierce each end of the egg with a pin or small nail and blow the inside yolk and egg white out of the egg and keep them in a box on a bedding of cotton wool or other soft material. One of the favourite bedding materials was fluff of bullrushes which grew prolifically along Springbank Creek. My brother Eric had a great collection kept in a large shallow wooden box with a sliding glass lid which he made himself. We also climbed trees just for fun and one tree not far from the front of our house was different from the other gum trees and was almost spherical in shape with branches radiating out in all directions a couple of feet above the ground. This tree was very popular as half a dozen or more kids could all climb to about the same height up different branches and sit there and talk to each other. This tree was known to one and all for some unknown reason as *Fatty Finn's Tree* after the comic strip character of the time.

We also had pine plantations at the rear of the cottages and near the Acton Hall to play in as well as having the swimming hole in the river, Black Mountain, the farms and animals in the agistment paddock - all in our area.

Entertainment was generally of our own making in my early days as we didn't have a wireless (radio) or have money to go to the pictures very often. We played a lot of cards at night - Five Hundred, Euchre and Crib being the favourites. We also played Rummy and a game called Pedro.

We also had a wooden Bobs set which was played on the kitchen table with a short cue and wooden balls. Our old gramophone had a broken spring which Dad had fixed but had to shorten it so that when we played one of our few records the spring would start to run down before the record was finished and you would have to grab the crank handle and wind like mad to keep the record running at the correct speed.

Board games were also popular such as Ludo, Snakes & Ladders, Draughts, Dominoes and other games. I remember that before we got a wireless that our next door neighbours - the Setons - used to have a permanent booking at the Capitol Theatre every Saturday Night and they went to the pictures and they invited us to go into their house to listen to the wireless while they were out. This was one of the highlights of the week. The pictures in those days were often referred to as the *talkies*.

I remember when we got our first wireless in its wooden cabinet standing in the corner of the front room and putting up the aerial which consisted of a long length of wire suspended between insulators strung from a poplar tree at the bottom of the backyard to a riser nailed to the side of the house and a lead down into the set with a lightning cap installed between this lead and an earth stake. It was wonderful to have the radio and be able to listen mainly to 2CA and 2GB and occasionally the ABC from Sydney. This radio remained a large focus of our entertainment at home for many years.

One very popular programme in those days was a serial produced by 2CA called *Ben & Sam* which came on in the later afternoon and we would be out playing and the word would go out that *Ben & Sam* was about to come on and we would all run home to listen to it. I remember the theme music for it was the *Bolero*. We also loved listening to the cricket and football on the radio and my Dad loved the boxing and wrestling.

We had lots of outside games we played with other kids in the street such as Hopscotch, Cops & Robbers, Chasings, Prisoners Base, Tops and Marbles etc. We often played a lot of games after dark under the street light in front of Seton's place next door.

Fred Marshall who lived next door in No 3 was a terrific marbles player and was considered the champion at Ainslie School so I never played him for keeps where you kept all the marbles you knocked out of the ring. We also played a form of marbles called *Little Ring* and another game called *Poison Hole*.

Cracker Night or Bonfire Night was always one of the great yearly events at Acton and we justifiably claimed that we always had the biggest bonfire in Canberra. We had a head start on most of the other places as Sid Griffiths who drove one of the very few - perhaps the only lorry (tip-truck) that the Parks and Gardens Section had lived close by the cottages near the Nursery and for weeks before bonfire night he would drop off all the suitable prunings etc at the site of our fire instead of taking it to the tip. We always left all the material scattered around the area until the last day when we would all hop in and build the fire. This was in case somebody set fire to it before the night. The kids

from The Gap were considered the most likely villains. Bon fire night was always on the 24th May which was called Empire Day and I believe this had been Queen Victoria's birthday. On Empire Day we had to go to school in the morning where we were fed a lot of English propaganda till lunch time then we were given the afternoon off which allowed us time to build the fire and get ready for the night's activities.

The preferred method of building the fire was to erect a centre pole usually in place a week or so before then the first large branches could be leant against the pole almost vertical and the rest stacked around and above them to form a conical fire that burnt really well.

Getting a suitable central pole was often a problem and one year we decided to take a pole that had been an Aussie Rules goal post on a now abandoned field in the middle of the race course. This post and some others had lain in the grass for a few years. Tom Stuart, Ron Ware and myself about two or three weeks before cracker night went down to the race course to collect the pole but we found it was a lot heavier than we expected and by the time we had carried it to the race course gate that opened on to the lane than ran down to Springbank we were feeling pretty pooped and were having a rest when we spotted a tractor and trailer coming from the race course paddock area towards the gate. These tractors followed by a long flat bed trailer were used quite a lot by the Department for goods delivery in the same way as trucks would be used today. This one had probably been delivering trestles or other equipment to the course for a coming race meeting. We knew that it would be returning to the main road along a track than ran very close to the bon fire site. We opened the gate for the tractor which slowed down to go through the gate and turn on to the lane where we threw the pole onto the trailer and jumped on ourselves. We hung on to the pole and the trailer as we bumped along the lane and the track. When we reached the nearest point to the bon fire site we shouted at the driver to stop but instead he opened up his throttle and started to speed up. I don't suppose you could blame him as we hadn't asked permission to use his trailer.

We quickly threw the pole off and jumped off ourselves only suffering a few scratches and bruises when we landed. We dug a hole and erected the pole which was probably the best centre pole we ever had for a bon fire. Before going to the bon fire we would share out the crackers separate them from the strings they were in and each have our own box - usually a shoe box with a lid to stop sparks or lighted crackers landing in it. The most popular crackers were about two inches long and quarter of an inch in diameter. There were much smaller ones called *Tom Thumbs* and larger ones which were fairly powerful called *Penny Bungers*. Usually some people at the fire would have a sixpenny bunger which was virtually a small bomb. They were about six inches long and two inches in diameter with a great long wick to allow you plenty of time to get clear. When someone was lighting one of these everybody at the fire knew about it and would stand at a safe distance and watch it go off. It would make a very loud bang and paper - many pieces of which were alight - would be scattered over a large area around the

cracker. There were also basket bombs which were encased in wicker basket material. These were also very powerful and you had to keep well clear of them. Sometimes they were set off under a square kerosene tin with the top cut out and tin would fly about five metres into the air and be badly bent. These bombs were also responsible for a few wrecked letter boxes. The bonfires were quite a community affair and when anybody was going to set up a special firework such as a Catherine Wheel, Flower Pot, Roman Candle, Rocket etc everyone would be informed and you could all gather around and enjoy it. In spite of the fact that crackers were thrown around and some powerful fireworks were used I can't remember any serious accident occurring.

Our Father's birthday was on the 25th May, the day after cracker night so we always kept a few crackers to be let off on his birthday. We were always the first out on this day searching for crackers which didn't go off. Some would still have some wick left and could be used normally. Those that didn't would be broken in half and the powder set alight sending out a shower of sparks. These were called *Fizzers*. In our later teenage years we would stay at the fire after the festivities and throw potatoes into the ashes where they would cook. Then we would break off the black skin and have a feast.

The Blacksmith's Shop which was situated behind the cottages at the top end of No 15 - Gardiner's house - was a favourite place of mine to visit. It consisted of a galvanised iron building with huge galvanised iron doors at one end and hinged galvanised iron windows that were propped open by a hinged piece of timber. A track ran along one side and another to the front of it. The back and the other side was a huge tangle of rusted iron and steel and old cart wheels etc.

The blacksmith was Bill Wallace who lived in No 1 Acton Cottages. He was a huge man over six feet tall with big bushy mustache and huge mostly black hands. He was assisted by Bill Gardiner who lived with his relation, Bert Gardiner who had No 15 Acton Cottages. I was fascinated watching these men bend and shape red hot steel to various shapes and repairing picks and other tools. The best part was watching them replace the horse shoes on the huge draught horses that were used for pulling the drays still in common use in those days by the Road & Bridges Section. Those big docile horses would stand quietly while the blacksmiths would take the horse's foot between their legs, cut lots of hoof away with a huge rasp then they would slap an almost red hot horse shoe on to the hoof and bang in the nails. I can still remember the smell of those smoking hooves.

I was friendly with Alf Wallace, Bill's son and we were sometimes allowed into the shop and allowed to turn the handle for the pump that blew air into the forge. There was no electricity supply to the shop. There were a few storage sheds near the blacksmith shop and a stable and horse yards bordering on to the Acton Nursery where the government kept a variety of horses. There was one horseman named Monty Tracey who was often around there. I think he was a ranger who always had an immaculately groomed horse



and was extremely well groomed himself with brown leggings and boots so shiny you could almost see your face in them.

We were fortunate at Acton to have a better bus service than most Canberra residents. There was only three different bus routes and they all passed through Acton. When they reached the Acton Offices stop the conductor would have to take a large brass key and turn it in a *Bundy Clock* that was situated across the footpath. There was also a bus stop near the Acton Hall. Very few people had cars so other than buses we either walked or rode push bikes.

The Bus Service to Queanbeyan also ran through Acton. It was owned by Mrs Barton and I have memories of a square shaped bus with luggage rack on the roof for luggage, prams, parcels etc and a ladder running up the back of the bus.

Bill Wallace the blacksmith was one of the few Acton Cottage residents to have a car. I can remember a bull nosed Morris Tourer that would really whine in low gear and you could hear it whining all the way up the hill around the Bachelors Quarters when he went that way. Bessie Chatham also had a little yellow baby Austin with a dicky seat in the back.

Our nearest shops were at Civic Centre where we did most of our shopping. The only other shops were at Kingston and Manuka. The administration would not allow any corner store. Youngs did quite a few other Acton residents. Bill McQueen would come on a motor bike and take the orders and two days later Angus Mortlock would come around in the JB Young delivery lorry with the groceries. Sometimes there would be a complementary bag of boiled lollies with the order.

Bill McQueen would come into the house and sit down at the kitchen table with Mum and tell her the prices of various items and write the order in his duplicate book. Sometimes he would have a cup of tea. I recall that one day when Bill was in the house taking an order that a kid, I think one of the Wares, pulled the motor bike over on to himself and broke an arm. Bill was terribly upset about it. When Angus Mortlock delivered the groceries myself and some of the other kids would get a ride on the back of the lorry up to the top part of Acton where we would carry the groceries into some of the houses for him as a lot of these houses were situated at the end of a very long driveway. This saved him a lot of walking. We were very happy to do this just to get a ride on the lorry.

Civic Centre in those days consisted of Sydney Buildings and half of the Melbourne Buildings. There was one little part of the Melbourne Buildings constructed in the other half on the southern side. I think this was occupied by the National Bank. Other buildings in the area were the Jolimont Building, a single storey weatherboard construction that had been transferred from Jolimont in Melbourne. It was generally

called the Census Office as it housed the Bureau of Census and Statistics. In later years part of the building housed the Police Station and Court House.

There was also a YWCA building in Mort Street and Freebody's Garage, the Canberra Times Building, Moores Garage opposite corner of Cooyong and Mort Streets and Genge's Garage further up Mort Street and the Canberra Steam Laundry on the corner of Cooyong and Torrens Streets completed the Civic Commercial area. There were a few small businesses and a bakery in Mort Street.

The Civic Picture Theatre and the Civic Hotel were built later on and I can remember their construction and opening. St Patrick's Catholic School was also built opposite the Steam Laundry and Northbourne Oval later. There was a dirt track that ran from Mort Street between the YWCA and Freebody's Garage across to the corner of Cooyong and Torrens Streets. This track crossed the unused railway lines which ran up in the direction of Lonsdale Street (which did not exist at that time). I used to ride my bike along this track regularly on my way to and from Ainslie School after I got a bike, before that I had to take the School Bus. Sometimes I would walk home to Acton from school so that I could spend the penny bus fare.

The shop and business places I can recall at Civic in the Sydney Buildings included JB Young in Northbourne Avenue, Harry Haywards Butchery, next door Leo's Cafe in the Centre at the bus stop going south Ally Nish's Sports Store, McGlades Jewellers and Snows Store on the corner of Northbourne Avenue and London Circuit which is now Fletcher Jones. Along London Circuit there was a chemist, a shoe store, banks and insurance agents, and Kennards Office Supplies on the East Row Corner.

London Circuit was not completed past East Row and the road ended there. In the other direction it went around City Hill as far as Constitution Avenue. Shops in East Row included Jack Cassidy's Cafe, Johnny's Cafe, McGirrs Butchery and Studmans Grocery and Delicatessen (they were called *Ham and Beef Stores* then). I remember often getting a penny's worth of broken biscuits from Mr Studman who would put a generous lot of broken biscuits into a paper bag. Mr and Mrs Studman were very kindly people. In my teenage years I mixed with a group of teenagers that included Una Studman. She also had an older brother, Russell. The Studmans like many of the Civic shopkeepers in those days lived above the store and I can recall many a pleasant afternoon spent in their residence standing around the Player Piano with the group singing songs while Una played the piano or while one of us pumped the pedals playing a pianola roll.

In Alinga Street I can recall mainly the Blue Moon Cafe and Woodgers and Calthorpe Estate Agency. The Blue Moon Cafe was operated by the Prowse family who was again very friendly people. My brother Eric was a good friend of Dick Prowse and they did a lot of trout fishing and skiing together. Dick lost an arm whilst flying in action during the war but still managed to remain a good fisherman with one arm. He was later the Commonwealth Film Censor.

Melbourne Buildings which were only half built had the Commonwealth Bank on the corner of Northbourne and London Circuit and the post office on the Northbourne and Alinga Street corner. Cusacks Furniture Store, OK Grocery Store, Cliff Williams Bike Shop which included Jim Bevans Barber Shop later run by a school mate of mine, Johnny Burnes. In the centre of the block opposite the bus stop going north was PP Cox's Newsagency for whom I delivered papers for many years.

I delivered *The Canberra Times* to Acton residents from about 1935 till 1941. In the later years Turner was included in my run when the first houses were built in that suburb.

In 1946 my father exchanged houses with a widowed lady, Mrs McIlveny and we moved to Flinders Way near the Manuka Shops but we always retained a great affection for OLD ACTON and its people.

[Frank is the youngest of four Dunshea children - Helen, Amy, Eric and Frank. The children attended Ainslie Primary, Telopea Park and Canberra High Schools - the latter did not open until 1939. Frank was in the School Cadets.]