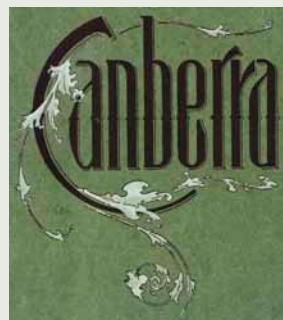


# FAR-SITED

## THE MAPS THAT MADE CANBERRA

2 September 2009 to 31 January 2010



A century ago, deciding where to locate the capital of the new Australian nation proved to be a contentious and protracted process. *The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900* decreed that the site had to be within New South Wales, at least 100 miles from Sydney and in a separate federal territory of at least 100 square miles in area. The constitution also decreed that the Commonwealth Parliament would meet in Melbourne until the new capital was built. Site selection was an issue on which the new House Members and Senators differed profoundly, not least because almost 50 New South Wales communities wanted the honour of hosting the capital.

To try to settle the question, two Royal Commissions were held. Numerous experts, architects, surveyors, engineers and geologists penned site assessments. Practicalities as well as politics had to be considered. The setting for the capital should be a beautiful one and a source of national pride. Many argued it should have a cool climate. Certainly, it had

to be readily accessible by rail (the roads at the time were rudimentary) and of good enough land to provide adequate fresh food, building materials and firewood. Most essential was that it have an abundant supply of water for households, parks, gardens and for 'ornamental water', meaning an artificial lake. In late 1908, reversing an earlier false start in favour of Dalgety, the Commonwealth Parliament voted to locate the capital in the 'Yass-Canberra' region, a site called 'Canberra' being widely favoured.

A great number of maps were generated by the site-selection process, as maps are the easiest way of explaining the location of a site and the nearby railways, roads and rivers, who owns the land, its terrain and where reservoirs or lakes might be built. Often these maps contain unique information, available from no other source. They provide a snapshot of the country 100 years ago, explain the journey and introduce those who contributed to the 'far-sited' decision in favour of Canberra.

– Greg Wood

### 1 "A" Map Accompanying the Report of the Commissioner on Sites for the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth (Oliver Report)

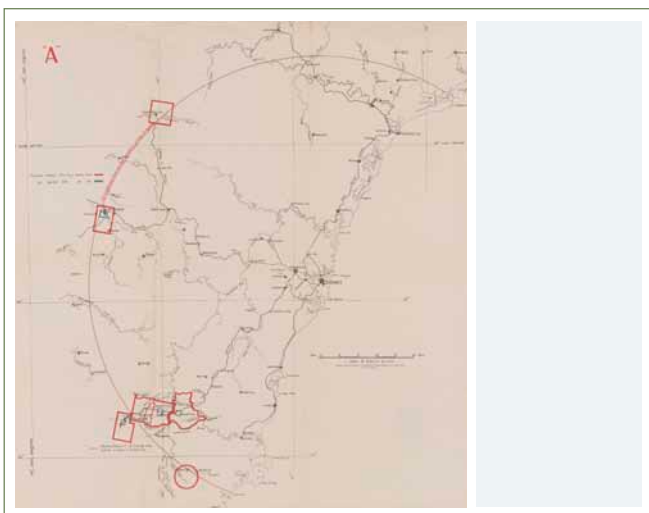
Compiled, drawn and printed at the Department of  
Lands, Sydney, November 1900  
lithograph; 51.0 x 64.5 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Maps Collection, nla.map-vn500280

As soon as it was decided that the capital would be placed within New South Wales, the State Government began the search for sites. In late 1899, Alexander Oliver (President of the New South Wales Lands Appeals Court) was asked to undertake a Royal Commission and assess the possibilities. Many aspiring contenders were excluded by the 'at least 100 miles from Sydney' provision in Australia's Constitution.

### 2 Sketch Map Showing Proposed Federal Territory and Capital Site at Queanbeyan Map Accompanying the Report of the Commissioner on Sites for the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth (Oliver Report)

Compiled, drawn and printed at the Department of  
Lands, Sydney, November 1900  
lithograph; 76.0 x 102.0 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Maps Collection, nla.map-vn2022797

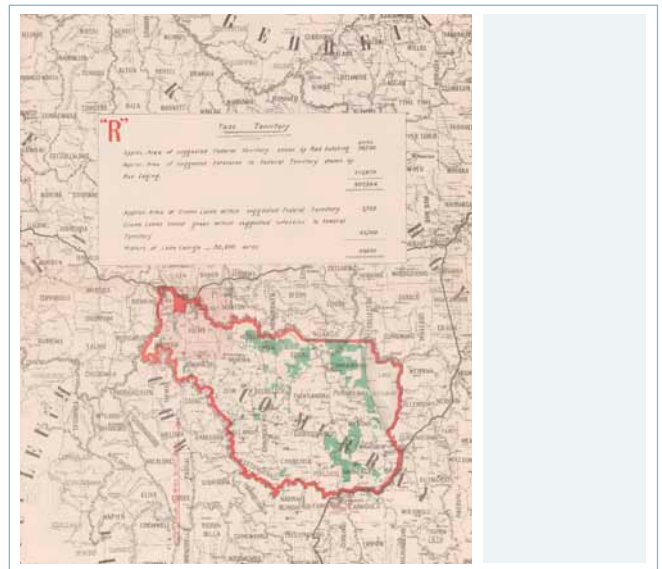
Alexander Oliver's report commented in detail on Albury, Bathurst, the Bombala-Eden region, Braidwood, Carcoar, Cootamundra, Forest Reefs, Goulburn, Orange (or Canobolas), Tumut, Wagga Wagga, Wellington and Yass—plus a site called 'Queanbeyan', which covered much of today's central Canberra. The meticulous Oliver preferred sites near Orange, Bombala and Yass. Nevertheless, his map of the Queanbeyan site is arguably Canberra's cartographic birth certificate. Names like 'Weetangera', 'Pialligo', 'Narrabundah', 'Tuggeranong', 'Mt Taylor' and 'Ainslie' are conspicuous on it. So too is 'Canberra', then the site of little else than a church, cemetery, school and blacksmith's shop. Queanbeyan was the only substantial town in the vicinity.



### 3 “R” Yass Territory Map Accompanying the *Report of the Commissioner on Sites for the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth* (Oliver Report)

Compiled, drawn and printed at the Department of Lands, Sydney, November 1900  
lithograph; 40.0 x 33.0 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Maps Collection, nla.map-vn2023486

Alexander Oliver concluded that the area of the Federal Territory should be 1000 square miles, rather than the minimum 100 square miles mentioned in the Constitution. He illustrated the implications of this for a capital site at Yass. If the proposal had been adopted, much of today’s Australian Capital Territory, located north of the Molonglo River, would have fallen within the so-called ‘Yass Federal Territory’, as would have Lake George and the villages of Sutton and Gundaroo.



Charles Coulter (1864–1956)  
*An Ideal Federal City, Lake George* 1901  
watercolour; 41.0 x 63.0 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Pictures Collection, nla.pic-an5263460

### 4 Plan Shewing Proposed Federal Capital Site in the Locality of Lake George Map Accompanying the *Report of the Commissioners on the Seat of Government for the Federal Capital, 1903, with Appendices and Plans* (Kirkpatrick Report)

Compiled, drawn and printed at the Department of Lands, Sydney, June 1903 (A.H. Chesterman)  
lithograph; 88.0 x 74.0 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Maps Collection, nla.map-vn437205

House Members and Senators toured potential sites in 1902. No consensus resulted. The next year, a second Royal Commission, chaired by Sydney architect John Kirkpatrick, was asked to assess eight sites specified by the Commonwealth Government. Its conclusions favoured Albury. The only site near Canberra that the Commissioners considered was Lake George—an idea promoted a number of times, most famously by Sydney architect and artist Charles Coulter. He envisaged an imposing, overblown ‘Venice’ situated on the Limestone Plains. Most Lake George proposals involved complex and costly engineering to divert the Queanbeyan or Molonglo rivers (or even the Murrumbidgee River) through pipes and tunnels to feed the lake.

### 5 Southern Monaro “To accompany my report of 27 October (1905)” Charles Robert Scrivener (1855–1923) from *Federal Capital Site: Report by District-Surveyor Scrivener on the Areas near Dalgety, together with Plans*

Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper (December 1905)  
digital copy of original lithograph; 24.0 x 41.0 cm  
National Library of Australia  
Maps Collection, nla.map-gmod101

Belatedly, John Kirkpatrick was asked to assess another site, Dalgety, on the Snowy River. So too was Charles Robert Scrivener, a New South Wales Government surveyor. Scrivener’s view was that the Commonwealth Government should have sole control over the river systems that supplied water to the capital. In 1904, amid some mischievous politicking, both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament voted in favour of Dalgety. Joseph Carruthers, the Premier of New South Wales, bitterly rejected Dalgety and, for some years, a stand-off ensued between the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments.



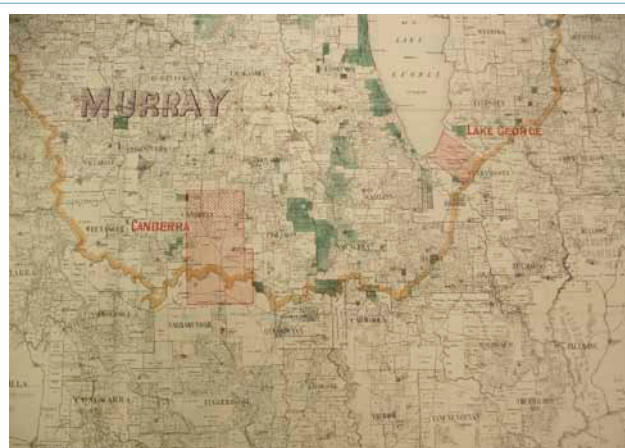
6 *Plan Shewing Crown Lands Available in Connection with Proposed Federal Capital Sites, 4 April 1906*

L.A.B. Wade (1864–1915)

hand-coloured editions to a New South Wales Lands Department county map never printed or published; 55.0 x 88.0 cm

House of Representatives

In 1906, of its own volition, the New South Wales Government resumed the search for national capital sites that were nearer to Sydney and closer than Dalgety to existing railway infrastructure. After a wide search, Arthur L. Lloyd (Chief Surveyor, New South Wales Public Works Department), Walter Liberty Vernon (Architect, New South Wales Government) and Leslie Augustus Burton Wade (Principal Water Engineer, New South Wales Government) identified 14 possible sites, later narrowing these down to three: Makhoolma, beside the proposed Burrinjuck Dam, near Yass, Lake George and the site on Wade's map called 'Canberra'. Wade's rare, hand-coloured map was never published but is the earliest known document to call the proposed capital site by that name. Today, the choice seems to have been inevitable, although there were numerous alternatives that could have been chosen.



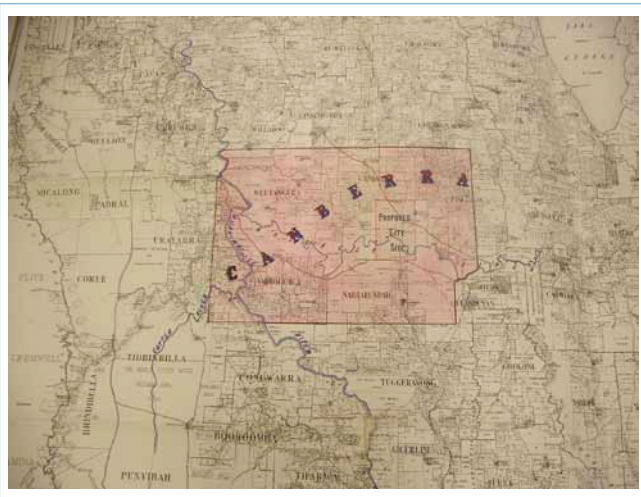
7 *Canberra, 12 September 1906*

A.L. Lloyd (1833–1913) and W.L. Vernon (1846–1914)

digital copy of original hand-coloured lithograph  
67.0 x 94.0 cm

National Archives of Australia

In August 1906, the New South Wales Government organised and funded a visit by federal parliamentarians to inspect the newly suggested sites and Dalgety. Many of the visitors were impressed by the Canberra site, in particular former Prime Minister John Christian ('Chris') Watson. Politics aside, their main reservation was whether Canberra had an adequate water supply. Immediately after the parliamentary visit, Arthur L. Lloyd and Walter Liberty Vernon produced this Canberra map, with the rivers unsubtly coloured in blue to imply abundant water.



8 *Map Showing Proposed Federal Capital Territory and Tenures of Land Within Same, 22 May 1909*

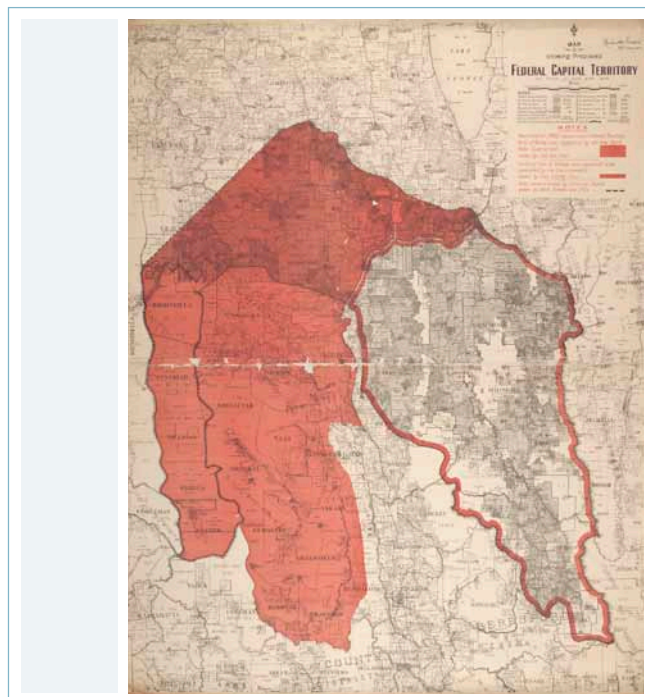
Charles Robert Scrivener (1855–1923)

lithograph; 149.0 x 115.0 cm

National Library of Australia

Maps Collection, nla.map-gmod83

In late 1908, the Commonwealth Parliament voted by a narrow margin to locate the capital not at Dalgety but closer to Sydney in the 'Yass–Canberra' region. Distrusting the New South Wales experts' assessments, the Commonwealth again sought a second opinion from Charles Robert Scrivener. He assessed six sites: Makhoolma, Yass, Gundaroo, Hall, Bungendore–Lake George and Canberra. A strong supporter of Dalgety, Scrivener concluded that the Canberra site, while 'far from ideal', was 'the best that can be obtained in the Yass–Canberra district'. He recommended that the Territory for Canberra encompass the Cotter River, the Queanbeyan and Molonglo river catchments and the town of Queanbeyan. These recommendations are reflected in this map, as is the New South Wales Government's response.



## 9 *Canberra Contour Survey with Advisory Board Recommendations, 16 June 1909*

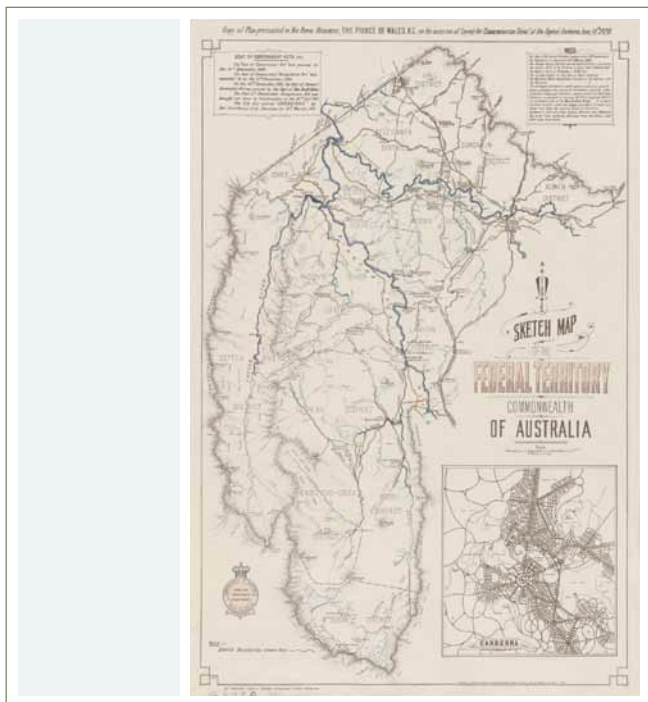
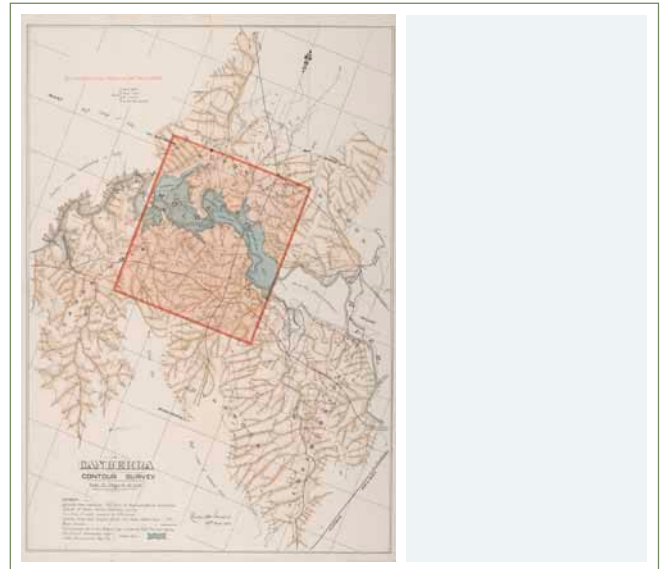
David Miller (1857–1934), Percy T. Owen (1864–1936), W.L. Vernon (1846–1914) and Charles Robert Scrivener (1855–1923)

108.0 x 75.0 cm

National Library of Australia

Maps Collection, nla.map-gmod102

The recommendation for the Canberra city site was made by Charles Robert Scrivener, together with Walter Liberty Vernon, Percy Thomas Owen (Commonwealth Director-General for Works) and David Miller (Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs). The site is illustrated in this map, as is the likely shape of an ornamental lake in the centre of the site, very close in outline to today's Lake Burley Griffin.



## 10 *Sketch Map of the Federal Territory, Commonwealth of Australia 1920*

Department of Home and Territories, Lands and Surveys Branch, Melbourne

32.0 x 49.0 cm

National Library of Australia

Maps Collection, nla.map-gmod107

In late 1909, Prime Minister Alfred Deakin and New South Wales Premier Charles Wade negotiated the territory lands transfer. Wade was not prepared to concede the Molonglo and Queanbeyan river catchments or the town of Queanbeyan to the Commonwealth. He did agree to cede riparian (water) rights over the Queanbeyan and Molonglo rivers and to include the Naas, Gudgenby and Paddy river catchments within the Territory. Some additional land along the eastern border of the Territory was included to ensure that the area of the Territory exceeded 900 square miles, the figure prescribed in the relevant Commonwealth legislation. The Deakin–Wade deal is reflected in today's map of the Australian Capital Territory and in this one from 1920.

## 11 *Map of Contour Survey of the Site for the Federal Capital of Australia, September 1910*

Felix J. Broinowski and Charles Robert Scrivener (1855–1923)

lithograph; two panels of four

72.0 x 72.0 cm (each sheet)

National Library of Australia

Maps Collection, nla.map-rm3095-4

Charles Robert Scrivener and a team of surveyors recommended work on the site. They marked out the Territory State border, assessed possible railway lines (for example to Yass) and roads, surveyed the Cotter River for dam sites and began the process of acquiring the privately owned land within the Territory. Scrivener also completed a precise contour survey of the site which was used as the template for the 1911–1912 international competition to design the city. Enter Walter Burley Griffin.

