



# Christening CANBERRA

above:  
Unknown photographer  
*Federal Capital Site, Canberra,  
Australian Capital Territory,*  
c.1912  
sepia toned photograph  
15.4 x 20.3 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-vn3918948

below right:  
New South Wales Department  
of Lands  
*Sketch Map Showing Proposed  
Federal Territory and Capital  
Site at Queanbeyan*  
(Sydney: Department of Lands,  
1900)  
coloured map; 76.0 x 102.0 cm  
Maps Collection  
nla.map-gmod112

Greg Wood pays tribute through the Maps Collection to some unacknowledged founding fathers

**W**ith the centenary of the national capital approaching, one puzzling question remains: *who* actually was it that caused Canberra to emerge as the site for Australia's national capital? Who first called the capital site 'Canberra'? The answers are found in a series of overlooked, recently rediscovered maps variously held in the National Library, the House of Representatives Archives, and the National Archives of Australia.

The idea that there's a gap in this history may puzzle some—but the following will explain. By 1904 there had been four years of public and parliamentary contention over the site for the seat of government. Two major public inquiries had been held,

one under New South Wales, one under Commonwealth auspices. Dozens of carefully worded expert reports had been drafted. Senators and Members had endured weeks of bone-jarring travel to inspect the proudly touted alternatives. The debates filled *Hansard*. Finally, in August 1904, with some relief both Houses agreed that the seat of government should be within 17 miles (27 km) of the southern New South Wales village of Dalgety.

The Dalgety site was blackballed by the NSW Premier, Joseph Carruthers, who saw it as a breach of the letter and intent of section 125 of the Australian Constitution, which made special concession to the mother state. For Carruthers, Dalgety was too remote from Sydney, too close to Melbourne, and would involve New South Wales in heavy expenditure on railways. If a federal port was established at Eden, as intended, it would compete with Sydney—a commercially (and hence politically) undesirable development. Besides which, to Carruthers' fury, the Commonwealth proposed to encompass Dalgety within a 900 square mile federal territory, in his view stepping beyond the Constitution's intent when it referred to a territory of 'not less than 100 square miles'.

A stand-off occurred; heated correspondence flew back and forth. Prime Ministers Reid and Deakin, greatly irritated by Carruthers' approach, reiterated the Commonwealth's decision in favour of Dalgety. Carruthers, in response, offered three alternatives: Tumut, Lyndhurst and Yass. The Commonwealth rejected all three.

Yet four years later, towards the end of 1908, the dust settled and the Federal Parliament again voted for the federal

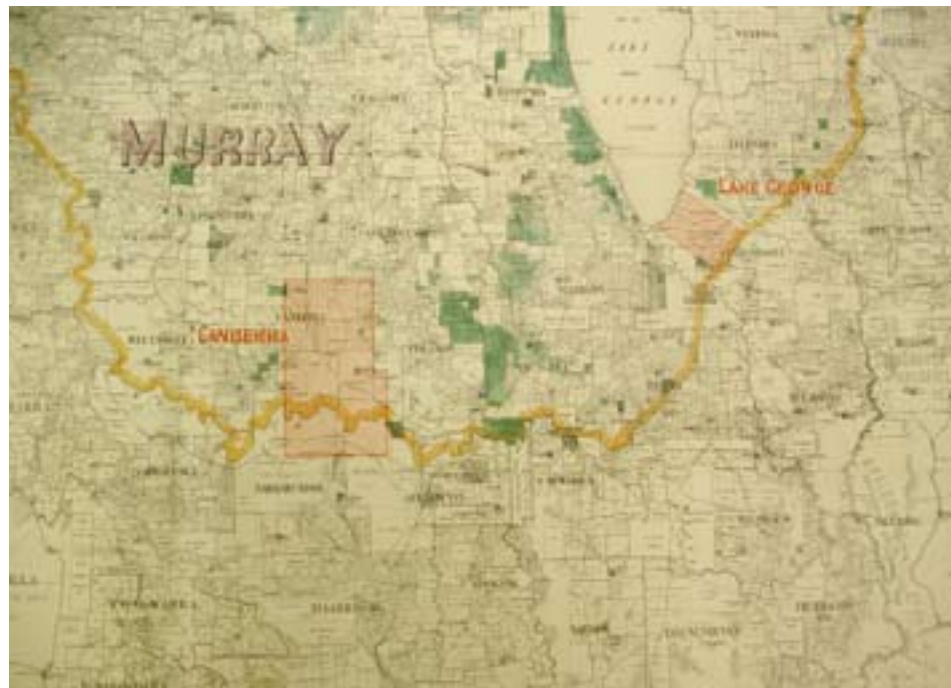


capital, this time choosing the Yass–Canberra district, knowing that in reality this meant Canberra. Somehow this site had emerged out of nowhere, its fortunes guided by some seemingly invisible hand. No one in Commonwealth pay had signalled the least inclination to explore options other than Dalgety. Certainly, between 1904 and 1908, the Commonwealth Government commissioned no studies of any alternative site. One paper did emanate from a member of the Cabinet, Acting Prime Minister Sir John Forrest, who in 1907, on his own say-so, compared the merits of Canberra (then gaining profile) and Dalgety—finding firmly in favour of the latter. But that was it.

The Canberra region had been proposed previously, but hadn't gained favour. The 1900 New South Wales commissioned enquiry, undertaken by Alexander Oliver, had looked at a site called 'Queanbeyan', close in coverage to today's Canberra, but had decided against. (The Queanbeyan map that accompanied Oliver's report was included in the National Library's *National Treasures* exhibition of 2006.) Relegated down the pecking order, lacking a champion in Parliament, Queanbeyan received no profile in that, or subsequent, assessments, much to the annoyance of its proponents in the local community, such as newspaper editor John Gale, and surveyor turned wheat breeder, William Farrer. In fact with 'Queanbeyan' rejected, Farrer re-entered the fray advocating another nearby site some kilometres south called 'Wanniassa', again without success.

So who gave Canberra its second chance? Who labelled the site thus? The answers come from a series of unpublished maps.

Maps are the natural means of conveying information about borders, a transfer of land or sovereignty, or a location. Generally the maps and the expert studies relevant to the capital site selection debate were published as parliamentary papers, usually in significant numbers. (For example, there are plenteous published copies of Charles Scrivener's analyses of Dalgety, and of his later assessments of the Canberra region undertaken early in 1909, after the Parliamentary vote in favour.) However, on some occasions the maps and plans that passed between governments weren't printed. With successive prime ministers and most of the Commonwealth Parliament



miffed with New South Wales, and reluctant to imply that Dalgety didn't have their continuing support, new site plans were briefly displayed, then pigeon-holed. At this moment in time they weren't printed. Left in manuscript, discounted and dismissed, they were quickly lost to sight.

These 'lost' maps show that the initiative for selecting Canberra came from within the New South Wales government, which had begun examining possibilities better suiting the state than Dalgety: sites closer to Sydney, nearer to existing railway lines, well watered, and away from competing ports. The focus fell on the region between

above top:  
A.L. Lloyd  
Untitled map showing Lloyd's favoured sites, J and K 1906 [detail]  
National Archives of Australia, series A100, A1908/9793  
Courtesy National Archives of Australia

above:  
L.A.B. Wade  
Map labelling the chosen site as 'Canberra' 1906 [detail]  
National Archives of Australia, series A100, control A1908/9793  
Courtesy National Archives of Australia



W.L. Vernon and A.L. Lloyd  
The first published map solely  
devoted to a capital site called  
'Canberra' 1906 [detail]  
National Archives of  
Australia, series A100, control  
A1908/9793  
Courtesy National Archives of  
Australia

Gundagai and Goulburn. Interestingly, Premier Carruthers and his cabinet left the hunt to the highly regarded engineers, surveyors, and architects working within New South Wales bureaucracy—the Department of Public Works specifically.

So, who was it that proposed Canberra as the site? Three hand-drawn maps dating from 1906 begin the story. The first, signed by A.L. Lloyd, the Chief Surveyor for the New South Wales Public Works Department, is dated 28 March 1906. It records 15 possible sites he surveyed, albeit briefly, in the region between Gundagai and Queanbeyan. He gives prominence to a site called Mahkoolma near Burrinjuck dam, but the accompanying text, subsequently published as a New South Wales parliamentary paper, indicates that he favoured sites 'J & K', which between them embrace what was later to become Canberra.

The second map is signed by L.A.B. Wade, then a Chief Engineer in the New South Wales Public Works Department. Wade was the brother of the recently appointed New South Wales Attorney General and future premier, Charles Gregory Wade. Leslie Wade's map, dated 4 April 1906, narrows the focus from the 15 sites Lloyd listed, to three. Like Lloyd, Wade implies a preference for Mahkoolma. However, significantly, he welds Lloyd's J and K sites into one and, appending the name of a New South Wales county 'parish' to it, christens this site 'Canberra'.

This map is the first official document of any genre to attach the particular name 'Canberra' to the proposed national capital site. It's not that the name wasn't in use beforehand. Canberra is found on parish maps, the church and so on. But from the innumerable available options, this document decides to call the proposed capital site 'Canberra'. And the name sticks, and recurs (initially in NSW government documents) until it is ultimately endorsed seven years later in 1913, when Lady Denman formally announces it as the capital's name.

A third, unpublished hand-coloured map is by Lloyd and Vernon, and dated 12 September 1906. This is the first map solely focused on a national capital site called 'Canberra'. Walter Liberty Vernon, the talented, highly influential, NSW Government Architect, was recurrently included in capital site decision making: he later helped ensure the victory of Burley Griffin's city plan over the Departmental Board design. Vernon had been spruiking the merits of the Mahkoolma site, but later became a strong advocate of Canberra.

The New South Wales Government had hosted and funded a visit by Commonwealth parliamentarians to these sites in August 1906. The visit to Mahkoolma had gone disastrously, misadventure compounding misadventure. In contrast, the visit to Canberra a few days later went swimmingly. Enthusiasm, once kindled, steadily increased,

though still not sufficiently to ensure that Canberra was unequivocally endorsed ahead of Dalgety in 1908.

These rare and elusive maps, held variously in the House of Representatives Archives and the National Archives, were drawn to supplement a range of papers first published by the New South Wales Parliament. The maps themselves, with the telling clues they contain, were never published. The hand-drawn original of the first published map depicting Canberra as the capital site is held in the Maps Collection of the National Library. This map (in its printed form, the Library's hand-drawn original is damaged) is dated 17 March 1908, and was published as a NSW Parliamentary Paper on 11 October 1908. It's signed by the NSW Chief Engineer, Ernest de Burgh, though acknowledges earlier contributions, for example of Lloyd and Vernon.

Late in 1908, the Commonwealth Parliament selected the 'Yass-Canberra' region, but not Canberra specifically, for the capital site. It was finally left to Charles Scrivener to undertake further surveys and nail down a recommendation. Scrivener's maps are also in the Library's Maps Collection.



Scrivener ultimately endorsed the Canberra site, and by so doing implicitly endorsed the earlier assessment of his NSW colleagues Lloyd, Wade and Vernon. Scrivener's contribution is widely acknowledged; Vernon's somewhat so. The contribution of Lloyd and Wade has effectively been erased. Holding positions of influence, they were able to sway the NSW Cabinet and ultimately the Commonwealth Parliament. Along with Scrivener and Vernon they can lay claim to being among Canberra's founders. Their contribution deserves public acknowledgement.

GREG WOOD is currently researching the formative influences that shaped Australia's national capital

above:  
E.M. de Burgh  
*Australian Capital Territory Proposed Dam Sites and Catchment Areas*  
1909  
coloured and backed map  
106.0 x 89.5 cm  
Maps Collection  
nla.map-rm3255

below left:  
New South Wales Department of Lands  
*Canberra Contour Survey*  
(Signed by Charles Robert Scrivener)  
(Sydney: Department of Lands, 1909)  
coloured map; 108.0 x 75.0 cm  
Maps Collection  
nla.map-gmod102

