



ANN NUGENT CELEBRATES
THE ACQUISITION OF AN
EXCEPTIONAL NATURAL HISTORY
ALBUM BY ONE OF CANBERRA'S
PROMINENT EARLY RESIDENTS

A CENTURY LATER

A TREASURE RETURNS

Politely, I opened the first [album]—expecting a conventional family scrap-book ... to get one of the biggest surprises of my life. Inside, painted by my hostess's great-grandmother, Marriane Campbell of New South Wales, were sheet upon sheet of the most beautiful wild flower pictures I have ever seen.

Each seemed lovelier than the last.

SO WROTE ENGLISH FILMMAKER, ANGLER and naturalist Hugh Falkus (1917–1996), in his preface to *From Sydney Cove to Duntroon—A Family Album of Early Life in Australia* (1982), co-authored with Joan Kerr. Falkus' search for plants remaining from the ice age had led him to the Highlands of Scotland where he lighted upon Marriane Collison Campbell's brilliant images of Australian wildflowers. What a contrast, what a coincidence. Thirty colour plates of Campbell's drawings, titled *Flowers of Duntroon*, are included in the book by Kerr

and Falkus. The originals are still in the possession of the family.

Another of Campbell's albums, *Wild Flowers, Fruit and Butter ies of Australia* (c.1843–1883), came on to the art market in 2005, almost 100 years after it left Australian shores. The National Library of Australia purchased this magnificent album and it is now held in the Pictures Collection.

How did her work find its way to Scotland in the first place? The answer to that question lies in the fluctuating fortunes of 'the Sydney Merchant', of Wharf House, Sydney, Robert Campbell (1769–1846), his wife Sophia (1777–1833, née Palmer) and their descendants. As well as his business interests, Robert Campbell had extensive land holdings, most prominently Duntroon on the Limestone Plains (later to be the site of Canberra).

Marriane Close was born in 1827 in the Morpeth district of New South Wales. She was the only daughter of New South Wales pioneer Edward Charles Close (1790–1866, also a sketcher and watercolourist) and Sophia Susannah Palmer (b.1803). At age 27,

Marriane married 36-year-old George Campbell (her second cousin and son of Robert and Sophia Campbell). Such a close kinship marriage was unsurprising in the restricted society of the all-Scots Close, Palmer and Campbell families.

Marriane had been a pupil of Sydney's best-known professional artist Conrad Martens (1801–1878) who, in the depression of the late 1840s, augmented his income by teaching the daughters of genteel families. Like other colonial young ladies, Campbell drew portraits and painted flowers—roses, poppies, holly and forget-me-nots. Her early work was conventional but her attention to detail and precision of execution carries through to her later work.

After their marriage in 1854, George and Marriane came to Duntroon to allow George's older brother Charles to pursue his legal studies in England. Then, in about 1860, they settled permanently at Duntroon House, with George, the 'peppery but kindly squire of Duntroon', taking over the management of the property.

The documentary evidence of Marriane's life at Duntroon suggests a life of great busyness. She was responsible for the management of Duntroon House, the supervision of its gardens and vineyard and

had a direct involvement in planning extensions to the house. Mrs Campbell dealt expertly with illness in her own family and beyond, and it seems her door was always open to visitors. Family and friends, religious duties and charitable enterprises took up much of her time. In 1872, a young English visitor, Stanley Howard (1850–1883), recorded 'the house is extensive and well furnished: and the grounds to match; quite a country residence'. At Duntroon, Marriane's garden blossomed with English flowers and was planted with exotic trees.

Her love affair with native Australian wildflowers was slow in maturing.

In 1876, after 20-odd years of married life at Duntroon, Marriane and George took their family to England with the intention of providing them with an English education. It was not to be. George died in England in 1881 before the children had completed their schooling. Marriane returned to Australia, spending time between Duntroon and the Campbell's Wharf House, Sydney. She completed *Wild Flowers, Fruit and Butter ies of Australia* on her return. Only a few paintings in the album postdate 1881.

Wild Flowers, Fruit and Butter ies of Australia is a large quarto album (41.4 x 32.7 centimetres) bound in morocco leather with gilt lettering and edges. Eighty-seven original watercolours on artists' paper are tipped-in to the pages of the album. The paintings are not in chronological order but range from 1843 to 1883. Some are undated. Many flower drawings are titled with both common and botanical names.

The most impressive drawings were executed in the 1870s. It is here that the artist takes flight; she moves away from the merely decorative arrangements of accurate depictions of botanical specimens to more dramatic, bold portraits of flowers. Compare, for example, *Bathurst Narcissus in a Vase*, completed in 1843 when 16-year-old Marriane was still mastering perspective and technique, to the undated *Sturt's Desert Pea, Native Pear* (1874)



Marriane Collinson Campbell (1827–1903)

TOP
Sturt's Desert Pea (*Swainsona formosa*)
watercolour; 28.0 x 22.4 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3624304

BELOW LEFT
Native Apple (*Planchonella australis*) 1874
watercolour; 28.0 x 21.6 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3626125

OPPOSITE
Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) 1875
watercolour; 25.8 x 25.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3545426





Marriane Collinson Campbell
(1827–1903)

ABOVE, FROM LEFT
Bathurst Narcissus
(*Calostemma purpureum*;
Calostemma luteum) 1840s
watercolour; 21.2 x 15.1 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3623845

Native Pear (*Xylomelum*
pyriforme) 1874
watercolour; 25.2 x 20.1 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3624094

OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT
Wahlenbergia capensis,
Synaphea spinulosa, *Banksia*
coccinea, *Conostylis setigera*
1883
watercolour; 28.8 x 22.7 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3641746

Dampiera hederacea with
Eight Other Species 1883
watercolour; 26.0 x 17.3 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3641750

OPPOSITE BELOW
Dryandra nervosa
(*Dryandra lindleyana*) 1878
watercolour; 26.5 x 20.6 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3626131

or *Native Apple* (1874). The work in the mid-1870s is that of a mature woman who is an accomplished artist. The spiked swirling green and yellow fronds in her *Dryandra nervosa* (1878) are contained within an energetic pattern that nevertheless conveys a strong life-force. The brilliant *Waratah* (1875) exhibits a supra-natural vividness. The play of light on the bloom and the virtuosity with which the artist manipulates the sheen and shades of green are distinctive facets of her mature work that were nascent in her early drawings.

I feel that Campbell's observing eye, her habit of recording data and her inclination for classification all point to a scientific bent. In her diary (c.1860–1870), a photocopy of which is held in the Library's Manuscripts Collection, newspaper cuttings and handwritten food recipes jostle with home cures. She records dispensary prescriptions for individual family members. Some of her recipes, such as preserving eggs in lime for up to two years, seem fitted more for a chemist than a kitchen. Her cure for the grape-attacking fungus *Oidium*—'choose a hot day and blow sulphur through the vines with a pair of bellows'—comes with the assurance, 'by those means I saved all my grapes last year'. However, lemons are her favourite antidote; they cure neuralgia, warts and, if rubbed into the roots of the hair, dandruff. Indeed her middle name, Collinson, confirms a scientific lineage and links her to the famous

English botanist Peter Collinson (1694–1768), a forebear through her paternal grandmother, Marriane Collinson. Art historian Joan Kerr suggests that it is this botanical heritage that started Marriane on her flower paintings.

Marriane Campbell was a busy, enterprising person. Stanley Howard, in his travel journal, described her as 'a pleasant-looking lady; short, stout and good-natured!!'. She was at this time about 45 years of age and the mother of five children. Howard wrote that her husband George

was 'a rather nice looking, elderly gentleman; there is nothing of the rough style about him'. He continued, 'They have a good number of relations and friends staying there just now: 12, I believe, besides their own household which is not small'. Howard did not mention Marriane's paintings, although he would have encountered them on his visits to Duntroon; Howard was, however, a young man and painting was not an unusual occupation for 'leisured' ladies.

The last two paintings in Campbell's album are dated 1883, when she was a 56-year-old widow, and both are titled *Memories of Albany*. Perhaps Marriane had been looking back to a Campbell family visit to Western Australia. An earlier painting (an arrangement of grevillea and other wildflowers painted in 1876, with the inscription 'King George Sound') suggests as much. In the painting, two grevillea blooms lean protectively above a collection of smaller flowers. Campbell was a friend of a Mrs Forrest, from Western Australia, who sent specimens to her. Such a specimen, sent on 6 June 1882 (the name of the sender is not known), is preserved in the back pages of the album. Campbell collected many of her own specimens on her travels.

Marriane Campbell died in 1903. A simple white marble cross marks her grave in the cemetery of St John's Church, Canberra. After Campbell's death, the home at Duntroon was broken up and a sale



of plant and furniture items took place on 31 October 1906. The house was left vacant until the Royal Military College of Australia development commenced in 1910, when the Campbell Duntroon estate was resumed by the Commonwealth Government to form part of the Federal Capital Territory.

It then fell to Campbell's oldest son John to quit Duntroon. He packed up the remaining family portraits, furniture and his mother's albums, returning them home to Scotland where they remained in the family's possession.

Until a few years ago, the only works of Marriane's held by the Library were a photocopy of her diary and a couple of her drawings. The Library's holdings of her work have now been brilliantly expanded with the 2005 acquisition of her *Wild Flowers, Fruit and Butterflies of Australia*, an extraordinarily beautiful compendium of paintings of Australian native flora and butterflies.

ANN NUGENT lives in Canberra. She edits the poetry journal *Blast* (www.annsverbandah.com/blast/)

