

Reid – People and Places

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Often the heritage of a place can be found in the memories and oral records of its people. The suburb of Reid is no exception. Reid was constructed in 1926-1927 to meet the urgent need to house public servants in new national capital. According to Alan Fitzgerald in his book *Historic Canberra 1825-1945*:

What little accommodation was available for visitors in Canberra and Queanbeyan was booked out for the opening of the New Parliament House [Provisional Parliament House as it was then known] on 9th May 1927 by the Duke of York. Although it was autumn many visitors, including 3,000 representatives of the armed forces and boy scouts were forced to camp out.”



A Federal Capital Commission House, Reid

Temporary arrangements were also made for that occasion in Reid to impress the Royal visitor. According to Mr. Burns, who later lived at 42 Booroondara Street, Reid, the Duke of York was to drive through Reid on that evening. He fixed lights at the windows of the unfinished houses so that the suburb would look lived-in on that autumn night. Mr. Burns would have seen the development of Reid. He was born in Murumbateman in the Yass-Canberra region. His father was a farmer and they would drive regularly to Queanbeyan, via what is now Limestone Avenue of Reid, to sell their farm produce. On their way back the parents would stop at the Old Canberra Inn for a drink and he and his sister would get

their lemonade. He later moved to the south coast as an electrician and was brought back to Canberra as the electrician for the Provisional Parliament House.

Professor John Mulvaney, a Commissioner of the Australian Heritage Commission in 1979, referred to the importance of Reid to the history of Canberra:

In 1979 the recently established Australian Heritage Commission nominated much of the inner suburb of Reid for inclusion on the Register of the National Estate. This constituted one of the Commission's first decisions to place an entire urban complex on the newly created Register. Reid exhibits unusually diverse and well preserved heritage values. These includes many variants of the architectural designs erected in 1926-27, before Parliament House was opened; they housed the subsequent influx of public servants; the uniformity of urban landscape, the tree planting and street furniture enhanced the historic values and amenity

The simple grid plan of Reid is a compromise between the triangular geometry of the National Area and the hexagonal geometry of Civic. Recognizing the original inhabitants of the area the streets of Reid have Aboriginal names alphabetically arranged; a rarity in those days.

The streets are:

East to West:

Amaroo	meaning Beautiful Place
Booroondara	Shady Place
Currong	Silver Wattle
Doonkuna	Rising Ground
Elimatta	My Home
Gooreen	Wind

North to South:

Allambee	Day
Boolee	Star
Coranderrk	Christmas Bush
Dirrawan	Emu
Euree	Sleep
Geerilong	Star in the sky

Edge Streets:

Ballumbir	Butterfly
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During the formative period of Reid, Booroondara Street used to lead to Civic with its planting of Algerian Oaks. Only Sydney building was complete and Melbourne building was still being built. Writing about the life in the suburb in 1946, Gordon and Hope Burgoyne, past residents stated:

It was still regarded as a way out suburb. The area beyond Booroondara Street was, according to the Griffin Plan, reserved for a railway which would run from the present railway station, across the lake by a causeway, through Reid and Civic and off into bush to join the main Sydney to Melbourne line at Yass.

Life in those early days was dominated by the Department of Interior, usually called 'the Department'. The Department was more than a landlord. It supplied firewood, shrubs for the garden, the Christmas trees for our children. It even cut the front hedges.

Margaret Horgan, another of the past resident remembers:

Up to the end of World War II Reid remained one of those Canberra suburbs 'in search of a city'. It was surrounded by empty paddocks which were used by drovers taking flocks of sheep from north of Mount Ainslie, through the area which is now Glebe Park and Allara Street to the low-level bridge across the Molonglo River at Scott's Crossing. Going to the shops at Civic, Reid residents used walking tracks across the paddocks. At time they had to wait until a flock of sheep had passed by.

Is this much different from waiting for the passing heavy traffic at the peak time nowadays?

Walter Burley Griffin's prize winning plan of the Federal Capital was designed for these open paddocks. Like his new imaginative concept of the Garden City capital, integrated within its natural setting, the suburb of Reid was also far ahead of its time. In his design of the garden suburb of Reid he foreshadowed the principle of what later came to be known as the "Radburn principle" in the planning world. His plan was, however, changed by John Sulman, who arranged subdivision around two gardens, following the English towns with village greens.

Mrs. H. Dunbar, who lived at 25 Geerilong Gardens, one of the two gardens in the suburb, tells us about her life:

I came here in 1937. For several years up to 1960 my husband used to show films in Geerilong Gardens on Christmas night. This arose from the fact that he founded the Canberra Film Club and trained many projectionists. One year he had some particular films including The Changing of the Guard at Buckingham palace. In all about 50 people, sitting on rugs saw the film that night.

The residents, mainly middle class public servants, had been uprooted from their Melbourne home comforts and social connections to a stark new area without even formal paths. They quickly began to make Reid their new home with a new social life. Charles Boag, a resident of Dirrawan Gardens wrote:

Following interest displayed at a meeting of Reid Residents in the Ainslie Public School in 1928 arranged by Mr. Joe Honeysett, Social Service Liaison Officer, Federal Capital Commission, the construction of two tennis courts and a shelter-shed was completed by the Commission in 1929 and play commenced on the club's present site in Dirrawan gardens.

The tennis club eventually obtained four courts and a modest club house which exists today. It has provided for most of the top Executive Officers of the ACT Tennis Association over the years. Across from the Tennis Club is the Reid Preschool. The preschool was founded in 1946 and continues to attract students.

Much of the residential area of Reid is now Classified by the ACT National Trust and entered on the ACT Heritage Register for its historic and heritage values representing the early planning philosophy, including social segregation and the urgent need for large public housing estates. The ACT National Trust continues to recognise Reid for these values and with funding obtained from the ACT Government's Heritage Grants Program has reproduced a new self-guided tour brochure for Reid and has placed an interpretive sign outlining the suburb's history at Dirrawan Gardens.