

Palmerville Historic Site

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(<http://www.cas.asn.au/newsletters/Old-News-Feb-2010.pdf>)

On 20 January 2010 five signs in the Canberra Tracks series were launched at Palmerville Heritage Park located in Owen Dixon Drive, bounded by William Slim Drive in Giralang and the CSIRO Experiment Station on the Barton Highway.

Lionel Moore, the last resident of Ginninderra as Palmerville was known in his time, spoke about some of his experiences from 1957 to 1959 before he was evicted by the CSIRO. Several descendants of John Crinigan, one of the convicts assigned to Palmerville, as well as descendants of the Crace and Campbell families and Canberra Archaeological Society (CAS) members and friends were also in the crowd.

CAS has been involved with this significant early Canberra site over many years, initially as the Belconnen suburbs were being developed in 1982 and more recently in pushing for signage and further interpretation of the site. While we were unsuccessful in our 2009 heritage grant application we are happy to see that the grassy mounds covering the ruins of the former buildings are now identified for the public and some of the stories of the people and place are outlined on the signs. Perhaps this can be seen as stage one of a future project for CAS.

History

The Palmerville settlement was established in about 1826 by George Thomas Palmer Senior. His father Lieutenant John Palmer had arrived on the First Fleet ship Sirius. Palmer probably learned about this fertile land on the Ginninderra Creek from his uncle Robert Campbell. James Ainslie had brought Campbell's sheep from Bathurst and depastured them somewhere in this area before being shown the Pialligo (later Duntroon) site by an Aboriginal woman. Duntroon was established in 1823.

Palmerville was managed in the early days by an overseer, Duncan McFarlane. From 1837 to about 1845 Charles Campbell and his wife Catherine (Palmer) lived there, followed by George Thomas Palmer Junior and his wife Selina; then from 1850 William Davis and his wife, Susan Adriana Palmer.

William Davis was a popular 'Squire of Gininderra'. He supported the local community, including a famous cricket team that included Aboriginal people Jimmy and Johnny Taylor and Bobby Hamilton. Balls were held in the shearing shed and fireworks were staged in 1863 to celebrate the marriage of Prince Edward.

In 1860 William Davis built a new home on newly acquired land at 'Goongarline' (later Gungahlin). Tragedy forced William Davis to leave the District in 1877 after his favourite nephew, Ernest Palmer, was killed in a horse-jumping accident at the Queanbeyan Show. Davis sold both his Ginninderra properties to Edward Kendall Crace.

Hard as it is to imagine to-day, Ginninderra Creek was the site of a drowning tragedy in 1892 when E.K. Crace and his groom, George Kemp, attempted to cross the flooded creek. Both drowned and Kate Marion Crace (nee Mort) was left to manage the properties which by then included Charnwood. With the establishment of the Capital all the properties were resumed in 1916. The CSIRO now occupies the Gungahlin homestead.

The buildings of Palmerville/Ginninderra were demolished in the 1950s.

Archaeology

In 1983 John Goldsmith prepared a conservation plan for the Palmerville area which later was to become the Giralang District Park. In 1986 Jonathon Winston-Gregson conducted a further investigation on the non-CSIRO part of the site. He made several suggestions regarding the conservation of the site which unfortunately were not carried out. During the ACT Heritage Festival at the Albert Hall in 1985 detailed photos of the excavation were displayed. Where are these photos now?

The old Ginninderra Cottage is probably now on CSIRO land and despite repeated ploughing, an archaeological investigation of this area could add significantly to the Palmerville story.

The area subsequently became the Palmerville Heritage Park and in 1990 the archaeological excavations were covered and the mounds planted with grass.

Excavation had revealed a 1820s 'convict' stone barn, measuring 65 feet (19.8 metres) x 22 feet 6 inches (6.8 metres) with three internal partitions.

In 1828 there were some 14 convicts at Palmerville. The 1841 census showed about 68 people – 47 males and 21 females; 15 were convicts and 6 ticket-of-leave holders.

Several other buildings were also identified including stables and a house site consisting of 4 buildings spread out over some 900 square metres.

A woolshed, cricket pitch, an office/store and other structures are known from the historical record.

Oral histories and interviews with former resident, Freena Humphries (a Crace descendant), Jane Southwell (nee Moore) and Beula McAppion (nee Curran) added to the archaeological evidence, together with Lyall Gillespie's knowledge of Ginninderra history. However further interpretation of the site is needed.

Palmerville also has some very old exotic vegetation. Three large oak trees thought to date from 1848 have survived together with elms and poplars. A hawthorn avenue has been re-established near the reconstructed wooden bridge and a bay tree, planted in the early 1900s, is thriving.

An investigation in 2004 of a proposed flood retardation basin on Ginninderra Creek identified parts of Palmerville that would occasionally be affected by inundation. Nothing has eventuated to date from these proposals, but any action should be monitored.

There is a need to clarify the 'village' buildings, their purpose, siting and changes over the 130 years of settlement at Palmerville. This would be an ideal historic archaeology project for students, particularly as we approach the centenary of Canberra the Capital city in 2013.

By Marilyn Folger