

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 39**

**A PLANNING HISTORY:  
DARWIN BOTANIC GARDEN,  
PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE;  
and,  
PLANNING : A NEW APPROACH**

**by**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the text of a talk intended to be given by George Brown in June 1992 in the State Library's series of "Under the Banyan Tree" lunchtime entertainments. However, the City of Darwin Mayoral election campaign intervened, and the afternoon in question found George at the Darwin Press Club rather than the State Library. Pressures of work at his new position have not permitted George to deliver this long postponed address, so we now present it to a public that will, we are sure, find it extremely interesting and refreshing.

George tells us that life began when he arrived in Darwin as a holidaying golfer some 25 years ago. On visiting the Botanic Garden, while lost on his way back to the City from the Fannie Bay Golf Links, he determined that here was where his future lay.

After a year of various employments George secured the position of foreman at the Garden and with the City Council.

Promotion to the positions of Director, Superintendent, and Manager of Parks and Gardens, Parks and Recreation, and Parks followed but his first love has always been the Gardens.

He has always maintained an interest in the planning of the City, his particular interest being in the actions of all levels of Government in relation to the protection of Public Lands. His landslide election last year as Lord Mayor of Darwin will permit him to keep this aspect under very close scrutiny, and to play a major part in the future planning of the city he loves.

George is a Fellow of The Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation and a member of a number of plant related organisations.

## **A PLANNING HISTORY: DARWIN BOTANIC GARDEN, PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE.**

The Surveyor General of South Australia, G. W. Goyder, arrived in Port Darwin on February 5th 1869 to found Palmerston, destined to become the first permanent township in the Northern Territory. Within one week of his arrival the first Official Garden was planted. The Official Naturalist, Frederic Schultze, had carried with him seeds of tomato, cucumber, peas, beans, pumpkin and onions among others.

William Hayes was given the task of establishing the first Garden, which he located on the foreshore of Francis Bay where Kitchener Street starts up from the wharf. Hayes was officially appointed the Territory's Official and first Gardener in May of 1869.

In June of 1870 sugar cane was planted in Doctors' Gully and the "Paper Bark Swamp" (Mindil), "The Garden", as it was originally referred to, prospered; it was later and variously called the Experimental Garden, the Government Garden, the Experimental Nursery, and the Botanical Gardens until the 1890s when the term Botanic Garden was used exclusively.

Planning was, until now, by necessity.

In 1871 money was made available by the South Australian Government for the establishment of an Experimental Garden which was begun in August on six acres of land about a mile from the Telegraph Station; the exact location is today uncertain. Hayes was appointed Government Gardener of the new Garden and was allowed to employ two Chinese labourers. Little experimenting was done and the main purpose of the Garden continued to be the production of fruit and vegetables for public servants and sick people. This practice led to the growing private sector resenting the fact of Government Officials only benefiting from Hayes' efforts.

In March of 1875 a move was made by the Town Council to take control of the Garden for experimental growing and the provision of produce to the public. The Garden was also to be planned as a recreation area. Argument continued until a year later when Hayes was supplying the public with both plants and produce and it was no longer necessary to import vegetables from China.

The Garden was now recognised by the Minister and the Town Council as being of some importance.

Hayes died on June 8th 1878 and Maurice Holtze, a trained horticulturist, was appointed to succeed him on July 16th 1878.

In March of 1879 Holtze, the Government Resident (Price), McMinn and William Owsten, who planned to grow sugar cane in the Territory, selected a new site for the Garden at Fannie Bay comprising thirty acres of mainly dense jungle directly north of the Gaol. Three hundred and fifty Chinese were employed at one shilling each per day to clear the jungle and to sink seven wells.

We might suspect that Mr. Owsten was planning his own future activities by encouraging experiments with sugar cane and indeed he was to be the first recipient of canes from the Garden!

The Garden now had Ministerial recognition.

Despite continued threats to abolish his position and lack of funds, Holtze persisted to

such an extent that, writing of the Garden in 1884, the Government Resident, Parsons, said... "To it, over the rough and, in the dry season, desolate road, every visitor to Palmerston is taken and is then marched along its Banana and Pineapple lined walks to see Sugar Cane, Rice, Tapioca, Arrowroot, Groundnut and other tropical and sub-tropical plants growing and flourishing".

Produce from the Garden had also won medals in Sydney and Calcutta.

The Garden was already becoming a tourist attraction.

In 1885 Parsons, the Government Resident, admitted to the Minister that a mistake had been made when the Gardens site had been chosen in 1879.

In hindsight, we know that, with planning, that problem might have been averted.

On 2 January 1886 the local newspaper announced that the Fannie Bay site would be surveyed and sub-divided into suburban blocks and auctioned. The Garden would be re-located to the "Paper Bark Swamp" (the present site).

Holtze acted swiftly, and on 22 February 1886, only four days after the shift was agreed to, he was transplanting mature plants to the new site.

Parsons' action in authorising the shift without his Minister's approval is an example of "shotgun" or "immediate need" planning brought about by the need to get things done, and frustration.

A further, similar action was taken by Parsons when, following months of indecision by the Minister, he (Parsons) issued a Proclamation declaring the formal establishment of the Botanic Garden on 1 October 1886.

To this day no proper Proclamation has been found; the situation being that, under Town Planning Zoning, the Botanic Garden is simply another piece of public land zoned "01, For the Recreation and Amusement of the Public".

A planning decision is required to formalise the Garden.

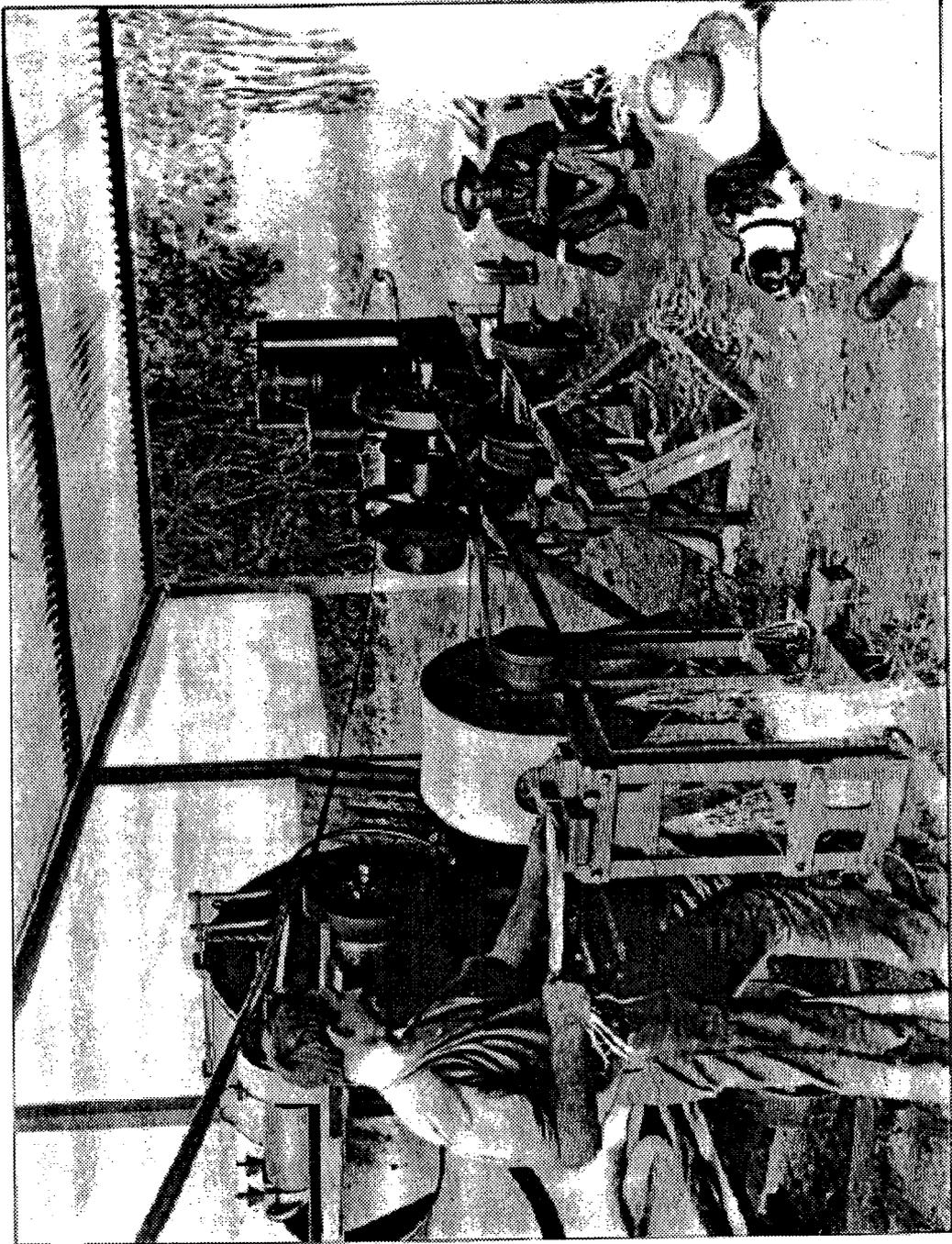
In 1887 Holtze listed 519 species and varieties of plants considered to have commercial potential growing in the Garden. Despite difficulties with labour, funding and the weather Holtze persisted and the Garden flourished.

In 1891 Dr. Schomburgk, the Director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden, died. Holtze, who was by now very much respected in botanical and horticultural circles, was appointed to succeed him.

At age 23, Holtze's son Nicholas was appointed to manage the Garden and given the title "Curator", an honour not afforded his father. Nicholas was a career Public Servant with many responsibilities...

Secretary and Accountant to the Resident  
Acting Deputy Registrar  
Public Trustee  
Inspector, Vines, Fruits and Vegetables  
Returning Officer  
Sheriff  
Curator Botanic Garden.

His eventual salary was £525.00. per annum, which made him the third highest salaried public servant in the Territory behind the Resident and the Chief Medical Officer.

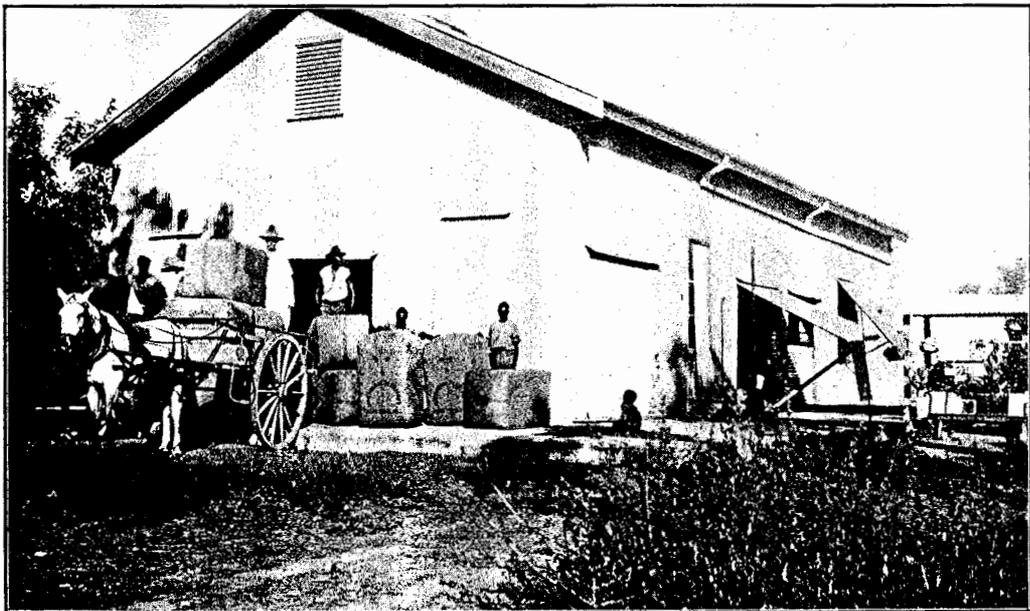


9.-SISAL HEMP MACHINERY AT WORK. BOTANIC GARDENS PALMERSTON, NORTHERN TERRITORY.

C. 1909



TEA ROSES AT BOTANIC GARDENS, DARWIN.



BALES OF COTTON READY FOR SHIPPING OUTSIDE THE GINNERY, BOTANIC GARDENS.  
c. 1927

Despite being only a part-time Curator, Nicholas managed to achieve a great deal in the Garden. In accordance with his father's plan, an avenue of Coconut palms was planted at the bottom of the gardens and the mangrove swamp was drained and cleared and also planted with Coconuts. It is believed that some of those original plants still exist along the present Gilruth Avenue. The plantation was subject to the deprivations of the occupying military during the two World Wars.

That line formed by the Coconuts was to be a handy boundary when, later, the Council annexed land from the Gardens to build the Gardens Ovals complex. Later on, and without consultation, the Mindil Beach and St. Johns' College land was also stolen from the Gardens and even in these modern days the City Council has stolen the land within the Amphitheatre fence.

Nicholas Holtze was very successful in the growing of Rice, which crop he promoted vigorously but with little success. He also is said to have planted the local Milkwoods (*Alstonia actinophylla*) in Smith Street.

At only 45 years of age Nicholas Holtze passed away in the Curator's Cottage in the Gardens. Top-end agriculturists had lost a man dedicated to their success. Like his father before him, Nicholas had lost out to the tyranny of distance.

The Territory was now the responsibility of the Commonwealth (they promised a railway). The first Administrator, Dr. J. A. Gilruth, decided that "The Darwin Botanic Garden" (a new name since 1911 when the Commonwealth took control) would become a Scientific and Educational Institution with a portion of the Garden being retained for vegetable growing under a Mr. Yeadon - Planning from a position of power.

Kew Gardens-trained C.E.F. Allen was appointed as the first full-time Curator but he soon left to join the Australian Expeditionary Force. G. F. Hill, an entomologist, was appointed as acting Curator but he soon left to take up a position in Townsville.

After World War 1 Allen was appointed Superintendent of Agriculture and Curator of the Botanic Garden but he had little time for the Garden which was "cleaned up and kept tidy" and gradually, under the care of Acting Curator M. C. Good, became an ornamental Garden.

Good was followed by W. L. Stanley (acting) who was the Chief Inspector of Pearlling and "no experiments were undertaken".

In 1937 a young botanist, H.K.C. Mair was appointed. Mair purchased a tractor and trailer (the horse had died of senescence), and a rotary hoe and built a tobacco curing barn. All the buildings which had been damaged by the cyclone in March of 1937 were re-built, including the nursery, shade-house, implement shed and the garage at the Curator's Cottage.

The good times lasted only up to the occupation of the Garden by the troops of World War 2. The occupation lasted until 1945. The Garden was described as being a tangle of brush and barbed-wire and the local dairyman, Brooker, was pasturing his cows there and calves were penned in the Shade-House. The Administrator complained at the deplorable state of the Garden with the result that Brigadier Dollery undertook its restoration. Army Headquarters in each State were asked to send plants which were planted under the supervision of Mr. Jack Agostini, the Foreman Gardener.

In 1955 Mr. J. Worland from the Toowomba Botanic Garden was appointed Curator but little was achieved due to lack of funds.

In 1957 the Gardens became the responsibility of The Corporation of the City of Darwin (C.C.D.) and the position of Curator became part of the duties of the Director of Parks and Gardens, the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation and the Parks Manager. These positions were variously filled by "Doc" McKenzie, Brian Edwards and George Brown who were charged with managing a "Botanic park" with some plant labelling and seed exchange comprising the botanical activities.

Planning was the prerogative of the Curator; little or no direction was given by the Council.

Cyclone Tracy, on 24 December 1974, destroyed Darwin and 89% of the plants in the Garden. Some of Maurice Holtze's original plantings survived to conserve a historical continuity of plants in the Garden.

In February of 1975 the Council made a decision which was a major change in policy; the Darwin Botanic Garden should, it decided, be developed as a Botanic Garden of Class 1 International Standard by the Northern Territory Government. While consultation waxed and waned, the Council and the government, with minimal consultation, made some planning decisions. The Council that the Garden should have Palm and Orchid collections, a Scent Garden and a Rainforest. The Government made funds available for the Rainforest and for a considerable amount of new irrigation works.

On 1 October, 1990 after almost 16 years of Finigan negotiations and four Reports, representatives of The Darwin City Council and The Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory signed an agreement which gave the Northern Territory Government responsibility for the Gardens.

The Commission, with consultants, undertook a Resources Study which was followed by a Future Directions and Planning Study in which interested organisations and individuals were invited to participate. This document is to be updated to reflect suggestions received and further comment will be asked for before a final document is put before the Cabinet.

Planning is now involving the wider public.

Mr. Alan White has been appointed as Head of the Botanic Garden and Herbarium and he heads a Working Party of persons with a wide range of expertise and interests. This Working party will make the recommendations to the Commission which will see the Darwin Botanic Garden advance into the future with its course set by Future Directions and Corporate Plans into which the community has made a valuable and recognisable contribution.

A better planning process is in place which even yet can be improved.

#### Reference

Bauer, June B. Some other Eden : a history of the Darwin Botanic Garden. (In Two North Australian cropping studies, by June B. Bauer and W. S. Mollah. Darwin, North Australia Research Unit, 1980).

## PLANNING: A NEW APPROACH

For my brief presentation I will adopt the "Kiss" principle; KEEP IT SHORT STUPID, to discuss this Managers' overview of some of the planning methods which have been used in Darwin during the years A.T.(After Tracy).

### Emergency Planning

Following Cyclone Tracy, the Town Planning Authority, the Darwin Reconstruction Commission and the Corporation of the City of Darwin produced a planning proposal for the reconstruction of Darwin. This plan contained all of the elements which, at that time, were considered to be the very best for a community based in the tropical north. Each of the suburbs were joined to the City via broad linear parklands and cycle-paths, noise barriers were to be provided on both sides of all of the major carriageways etc, etc.

Unfortunately the house designs were such that the designers had concentrated on strength rather than on comfortable living.

In my view, at the time, again unfortunately, the few remaining citizens were asked to comment on the proposals with the result that many of the better elements were deleted. I then believed that this city would have been better served if the Authorities of the time had made a decision to adopt the Planning Proposal. Today I have my doubts.

### Conflict Planning

Down the years there have been many planning decisions made by both levels of Government which have reflected the views of the Council and the Government and even the views of individuals from those organisations.

Northlakes and the Golf Links took away public land which had been sensibly planned to form a noise barrier between the Airport and residential areas and for the development of recreational facilities.

The Casino site was decided over a holiday weekend by the Lord Mayor and a Minister of the Government.

The City Council stole the Kiosk/Information Centre from the Botanic Garden to be leased as a restaurant.

The Government gave us a Foreshores Protection Plan and then proceeded to steal portions of it for private development.

Birdsong Gully, in the Botanic Garden was proposed for private development.

The Darwin Water Garden was a long week-end plan by a couple of Government Ministers. The public never saw the plan and the lake, which was supposed to meet the needs of the Model Boat Club, proved to be unsuitable for their activities. The original total proposal was never achieved.

The City Council decided to build a cricket pitch in the Botanic Garden.

The City Council stole the land bounded by the Amphitheatre fence from the Botanic Garden.

In recent weeks an individual officer of the Council approved the construction of a security-fence across one of the most beautiful and admired landscapes in the City.

### Planning by Consultation

In all of the above listed cases the public complained, in various degrees of voracity; some battles were lost and some won. There should not have been any need for the battles.

We appear now to have entered into a period of planning by consultation; The Chief Minister's initiative, The Darwin Planning Group, is achieving results which are adding considerably to the visual amenity of our city and to the local and tourist enjoyment of it. Persons other than the planners have had input into these exciting proposals and are able to see the results of their thought and effort.

The Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory has been given the task of producing a Future Development Plan and a Corporate Plan for the Darwin Botanic Garden for the first time in its, The Garden's, one hundred and twelve year history. Interested organisations and the public have been given the opportunity to comment or to put proposals for this exciting and most important planning initiative, and will again be invited to comment on the final document before it goes before the Cabinet.

Certainly both of these planning projects have had input from outside of the host organisations but despite this improvement, the planning is still, in my opinion, very much flawed.

Consultative Planning should be a process whereby the planners approach the people with their minds completely free of preconceptions other than that there is a proposal to be planned. Only by adopting this approach can any plan belong to those who will ultimately own it: the People. The process currently used only results in minor changes to proposals put by the planners and consultants; all plans are, largely, the plans of planners.

The Mindil Beach Markets site development is the plan of consultants who only consulted with the Market Managers' and Stallholders' representatives. It does not belong to the users, the People.

The Botanic Garden plan will be the plan of consultants, planners and CCNT Officers, as I learned when I put a proposal relating to the siting of proposed new buildings only to be told that the decision was already in place. Further to this, actions have already been taken which affect the users of the Garden without any consultation having been had with them... through traffic has been denied, and the barbecues have been relocated.

Conversely, the City Council is in it's third year of a Foreshores Development Plan which is the result of the Council, without preconceptions, asking the people what they wanted and accepting what was asked.

While planners find it difficult to accept that plans do not belong to them and that they, the planners, should be the instrument by which the People's needs and aspirations are achieved, the transition to the actuality of People's Planning could be achieved if they, the planners, could consider and accept a few suggestions.

...People's Planning can, and does, work.

...Staff at all levels and the People should be involved in the planning process.

...People do know what they want.

...Share the vision.

...Plans belong to the People.

...Talk with individuals, those who are not part of an organisation.

...There is no such person as "The Average Person", each is a Person in their own right with their own aspirations.

...The involvement of the People at the very outset of a planning proposal will ensure that the proposal will not become an issue.

...People need causes.

...Workshop involvement with the interested is more effective than talkathons by experts.

...No planning proposal should be put to paper until every interested person and group has been heard; have no preconceptions.

Having said that, I am hopeful that a new age of planning is here and that the Planners, the People and each level of Government can form a Planning Partnership which will develop our City with its own unique style and qualities which will be recognisably Darwin and, proudly, our own.