Saturday 5 March 2011
Northern Territory Library – Parliament House, Darwin
COVER IMAGE: Heather Riley, The flag-raising, 1985, Oil on canvas, Gifted by the Riley Family to the people of the Territory, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Collection.
On 1 January 1911, the Northern Territory separated from South Australia and came under Commonwealth control. Although self-government would take another 67 years, this was the beginning of the Territory we know today.

The Territory has had a short, but interesting, history. This year will be a time to reflect on the past and see where we have come as community over the last 100 years.

This seminar has been developed to commemorate the Territory’s centenary year by bringing together a collection of prominent local and interstate historians to share their knowledge and research on our fascinating history.

With topics ranging from Indigenous Territorians right to vote to the decline of Chinese ‘houseboy’ servants in white colonial home-life, these sessions will detail significant events in the Territory’s history, governance and foundation over the past 100 years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00 a.m.</td>
<td>Welcome by Jo McGill, Director, Northern Territory Library</td>
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<td>9.05 a.m.</td>
<td>Welcome to country - Donna Odegaard of the Larrakia People</td>
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<td>9.10 a.m.</td>
<td>Address by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Paul Henderson</td>
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<td>9.45 a.m.</td>
<td>MORNING TEA</td>
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| 10.15 a.m. | Professor Dean Jaensch, Flinders University  
*The convoluted history of electoral representation in the Northern Territory* |
| 11.00 a.m. | Professor David Carment AM, Charles Darwin University  
*Landscapes of Commonwealth authority in Darwin* |
| 11.45 a.m. | Professor Bob Reece, Murdoch University  
*A Tale of Two Railways: The debate on the Commonwealth takeover of the Northern Territory, 1910* |
| 12.30 p.m. | LUNCH                                                                 |
| 1.30 p.m. | Dr Micky Dewar, Consulting Historian, Darwin  
*Before and after: How the Commonwealth helped make us all Territorians* |
| 2.15 p.m. | Dr Sue Stanton, Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services NT  
*A new era? 1911 and Aboriginal policy* |
| 3.00 p.m. | AFTERNOON TEA                                                          |
| 3.30 p.m. | Dr Claire Lowrie, University of Newcastle  
*Darwin in 1911: A colonial city* |
| 4.15 p.m. | Panel Discussion  
Administrator of the Northern Territory, His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC, and former Administrator, The Honourable Austin Asche AC QC  
*One hundred years since separation: What were/are the advantages to the NT/SA and the Commonwealth?*
| 5.00 p.m. | Book launch  
*Commonwealth takeover of the Northern Territory: 100 Years*  
Author: Dr Val Fletcher |
In 1911, the people of the Northern Territory faced democratic limbo. For the next 25 years, they had no franchise, no representatives in any parliament, no democratic rights.

This session analyses what went before, and what followed. The focus is “franchise”, but not limited to the “quantitative” – the right to vote. It includes a focus on “qualitative” aspects – the context of representation in the Territory.

The quantitative component involves simple questions: is there a right to vote which is universal, and is there a guarantee of one person, one vote, and one value? From 1890 to 1910, both applied in the Northern Territory, the latter within the parameters of rural malapportionment which was then endemic in Australia.

The qualitative components are broader, but in this speaker’s opinion, equally important. Is there an equal opportunity to vote? The exercise of voting should not be more difficult for some than for others.

The quality of the franchise is embedded in the concept of representation. And the nature of representation is more important in a society which contains sociological, geographic and racial or ethnic cleavages. The Northern Territory has all three. So the representation system should be designed to adequately reflect these.

The quality of the franchise also raises issues of responsibility. It should offer an equal opportunity for all citizens to have their interests heard and acknowledged by the elected representative, and to bring these representatives to account.

In 1863, when South Australia accepted an offer to take over the area and its people, it was a case of a franchise vacuum. But for 21 years, from 1890, Territorians joined South Australians to enjoy the most democratic franchise in the nation, ie adult male suffrage, including for all Aboriginal people, electing members to the South Australian parliament.

When SA relinquished control in 1911, the franchise vacuum returned, and lasted until 1922. In that year, the NT was granted one member in the House of Representatives, who had no speaking or voting rights, essentially a non-member. This franchise without power remained until 1936, when the member was granted a right to speak and vote on motions to disallow NT Ordinances. In 1968, full voting rights were granted.

In the Territory electoral context, the 1947 grant of a Legislative Council was hardly a major step to democracy. Of the 13 members, the majority were nominees of the Commonwealth government, with the Administrator granted both deliberative and casting votes. This took representation in the Territory to the position of the colonies in the 1850s.

In 1974, with the inauguration of the Legislative Assembly, full franchise and full representation were finally granted. But the early electoral systems contained complicated and confusing elements which were unique to the Territory. It was not until 1980 that Territorians achieved a “national” franchise.
Between 1911 and 1978, Darwin was the Commonwealth’s principal Northern Territory base. The city’s cultural landscapes in 2011 include places that help illuminate and explain significant aspects of the imposition of Commonwealth authority.

Many older buildings represent the mechanisms through which the Commonwealth legitimised its rule and defined its goals. Initially, the Commonwealth operated from former South Australian buildings. These, however, were adapted for new purposes and additional facilities, especially for administering the Aboriginal population. The Commonwealth also built residential accommodation for its non-Aboriginal employees.

Commonwealth fears of an Asian invasion often focussed on Darwin, resulting in the construction of fortifications, including an air force base and an army barracks. Although the built heritage of Commonwealth rule in Darwin has been much diminished, enough remains to reveal key themes. The city’s present structures and places frequently provide vital historical documentation.

The building that best symbolised the South Australian administration is Government House. It also is the building most closely associated with the new Commonwealth regime after 1911. Additionally and outstanding among the oldest administrative structures are the former police station, courthouse, courthouse annexe and cellblock. Further evidence of the Commonwealth’s impact is found at the former Fannie Bay Gaol, many of whose inmates were Aboriginal or Chinese people.

Karu Park in Coconut Grove includes the remaining concrete slab foundations of the second site of the Retta Dixon Home for so called ‘mixed descent’ Aboriginal children. A very different facility that the Commonwealth established principally for Aboriginal people, in 1931 is the former leprosarium on Channel Island.

Perhaps the best-known surviving examples of Commonwealth residential accommodation are four elevated houses at Myilly Point. Throughout Darwin during the 1950s and 1960s, the Commonwealth constructed numerous new houses, some of which survive in suburbs such as Fannie Bay, to keep up with its rapidly growing public service population. Not surprisingly, such houses failed to withstand Cyclone Tracy particularly well and following the Cyclone there was an unfortunate over-reaction now seen in suburbs like Wulagi.

The Commonwealth’s fears of an Asian invasion of Australia that often focused on Darwin are reflected in the extensive fortifications at East Point. The Royal Australian Air Force base at Winnellie is a large area containing a diverse precinct of buildings and a wide range of designs and functions.

Darwin’s present cultural landscapes include quite varied evidence of how the Commonwealth established and extended its authority. Although some of the remaining material evidence of Commonwealth rule encompasses places important to the Northern Territory’s Aboriginal and Asian inhabitants, Commonwealth authorities tried hard to eradicate reminders of earlier Aboriginal ownership or Asian occupation.

Darwin’s surviving landscapes of Commonwealth authority generally show a continuing assertion of the goal to mark land as belonging to white settlers rather than the earlier Indigenous inhabitants and their descendants or non-white peoples. The centenary of the establishment of Commonwealth rule in the Northern Territory provides a fitting occasion to consider how best to preserve and interpret the evidence of this process.
A tale of two railways: The debate on the Commonwealth takeover of the Northern Territory, 1910
Speaker: Bob Reece, Professor Emeritus in History, Murdoch University

The 2 January 1911 ceremony marking the transfer of the Northern Territory from South Australian to Commonwealth control was a multi-cultural affair that sat uneasily with the dominant nation-building ideology of White Australia responsible for Federation.

After ten years of negotiations backwards and forwards, little interest was shown in the event by the southern newspapers and there was not even a message from the Commonwealth Government in Melbourne to mark the occasion. In Port Darwin itself there were some feelings of regret about the transfer but it was generally met with cautious optimism. After all, there was little to show for sixty-seven years of South Australian rule and Commonwealth control seemed to promise a more rapid pace of development.

A study of the Commonwealth Parliament debates of late 1910 that considered the two bills facilitating the transfer, the *Northern Territory Acceptance Bill [No. 2]* and the *Northern Territory Administration Bill* reveals that members were preoccupied with the question of railway development, the condition of South Australian agreement negotiated earlier by the Deakin government. The long tradition of rival colonial interests, particularly between Queensland and South Australia, surfaced once again with the revelation that E.L. Batchelor, the Minister for External Affairs who was to be responsible for the Territory’s administration, was a South Australian.

To be fair, there was certain inevitability about the outcome of the debates in view of the knowledge that the Fisher Labor government’s majority would always carry the day and that the Deakin opposition was essentially in favour anyway. There seems to have been a general perception that while the Territory promised to be a financial liability in the short term at least, the question of ensuring northern Australia’s defence made its acquisition unavoidable. However, it was abundantly clear that little or no Commonwealth government planning had been done from Melbourne and that scant thought had been given to the fundamental questions of political representation, land policy, economic development and Aboriginal welfare. Indeed, rather more planning had been done for Papua, which was also the responsibility of the Minister but already had its own Legislative Council.

Speaker biography
Bob Reece is Professor Emeritus in History at Murdoch University, Western Australia, where he has taught since 1978. His early publications were in Aboriginal History; most notably *Aborigines and Colonists and Inventing Aborigines*. This interest has continued with his production of a number of articles, including *The Irish and the Aborigines* and a biography titled *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*, for the National Library of Australia where he held a Harold White Fellowship in 2005.

More recently, he has published articles on the history of the Benedictine Aboriginal mission at New Norcia. He has also published extensively on the history of Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo), his best known books being *The Name of Brooke, Masa Jepun: Sarawak Under the Japanese, 1941-1945*, and *The White Rajahs*.

As Professor of Australian History at University College, Dublin, he developed an interest in Irish convict history and went on to publish three collections of Irish convict biographies. In relation to Northern Australia, together with Lenore Coltheart, he contributed a chapter to Dean Jaensch and Peter Loveday’s *Under One Flag* and provided an account of the search for a capital for South Australia’s newly-acquired Northern Territory in Pamela Statham’s *The Origins of Australia’s Capital Cities*. He also provided a biographical introduction for the CDU Press 2002 reprint of George Windsor Earl’s *Enterprise in Tropical Australia*.

His most recent publication is *End of an Era: the Borneo Reminiscences of C.F.C. Macaskie*, the edited memoirs of a North Borneo (now Sabah) senior civil servant who headed Australia’s civil affairs administration in Borneo at the end of World War 2. The common theme that links his diverse work is the history of colonial settler societies and their relations with indigenous peoples.
Identity is as much about who we are not, as it is about who we are. In the contemporary period within the writings of the Northern Territory News there can be seen an articulation of a sense of us and them. Both editorial comment and popular contribution argues a distinct set of beliefs, philosophies and attitudes attributed to a notional identity, the Territorian, against the imported and alien values of the southerner.

Enshrined within the language and politics of the region, there is an argued identity of place, defined in large measure by who we are not. As Marilynne Paspaley noted in her 2005 Eric Johnston Lecture, ‘As to our identity […] we do not need to look south for answers. We can be proud of our heritage’.

In tracing the evolution of the discourse of difference within the Territory’s popular press, from the earliest period of European settlement to the late twentieth century, one can see some of the characteristics and forms the notion of Territorian took over time. In turn, the responses to the problems of Territory administration by both the South Australian and Commonwealth Governments, also suggest some tensions and difficulties revealing of regional identity and autonomy.

At various times, and in key areas, it can be seen that both administrations were unpopular. However, as the Commonwealth’s relationship to the Territory continued for a much longer period and also because it assayed more initiatives for administration of the region, it is here that the most critical points of opposition and corresponding key developments in identity occurred.

From the outset, the Commonwealth suffered wider national criticism as a result of its administration of the Territory, particularly with regard to its Aboriginal inhabitants. The repeated failures to resolve political and social issues within the Territory led the Commonwealth to believe that they were required to exercise a greater control than elsewhere in Australia.

This had the effect of unifying Territorians politically to push for greater independence against the control of the Commonwealth Government. Particularly, this sense of opposition crystallised in Central Australia during the post-war period, where key individuals united in what would become the defining aspect of the Territory political identity.

The newspaper record of Territory identity, as illustrated by the positioning of locals in their responses to South Australia and then the Commonwealth, illustrates an identity of opposition and exclusion. The key characteristic of this notional opposition was established during the South Australian period, but increased sharply throughout the period of the Commonwealth administration. Some of the grievances Territorians aired, such as the Commonwealth lack of political say for Territorians, a preferential treatment to southerners and a policy towards Aborigines that conflicted with Territory views, are consistent with contemporary views. The construction of Darwin residents as public servants and administrators, as opposed to Centralians with ties to land, economic development and political activism, is also a part of Territory identity that continues to resonate with surprising clarity.

Speaker biography

For nearly 30 years Mickey Dewar has worked and been involved with Northern Territory history. Two of her books have been short-listed for the NSW Premier’s History Awards for Community and Regional History. In 1998 she also received the Jessie Litchfield Award for Literature. Her career has been diverse including teaching in Arnhem Land, a postdoctoral fellowship and teaching at Charles Darwin University, working as a senior political adviser for Chief Minister Clare Martin and as a contract historian. For many years she was Senior Curator of Territory History at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, responsible for the heritage management of a number of listed sites, including Fannie Bay Gaol and Lyons Cottage. She has also curated a number of exhibitions including the development of the permanent Cyclone Tracy Gallery.

She is currently working as a freelance historian and museums policy consultant based in Darwin. She was appointed a National Archives of Australia Frederick Watson Fellow in 2007 and National Museum of Australia Director’s Fellow in 2008. Her most recent book Darwin: No Place Like Home is a history of Darwin in the 1950s with a focus on the Commonwealth social housing policy.

Before and after: How the Commonwealth helped make us all Territorians

Speaker: Dr Micky Dewar, Consulting Historian
The South Australian Government had been the administrator of the Northern Territory from 1862 until 1911 when the Territory became the responsibility of the Commonwealth. The 1881 Census recorded there were only 79 males and 3 females living between the South Australian border and the very small siding known as Barrow Creek. The Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory at this time was estimated to be around 20,000. By the time of the Commonwealth takeover in 1911, white residents were still quite small in number, estimated to be around 1,200, with around 2,800 Chinese, Malays and Japanese.

Both anti-Asian and anti-Aboriginal sentiment was high throughout the Northern Territory and Aboriginal people especially were deemed inferior. The white authorities, pastoralists and other settlers hoped that they would eventually become extinct. Mostly white residents of the Northern Territory, even those Baldwin Spencer identified as indolent and practically worthless, still rated higher than any Aboriginal person. Aboriginal people were seen as treacherous savages, devoid of gratitude and according to Pine Creek businessman Mr J Little, in 1875, “any aggression on their part should be met by a prompt and decisive blow against [them] and so teach them to respect the lives and property of whites and to know their power”.

So what did the new era of Aboriginal policy bring to the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory in 1911? Better quality rations, clothes, blankets? Health facilities and education? Some basic human rights? The new era brought new white power – a new Aboriginal Ordinance courtesy of the Commonwealth – new Chief Protectors who would take total “care”, custody and control of any “aborigine or half-caste”.

Speaker biography

Sue Stanton is Kungarakan-Gurindji born in Larrakia country, Darwin, Northern Territory. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (History) from the Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University) in 1995. Sue was granted a Fulbright Scholarship in 1995 and undertook postgraduate studies in the USA, completing a Masters A in Master of Arts (American Indian Studies: Law and Policy - International Indigenous Human Rights Law) from the University of Arizona in 1997.

On her return to Australia, Sue was a research fellow and later Director at the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University (now CDU) from 1997 until 2000.

She is a board member of the United Association of Australia as well as the NT Writer’s Centre. Sue is currently working with the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services and is an Adjunct Research Fellow with the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.
When Port Darwin was established in 1869, it was the hope of the South Australian administration that it would become a bustling colonial city. Sub-Collector of Customs, Alfred Searcy, optimistically predicted that Port Darwin would become the ‘Singapore of Australia’.

As the town developed, its connections with South-East Asia were fuelled by an exchange of trade, migrants and travellers. Despite Federation and the introduction of the White Australia Policy in 1901, at the time of the Commonwealth takeover, Darwin remained far more connected with the neighbouring colonies of South-East Asia than with the white settler societies of south eastern Australia.

As with Singapore, Darwin had a multiethnic population that was governed by a small white colonial elite. The white elites of Darwin embraced a lifestyle that mirrored that of Europeans in other tropical colonies. They donned white plantation suits and solar topees and employed a multiethnic entourage of domestic servants.

In 1911, Darwin was indeed a colonial city, but it was one in transition. The years following the Commonwealth takeover were marked by tension between the desire to maintain the traditions of tropical European colonialism on the one hand, and the aim of transforming Darwin into a member of the white Australian nation on the other.

This session explores historical connections between Darwin and South-East Asia, the nature of colonial life in the lead up to 1911 and the process of transformation that took place after the Commonwealth takeover. In particular the focus will be on home-life and domestic service in Darwin.

**Speaker biography**

Claire Lowrie is a lecturer in history at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research focuses on the connected histories of Australia’s tropical north and South-East Asia. Claire’s PhD thesis, titled *In Service of Empire: Domestic Service and Colonial Mastery in Singapore and Darwin, 1890-1930*, was completed in 2009. She has been a recipient of two Northern Territory History Grants.

In 2010, she was awarded a prestigious Australian Research Council Grant for a collaborative project with Julia Martinez, Victoria Haskins and Frances Steel, on the history of male domestic servants and colonialism in the Asia-Pacific.

Claire has presented her work at prestigious national and international conferences and she has published a number of articles and book chapters in the field of colonial history.
Panel discussion
The final session will be in the form of a panel discussion with the current and former Administrators of the Northern Territory. They will be discussing their views on the past 100 years since separation and, in particular, the impact on the Territory, South Australia and the Commonwealth.

Administrator of the Northern Territory, His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC

Biography
His Honour Tom Pauling AO QC was appointed as Administrator of the Northern Territory in September 2007.

Born in Sydney and graduating with a Bachelor of Laws from the Sydney Law School, Mr. Pauling was admitted to the Bar in New South Wales in 1969 and worked for the NSW Public Solicitor. In March 1970, he moved to Darwin in the Northern Territory, where he practiced as a barrister.

He was made a Queen's Counsel (QC) in 1984, and was Solicitor General of the Northern Territory from 1988 to 2007.

Mr Pauling was appointed a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John in 2007 and awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia for his significant services to the Northern Territory. In the Queen's Birthday Honors of 2008.

The Honourable Austin Asche AC QC, former Administrator of the Northern Territory

Biography
Keith John Austin Asche AC QC is a former Administrator of the Northern Territory and was the third Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

He resigned as Chief Justice on 26 February 1993 to take up appointment as Administrator of the Northern Territory. While Administrator, he was patron of numerous organisations, including being the Northern Territory Chief Scout, an Honorary Colonel in NORFORCE, and a Deputy Prior of the Order of St. John.

He retired in 1997, but is still the Chair of the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee and is an Adjunct Professor in Law at the Charles Darwin University.

He was appointed a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John in 1993 and made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1994. He was also awarded Honorary Doctorates from both Deakin University and Charles Darwin University.
Author: Dr Val Fletcher
This book is a thorough account of the events that led up to the decisions, a century ago, of the Commonwealth and South Australian parliaments to transfer administrative responsibility for the Northern Territory. It covers the decade or so beforehand and makes sense of the shifting issues and unstable parliaments of the time.

Dr Fletcher describes in detail the people of the Northern Territory at the turn of the century, the businesses and industries they were trying to operate and the remote, often uninformed, South Australian Government administration. That administration became increasingly preoccupied with the debt in the Northern Territory account and turned to the Commonwealth Government for a solution. That administration was also preoccupied at the same time with the plight of the Aboriginal people about the settled areas and with the increasing numbers of vulnerable mixed race children.

Described as well are the protracted negotiations through changing governments and politicians. Dr Fletcher draws the other states into the discussion and shows how they increasingly perceive their own interests may be effected by the outcome. Tangled up in it all is the proposed north-south railway and the extent to which it can be given some certainty in the agreement with the Commonwealth.

Dr Fletcher concludes with a fascinating discussion of the early years of the Commonwealth administration, how it failed to implement the ‘political philosophy’ with which it arrived and how its sights were more fixed on horizons in New Guinea and the Pacific. It took the events of the Second World War and the bombing of Darwin to significantly alter Commonwealth attitudes.

A historian and a descendent of a well known Darwin family at the time of these events, Dr Fletcher is well placed and qualified to produce this scholarly and absorbing account.
100 YEARS OF THE TERRITORY
OVER 50,000 YEARS OF STORIES

1911-2011