

## Tales from Canberra's Past Activity Sheet 1

### Stories of the Landscape

On his way to stay at Duntroon House in the 1870s, Stanley Howard rode through the area and described what he had seen in his diary:

'... we had a glorious ride: first to the parsonage, then over that low range covered with scattered trees like a park, which lies between Mount Ainslie and the Bald Hill. We had a most lovely view on the way back as we came over this range. Just at the foot of it was a pond (or waterhole as they call it here) surrounded with willows, and the cattle grazing on fresh grass. On the right was the pretty church, with the ivy growing over it, and the new parsonage not far off. In front the plain rolled away right up to the foot of the black forests with which all the hills are covered. Here and there, on the plain, one caught sight of a rustic cottage with its bark roof and rough looking sheds attached...'

In a book about Blundells Cottage, Beth Knowles writes about the area:

'Life for the lively Blundell children was not all work; Jack (as John was called) remembered the koalas that frolicked in the nearby gum trees. The Molonglo River at Church Crossing, when it wasn't in flood or suffering drought, was an idyllic playground. Generations of Canberra young (with dire warnings from parents about drowning and snakes ringing in their ears) created and enjoyed make-believe games of boats and water engineers at this spot. It had all the right ingredients: a rocky knoll for bushranger watching, willow-covered pools, a bank for sliding, big smooth rocks and little rocks for adjusting the flow of water. For background music add the resonant song of magpies ... the echoing call of the currawongs, the laugh of the kookaburras and the caws of ravens ...'

*Knowles, B. 1990. The Cottage in the Parliamentary Triangle. Canberra and District Historical Society*

Read one, or both, of the descriptions to the class and then ask them to draw or paint the Limestone Plains as they imagine it looked in the past. Describe the paddocks, animals, crops and dusty roads of a rural landscape to assist the students in this activity.

Some of the photo gallery images can also be used to compare how the landscape around the cottage has changed.

When the Ginns and Blundells lived in the cottage, there was no Lake Burley Griffin. The Molonglo River ran through the area. Ask the students why the Molonglo River would have been important to the cottage families. Explain that there was no running water – for drinking, cooking, washing, animals. The river used to flood often and, when it did, it would ruin crops and haystacks and sometimes drown animals and humans.

[Photo Gallery Links](#) – [Canberra 1910 \(Duntroon Estate\)](#), [Blundells Cottage and surrounding area 1964](#)

## More Tales about the Duntroon Estate...

Tales from  
Canberra's Past  
Activity Sheet 2

### A Lost Bullock

This story is based on a tale told to Nobby Blundell by his Uncle Jack, George Blundell's son.

'George and a neighbour rode out searching for a bullock named Sailor. Sailor was a bit of a rogue and at times, inclined to wander.

George and his friend called at a property near the Uriarra crossing, where George had recently pulled down some timber with his bullock team, including Sailor. While riding across the farm they noticed an area where some logs had been recently burnt, and in the ashes were some remains of a bullock. Sailor had a distinctive damaged horn, and the burnt head resembled Sailor's, but was burnt too much for proof.

George and his friend called at the homestead where they were well known. They were invited to rest and water their horses, and were also invited to stay for lunch. At lunch they were served roast beef and potatoes. During lunch they explained that they were searching for the missing bullock, Sailor.

On returning home, Flora asked if they had found any sign of the lost bullock. George replied that they could not be sure, but he believed that they enjoyed part of him for lunch!!'

*From: Moments in History, A Nations Pioneer Heritage. HM ('Nobby') Blundell*

### Mary McTavish Story

'In 1865, a man named McTavish was employed at Duntroon. He was a widower with a daughter named Mary, aged about fifteen. He treated this girl in a cruel manner, and about three years before our (Shumack's) arrival he gave her a severe beating and she disappeared. Two months later, she was located living with a group of aboriginal people at Uriarra, and returned to her father. The aboriginal people treated her kindly, and several years later she told her story to Jemima Winter, who told it to me when she became my mother-in-law. Following Mary's return to her father, he gave her another severe beating and she again disappeared. Police efforts to trace the runaway were unsuccessful. One day a youth called on Thomas Southwell at Parkwood and obtained work as a general hand. He proved to be a superior type of lad, and was very good with horses and on one occasion accompanied Southwell on a trip to Sydney with a load of produce. He was about two years with Southwell and then gave notice that he was leaving to take up a better paid position as a horse breaker on a station south of Queanbeyan, and in due time commenced work there. One day Tommy, as the lad was called, was injured when a horse fell and when the doctor arrived, Tommy's true sex was discovered - he was the missing Mary McTavish. Southwell was sceptical when a trooper told him the story, so he visited the injured person and found she was identical to the boy Tommy. I last heard of her in 1869 when she married the son of the station owner.' (Pages 13-14)

*Shumack, Samuel. 1967. Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers. Canberra, Australian National University Press.*

## Travel Stories

The extracts below give a good picture of the difficulties of transport in the late 1800s.

Read one or both of these stories to the students, then ask them to write their own short story about an interesting event that happened to them when travelling to or from school...

'Miss Sophie Campbell was a lovely young woman aged twenty-eight years and a splended equestrienne, well liked by all the staff at Duntroon. One morning in 1885 word came out that she had had a stroke. Mrs Campbell sent word for my father to take one of the thoroughbred horses from the stables and ride to Yass for a doctor, the nearest medical assistance.

My father rode the horse as far as McAulliffe's place at Murrumbateman, changed horses and rode on to Yass where he informed the doctor of the problem, helped him with his buggy and horses and rode on ahead to McAulliffe's where he remounted the rested horse and continued on to Duntroon. After the doctor arrived, my father and several of the men were sent to the Molonglo River to bottle leeches which were applied to Miss Campbell but without avail. She passed away a couple of days later.'

'Ada used to walk to school on her own from Duntroon to St John's Church daily. One hot morning during summer she was dancing along the road with her shilling school money tied in the corner of her handkerchief swinging it around and on the small bridge over the creek at Blamey Crescent she saw a large black snake sunning itself on the path. The hankie and shilling went flying and she detoured and arrived home that afternoon from school to tell my parents the story. Father went over to the area to find her hankie and shilling but there was not a sign of either. We always joked over this event and said the snake swallowed both hankie and shilling.'



\* Curley, Sylvia. 1998. *A Long Journey*, Canberra, ACT Government.