

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

DEPT. OF THE SENATE
No. 2014
Presented OCT 1949
<i>John Edwards</i>
CLERK OF THE SENATE

R E P O R T

relating to the

proposed erection of the

N A T I O N A L   L I B R A R Y

AND

R O O S E V E L T   M E M O R I A L,

C A N B E R R A.

A U S T R A L I A N   C A P I T A L   T E R R I T O R Y.

For Senator O'Sullivan,

I bring up the Report of the  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,  
relating to the following work :-

Proposed erection of the National Library and  
Roosevelt Memorial, Canberra, Australian  
Capital Territory -

and I move that the Report be printed.

20th October, 1949.

*Passed*

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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.  
ERECTION OF NATIONAL LIBRARY AND ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL,  
C A N B E R R A, A.C.T.

R E P O R T.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and Report the question of the erection of the National Library and Roosevelt Memorial, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, has the honour to report as follows :-

HISTORICAL.

1. During the first session of the Commonwealth Parliament a Library Committee was appointed consisting of seven Senators and seven Members of the House of Representatives; its duties included the establishment of a Library to cater for the needs of Members of Parliament.
2. This Committee, as early as 1903, indicated in a Report that in addition to gathering a collection of books for the Library of Parliament it had in mind the probability of the establishment in the National Capital of a Federal Public Library of which the Parliamentary Library would be only one section.
3. In a Report made in 1907, it announced the ideal of establishing in the Federal Capital a great Public Library on the lines of the world famous Library of Congress at Washington - a library worthy of the Australian Nation, the home of literature, not of a State or a period, but of the world and of all time. It was hoped to establish a centre to which might gravitate as years pass, manuscripts, documents and records of all kinds, and particularly relating to the discovery, colonisation, history, and development of Australia and adjacent regions, to which public funds and private benefactors might contribute.

4. While the Commonwealth Parliament functioned in Melbourne a number of books was accumulated with this object in view and it was intended when the Parliament was transferred to Canberra to establish, apart from Parliament, a building to accommodate the collection for the National Library.

5. In 1925, the Public Works Committee recommended to Parliament that the building now known as West Block should be erected in time for the transfer of Parliament to Canberra. It further recommended that the building should be known as the National Library, but be shared with a number of other Government Departments. Accordingly the accommodation allotted to the Library in the Parliament building designed for Canberra in 1925, was limited to a book capacity of 100,000 which was considered sufficient for the immediate servicing of the Parliament.

6. The Library surrendered the accommodation provided in West Block in order that the Statistician's Branch might be brought to Canberra during the financial depression of 1929/32.

7. In 1934 a commencement was made with the erection of a National Library building fronting King's Avenue. It was to be built in sections and the first section was designed to form a book stack in the complete building, but adapted on the ground floor to provide a temporary reading room for the public.

8. In 1938, the Joint Library Committee made special representations to the Government for large extensions to the National Library building, and these were receiving sympathetic consideration when the war broke out.

9. Following upon the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, it was decided to erect a memorial to him, and a sub-committee of Cabinet was appointed to consider the form this memorial should take. It was eventually decided that, when the National Library was being erected there should be set aside a special wing in which would be established The Franklin Roosevelt Library of American Literature as a memorial to President Roosevelt and as a permanent contribution to Australian-American understanding, and a

comprehensive record of the rise and development of American civilisation.

10. Encouraging co-operation has been forthcoming from the Department of State at Washington and from American Institutions such as the Library of Congress and a substantial gift of 500 important American books has been received from the Rockefeller Foundation.

#### PROPOSAL.

11. The proposal submitted to this Committee aims at the erection of a building which, in addition to being a repository for the numerous volumes forming the National collection, will also provide space for the varied activities now carried out, or later to be entrusted to the Library Authorities.

12. It is intended that the building shall be so designed as to incorporate the existing National Library block into the structure, which block could be utilised as the Roosevelt Memorial Wing.

#### STRUCTURE.

13. The building is designed as a steel-framed structure consisting of a Basement and three Main Floors supplemented with Mezzanine levels between Ground and First and between First and Second Floors. It will have reinforced concrete floors and beams to all excepting the two Mezzanine Floors which will have a special type of construction to permit of flexibility in space allocation.

14. The external walls will be faced with cast stone. The variety of cast stone that is generally favoured is a crushed grey granite with 60 per cent white cement and 40 per cent ordinary cement. The stone is cast with a dove tail extending from the top to the bottom; this, when built, is keyed to the concrete backing and forms an integral part of the wall.

15. The internal walls and floors will be treated with materials suitable to the various areas, and particular attention will be given to acoustic requirements.

16. Windows throughout will be framed with non-ferrous metal sections; the flat roof will be covered with a bituminous

roofing material insulated below and protected above by a water proof cement tile surface.

17. Partitions will be constructed of demountable materials such as terra cotta lumber or pre-fabricated units of either metal or timber. Joinery will be carried out in Australian timbers.

18. The usable floor areas excluding walls, corridors, stairs, lifts, ducts, toilets and rooms for mechanical engineering services, etc. is set out as -

Library ...	208,750	Square Feet.
Film Unit ...	<u>31,500</u>	" "
	<u>240,250</u>	" "

ESTIMATED COST.

19. The estimated cost of the building and services due to changing circumstances in the building industry, will be subject to variation. As at July, 1949, the estimated cost for this proposal was £1,702,000, the details of which are as follows :-

	£	£	£
Building			1,100,173
Engineering Services -			
(1) Air-conditioning :			
Library	210,000		
Film Unit	88,000		
Roosevelt Memorial	11,500		
Film Store (20' x 20')	<u>900</u>	308,400	
(2) Mechanical Ventilation :			
Kitchen and Lavatories,		4,800	
Cleaning, Unpacking, etc.			
(3) Hot Water Supply :			
Kitchen and Lavatories.		3,900	
(4) Kitchen and Cafeteria :			
Equipment.		6,500	
(5) Lifts :			
Staff - Goods.	8,300		
Stack	4,200		
Stack	4,200		
Stack	4,700		
Staff - Goods.	7,100		
Passenger	8,300		
Staff - Goods	3,600		
Book	1,800		
Film	<u>1,300</u>	43,500	367,100
External Paving and Car Park	...		5,000
Steel Book Stacks	...		<u>75,000</u>
			1,547,273
10 per cent contingency provision	...		<u>154,727</u>
Total	...		<u>£1,702,000.</u>

TIME FOR COMPLETION.

20. The time that would be taken to complete the building is a matter of conjecture. Before building operations could be commenced working drawings would have to be prepared and these, it was stated, might take eighteen months to complete. It is quite possible that two years might elapse before tenders could be called. The time taken to construct the building is also a matter of conjecture and would depend upon the availability of materials. Officials of the Department of Works and Housing stated that if ready to proceed with the building in two years' time it would take up to five years to complete the structure.

SITE.

21. The site, bounded by Kings' Avenue, Broughton Street and Macquarie Street, has an area of seven acres, and is claimed to be an ideal site for the purpose of the National Library. It is represented that the park land environment and surroundings will permit the harmonious and yet individual architectural character of the building to be viewed to advantage from all angles.

22. The area has a slight even fall of about twelve feet from Broughton Street to King's Avenue, a distance of 415 feet; the portion to be occupied by the Main Library building has a maximum fall of six feet.

23. The ground at present is roughly grassed and without formal planting excepting in the vicinity of the existing building. It is proposed to landscape the whole area using a formal treatment as a setting to all elevations. A feature of the Broughton Street elevation in the plans submitted would be the development of a covered way linking the Library with the Film Unit into a formal pergola treatment with access through into the garden court. A fountain and small reflecting pool are designed to be placed on the main axis of the Library building and a second pool to enhance the quiet seclusion of the garden court.

COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

24. The Committee studied the plans submitted, viewed the site, and inspected the Library space occupied in Parliament House and in the existing building now known as the National Library and which it is suggested to incorporate in the new building as the Roosevelt Memorial. A visit was also paid to the Institute of Anatomy and the Old Canberra Hospital in which library material is stored as a temporary measure.

25. Evidence was taken from the Parliamentary Librarian, the Librarian of the New South Wales Public Library, and the Librarian of the Melbourne University Library; from the Chairman of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee; and from Parliamentary and Departmental Officials and University Authorities, and an endeavour was made to obtain a clear picture of existing Library conditions, the immediate necessity for more accommodation, and to visualise the ideal aimed at for the building of the National Library.

Existing Accommodation.

26. Even a cursory examination is sufficient to show the over-crowded conditions of the space available for Library purposes in Parliament House where a quantity of material is so stored that it is practically unusable, and where verandahs are cluttered with cases awaiting packing or unpacking. Moreover, in the Institute of Anatomy, and in the Old Hospital Building, books and papers are piled on the floors under conditions inimical to their proper supervision or preservation.

27. It was stated in evidence that a large amount of storage space originally allocated for the use of the Senate and of the House of Representatives has been occupied by the Library as a temporary measure, but that with the increased membership of Parliament, and the accumulation of material, that space is now required for its original purpose, and it is asked that it be vacated by the Library by 30th June, 1960.

28. Moreover, there is accommodated in Parliament House a number of Library officials who are really officials of the National Library who should be accommodated in that building. That, at the present time, is impracticable because those officials in the National Library block are very much overcrowded and are working under conditions that should not exist in a Government office.

#### Temporary Relief.

29. As indicated above, it is estimated that the building as planned could not be ready for occupation under about seven years; even a section of the building might take three or four years. But the necessity for the provision of Library accommodation is desperate and, unless some relief is forthcoming immediately the efficiency of the service may be expected to collapse.

The Committee therefore recommends that earnest endeavour be made as early as possible to provide at least suitable storage space for Library requirements and so relieve the congestion in Parliament House which is seriously affecting the operations of the Library as well as the other Departments of Parliament.

#### Canberra's Building Programme.

30. During the course of his evidence the Director of Works in the Australian Capital Territory gave information as to the stupendous building programme approved for Canberra, and pointed out the impracticability under existing conditions of executing quickly a project of this magnitude unless special steps be taken by the Government to this end.

31. The main features of the present situation are that the housing position in Canberra is critical (2,384 applications are registered with the Department of the Interior); educational facilities are inadequate; the provision of suitable accommodation and facilities for community activities and recreation is in arrears; and no major projects to provide shopping facilities are under consideration or likely in the future.

32. The housing and development programme approved by Cabinet in 1947 established the principle of a five to seven years long range constructional programme for Canberra envisaging the construction of 3,500 houses together with incidental engineering work, essential accommodation for housing public Departments and community provisions required to meet the needs of the increasing population. The expenditure proposed was £2,000,000 per annum; i.e. £1,000,000 for housing and £1,000,000 for collateral development works including incidental engineering services.

33. The estimated cost in requisitions for building carried forward from 1948-49 is £4,950,000 to which must be added the anticipated requirements of £2,900,000 (not including any provision for a National Library Building) in 1949, making a total demand for the current financial year of £7,850,000. During 1950-51 the total carried forward together with new demands for that year is expected to exceed £8,333,000.

34. These figures relate to new buildings only. As a corollary there is also the parallel programme of engineering works to provide water supply, sewerage, electricity supply, roads and drainage to the areas of the City being developed, together with the maintenance and operation of these and existing services, and the maintenance of Government buildings.

35. Obviously there is need for the acceptance of the fact that notwithstanding a considerable expansion of the Department of Works and Housing it is impossible adequately to meet all the requirements of building in the Australian Capital Territory, and revision of the programme is in consequence desirable. The situation in relation to essential living conditions in Canberra is unsatisfactory and demands remedial action.

36. With particular regard to the project under investigation by the Committee it is difficult to see how a major work of this kind can be added now to the Canberra programme with any possibility of completion within a reasonable period even if given high priority.

Future Building.

37. The plans of the National Library submitted to the Committee indicate a conception of the ideal accommodation which an institution of this magnitude and importance may hope to attain in the future. All witnesses examined were strongly in favour of the erection of an imposing National Library, and appreciative of the benefits to Parliament, to the National University, Government Departments, research officers, students and the public generally that might be expected to result from its establishment. The consensus of opinion expressed in evidence, however, was to the effect that it would not be advisable to erect the building envisaged at the present time.

38. The most consistent criticism of the plan was that for present requirements it was over generous and the Parliamentary Librarian himself stated that, for a period of years a substantial area in the building would not be used for Library purposes, but could be made available for the accommodation of other Government Departments, although, he said, this is not normal Library practice.

39. The Parliamentary Librarian stated that the present stock in the Library approximates 300,000 volumes which number had risen from about 60,000 in 1927 - an average of slightly over 10,000 a year. It is expected that an intake of 25,000 a year may be reached by 1950 and thereafter would gradually rise. Taking an average of 25,000 a year it would take 28 years to reach a million volumes, and 68 years to reach the 2,000,000 which, it is stated, the complete building could accommodate. That is four times the number of volumes accumulated in the Public Library of New South Wales in the course of more than a century.

40. This building has been designed to cater for an indefinite future, but it is possible that if proceeded with, within five or ten years of its erection ideas may have changed. Evidence was given that recently in the United States of America a group of University Librarians after an extensive survey of Library design, expressed the opinion that books and printed matter might be a diminishing medium for the preservation

of thought in the future, and that the micro-film process might obviate the necessity of making provision for a large number of books, and storage space might therefore be easily reduced. As an example of the reduction it has been quoted that the Encyclopaedia Britannica could be reduced to the size of a match box and the cost of reproduction thus reduced to a few shillings. If the micro-filming of books developed it would reduce the area required for book stacks. The housing of films could be arranged in a cabinet fitting in an ordinary room and book stack areas would thus only be necessary for certain types of literature.

41. It is urged that the greatest caution be exercised in embarking upon the erection of such an enormous and expensive building without due regard to future developments. The Committee feels that, on the grounds of economy, and to provide against future changes in Library policy and practice, a plan should be evolved so that, instead of aiming at the erection of this building in one unit a section could be built to cater for needs for say, ten or fifteen years, and leave adequate room for extension later.

Architectural Aspect.

42. The plans were submitted for the consideration of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee, and evidence obtained from the Chairman of that Committee respecting the building from the aesthetic point of view. Criticism was offered that the plan had not made adequate provision to ensure that the building would be a fine structure in appearance when viewed from every possible angle. The building will be on what is practically an island site, and the Planning Committee considered that a great deal more study would have to be given to the plan and revisions made to it to make it acceptable from the architectural point of view.

43. It was also suggested that, with a view to future expansion, the location of the building on the site should be very carefully considered, as the Planning Committee was of opinion that, owing to the peculiar shape of the site the building would come too close to the building alignment.

Theatrette.

44. The plan provides for the inclusion of a theatrette to seat 500 persons, and a lecture room to seat 56, together with all necessary space and equipment to provide cultural opportunities for residents of the Australian Capital Territory through documentary film showings, play readings, sound recordings, and presentation of small musical works as well as the holding of conferences, etc.

45. It is recommended that the theatrette is a part of the planned building that might not be immediately required and the construction of which could be postponed. Desirable as this film theatrette might be in the future, there are existing means of meeting these needs at least in part, and others are receiving consideration by another Government agency.

Film Unit.

46. As an adjunct to the theatrette, a complete film unit is required to enable the processing, inspection, and storage of 16mm, and 35mm. film; to provide a film library service to borrowers; equipment for sound recordings, auditions, micro-filming of records, and to provide for an administrative section. As stated earlier the space proposed for the film unit is 31,500 square feet.

47. The facilities possessed by other Commonwealth Departments for photographic and film processing could probably meet the needs of the Library satisfactorily for the time being; alternatively, provision for essential work of this kind might be embodied in the Library block itself.

It is therefore recommended that provision for a separate film unit be eliminated.

Cafeteria.

48. The permanent staff population of the proposed building probably would not exceed 300 persons, and the provision of somewhat lavish and costly food services for such a number, and for occasional service to the public seems hardly to be warranted.

The service cannot be economical and will undoubtedly show a substantial loss in operation. In any event the cafeteria included in the nearby Administrative Building, and another to be erected at the Barton Offices, also nearby, will provide sufficient for all requirements.

It is therefore recommended that a cafeteria be not provided.

Request for Fresh Design.

49. In view of the tremendous building programme already approved for the Australian Capital Territory, and the serious housing situation in Canberra, the Committee realised the futility of advocating the commencement of a building, the completion of which could not be foreseen. Moreover, it was pointed out, that as designed, the building did not lend itself to construction in sections. After reviewing the evidence received from the National Capital Planning and Development Committee and others and appreciating the facts stressed that the needs of Library accommodation are changing so rapidly in character that it is difficult to forecast what will be required very far ahead, the Committee decided to request the Architect to submit for consideration a modified plan. He was asked to eliminate the theatrette, film unit and cafeteria, and confine the accommodation to be provided to what is considered immediately essential for Library requirements.

New Proposal.

50. At short notice the Principal Architect produced before the Committee fresh plans and a scale model showing how the building could be erected in three stages as follows :-

Stage 1, the Main Library Building incorporating the Roosevelt Memorial;

Stage 2, the Film Unit including the Art Gallery and Theatrette;

Stage 3, ultimate additions to the Main Library Building and the erection of an independent Archives Building.

51. In Stage 1 the nett usable floor space would be reduced to 165,000 square feet and the estimated cost to £1,080,200.

52. An examination of the revised plan showed that the First Stage would provide, in addition to the Library accommodation for immediate needs, an area in the Basement of 10,626 square feet for Archives bulk storage and approximately 22,000 square feet on the Second Floor for Archives stack. This material it is intended later to accommodate in a separate Archives building. Provision was also included in the Third Floor for a Theatre to seat 220 persons, a Film Unit of approximately 8,000 square feet and an Art Gallery of 3,864 square feet - all of which would be subsequently accommodated in the Second Stage.

Criticism by the National Capital Planning and Development Committee.

53. The plans and scale model were made available to the National Capital Planning and Development Committee for examination, and subsequently the Chairman of that Committee gave in evidence the opinion of the Committee on the project. The Planning Committee reiterated its former criticism that the building had not been designed to its satisfaction to present a dignified appearance and harmonious architectural picture from all angles as an island site demanded; and added that something could be done to make the building more monumental as a whole. It offered the opinion that the present disjointed appearance would be accentuated if any additions to the main structure were made later as suggested, or a separate Archives building were introduced into the area in the Third Stage. It was suggested that in view of this latter proposal a re-arrangement might be made to combine the future Archives accommodation in the main structure and that the Theatre, then proposed to hold 500 people, could be raised to a higher level.

54. It was pointed out that the existence of the present Library building on the site, which it is proposed to incorporate in the final project as the Roosevelt Memorial Library, but which need not necessarily serve that purpose, is controlling the design more than it should. If this building, which cost only £13,000 or £14,000, did not exist, a more satisfactory Library building could be planned, and it was suggested that if it were demolished it would allow of a much more fluid and flexible arrangement.

55. Criticism was also directed to the main entrance which, for such a structure, it was thought, should have added dignity.

56. The Planning Committee deprecated very earnestly any suggestion that the first section only should be completed at this stage, that the Theatre and Archives Section should be eliminated, and that subsequently the second part should be constructed in conformity with the first part. It was stressed that the Planning Committee would not approve under any consideration of any part of the building being proceeded with until revised sketches and plans for the whole of the structure had been put before and endorsed by both the Planning Committee and the Public Works Committee.

#### Conclusion.

57. In regard to the suggestion thrown out that it would facilitate the planning of the National Library and even prove economical if the small building now on the site were demolished, there was some difference of opinion amongst Members of the Committee. After discussion, Senator O'Sullivan moved :-

That to avoid the necessity of demolishing the existing building on the site consideration be given to the availability of an alternative site.

Seconded by Mr. Howse.

The Committee divided on the motion -

Ayes (4)

Noes (3)

Senator O'Sullivan  
Mr. Conelan  
Mr. Howse  
Mr. McLeod

Senator Lamp  
Senator Neah  
Mr. Rankin

and so it was resolved in the affirmative.

58. Although there is an urgent necessity for the erection of a National Library building in Canberra, and although it is realised that some time would be occupied in preparing fresh detailed drawings, the Committee feels that a building of this magnitude and importance should, when erected, be beyond criticism. It wishes to emphasise the fact that the greatest caution should be exercised in embarking upon a project of this importance, and in planning for a monumental building worthy of the Australian Nation. The slight delay which would occur in achieving a result of which Australia could be proud would therefore be amply justified.

After considering all aspects of the matter, therefore, the Committee recommends :-

That the architects be requested to prepare, in association with the National Capital Planning and Development Committee, fresh alternative plans for this or an alternative site if selected, and that when agreement shall have been reached on the plans, the project be remitted to the Public Works Committee at the earliest possible date for further investigation and report.

59. It is further recommended that in the case of any future buildings proposed for Canberra the endorsement of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee should be obtained before the project is submitted to this Committee for investigation and report.

#### COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS.

60. Briefly summarised, the recommendations of the Committee are as follows :-

- (1) That an earnest endeavour be made, as early as possible, to provide at least suitable storage space for Library requirements, and so relieve the congestion in Parliament House which is seriously affecting the operations of the Library as well as the other Departments of Parliament.

Paragraph  
in Report.

- (2) That in view of the stupendous building programme already approved for the Australian Capital Territory, the Committee sees no probability of the building, as submitted, being completed within a reasonable time. 36
- (3) That on the grounds of economy, and to provide against future changes in Library policy and practice, a plan should be evolved so that instead of aiming at the erection of a building in one unit, a section could be built to cater for needs for the next ten to fifteen years, and leave adequate room for extension later. 41
- (4) That in designing the new building special attention be paid to the fact that it is to be on an island site, and ensure that the structure have an attractive elevation from all angles. 42
- (5) That consideration be given to the siting of the building on the area to admit of extensions if and when necessary. 43
- (6) That provision of the Theatrette be postponed for the present. 45
- (7) That provision for a separate Film Unit be eliminated. 47
- (8) That a Cafeteria be not provided. 48
- (9) That the Department of Works and Housing be requested to furnish fresh plans eliminating the Theatrette, Film Unit and Cafeteria, and confining accommodation to be provided to what is immediately essential for Library requirements. 49
- (10) That to avoid the necessity of demolishing the existing building on the site, consideration be given to the availability of an alternative site. 57
- (11) That the Architects be requested to prepare in association with the National Capital Planning and Development Committee, fresh alternative plans for this or an alternative site, if selected, and that when agreement shall have been reached on the plans, the project be remitted to the Public Works Committee at the earliest possible date for further investigation and report. 58

Paragraph  
in Report.

- (12) That in the case of any future buildings proposed for Canberra the agreement of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee be obtained before the project is submitted to this Committee for investigation and report. 59.

CHARLES A. LAMP  
CHAIRMAN.

The Office of the  
Parliamentary Standing Committee  
on Public Works,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA.

19th October, 1949.