

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Formation

The genesis of the National Trust in Victoria was community outrage at increasing heritage loss.

Starting in 1934

Since 1934, the Victorian public had been concerned about the destruction and general security of significant community heritage assets. On 31 May that year, The Argus newspaper reported on the removal of parkland and permanent reservations from community use and quoted the report of the Town Planning Association: "Victoria needs a national trust, such as the National Trust of England for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, on which nature-loving bodies and local communities would combine."

Always with a focus on environmental and cultural heritage, the Trust grew from this call, but it took some time...

The Town and Country Planning Association Steps In

It wasn't until 1954 that the Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria took the bit between the teeth and started active development of such a trust. They established a sub-committee for the Preservation of Historic Buildings of S.P. Calder, Donald Ward and Robin Boyd, which then wrote to other Trusts in Australia and the first Trust in England, seeking information on how they had been formed. The Committee then recommended to the Association that "the launching of a National Trust could have a greater appeal to interested bodies and the public, if an historic property of some significance could be quoted as a possible acquisition by an established Trust for permanent preservation."

In late 1954 the Committee started to discuss Como as such a property however they weren't quite sure how to approach the owners, Miss Armytage and Mrs Fitzpatrick. Como was known to the Committee through Robin Boyd, whose father Penleigh and grandfather Arthur Merric Boyd had taught the young Armytage sisters to paint. Now aging and with no children of their own, the sisters must have been concerned about the rising trend to demolish grand homes such as theirs. By Christmas Daryl Lindsay, then Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, had been approached by the Committee to suggest the idea to the Armytages. Lindsay's conversations with the sisters continued throughout 1955 until, in August, Daryl and his wife Joan Lindsay, Robin Boyd and other members of the Committee and Association were "received at Como".

Robin Boyd's Call to Arms

Activated by the potential lobbying acquisition, Robin Boyd published an article on 4 October 1955 in leading Melbourne newspaper the Herald, announcing that, on 10 October, a meeting would be held to "discuss the formation of a society or trust for the preservation of historical and meritorious buildings in Victoria." This meeting was to become our formation meeting.

Called by the President of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects (RVIA) Harry Winbush, the meeting was attended by a broad range of significant organisation and individuals, including inter alia the RVIA, Municipal Association of Victoria, Australian Planning Institute, Victorian Artists' Society, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Contemporary Arts Society of Australia

(represented by John Reid), National Museum of Victoria, Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria.

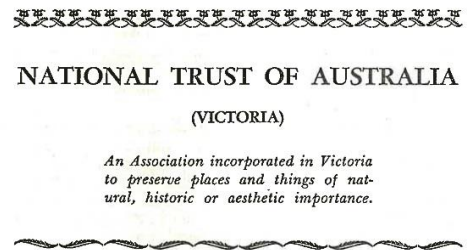
The meeting unanimously supported the establishment of a society “for the purpose of preserving for the people of Victoria buildings, natural features, monuments and records of significance to the community” and elected a provisional councils.

Formal Incorporation

On 23 May 1956 the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and we formally began our role as community activists, custodians and educators. This vision for the organisation as one for preserving landscape and cultural heritage was

concisely outlined by Robin Boyd in his address at our first AGM on 9 September 1957. He encouraged the Trust to change societal understandings of beauty in order to preserve our landscape, to move away from an English antecedent of attractiveness towards an uniquely Australia one; an “untouched, undisciplined, uneuropean dignity, a sort of Australian dignity even after 180 years we have not yet learned to appreciate.” And from here the Trust accepted the vision and expanded it to include a shared heritage embracing the 40,000 years of traditional ownership by Koori peoples of the place now known as Victoria.

References: Minutes of Meetings of the Town and Country Planning Association and their Sub-Committee for the Preservation of Historic Buildings 1954-55



L-R: 1954 meeting of the Town and Country Planning Association; Receiving the Keys to Como 1959; Memorandum of Incorporation