

## Canberra Museum and Galley purchase of the CS Daley desk and chair

Occasionally, items of historical value are raised from obscurity to their rightful place among our historical heritage assets. Recognition of CS Daley's desk and chair (circa 1926-27) is a typical example.

### The purchase

In October 2018, the National Trust (ACT) approached the Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) about its possible interest in purchasing CS Daley's office desk and chair. The desk's then home was the entry foyer to the Trust's 3<sup>rd</sup> floor office in the Griffin Centre where the desk was used to display Trust brochures and other publications, not the ideal location for such historic items of furniture. The Trust's imminent move to a new, smaller office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Griffin Centre prompted the approach, along with the belief that the desk and chair, so significant in the formative history of Canberra as the new national capital, really belonged in a museum where they could be easily displayed to the people of the ACT and Australia.

After an inspection by a CMAG conservator and an independent valuation, CMAG purchased the desk and chair in late October 2018 for \$5,000.



The C S Daley Queensland Maple Desk – circa 1926-27. [Photograph: John Tucker]

The partner's-style desk and chair were donated to the National Trust (ACT) in about 2001 by the family of Mr Thomas Talbot Colquhoun MBE (1904-81). Mr Colquhoun reported that both items were first used in the mid-1920s by Mr CS Daley, Secretary of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) and, from 1 January 1925, Secretary of the Federal Capital Commission (FCC). The desk and chair were subsequently used by Mr Colquhoun, for 16 years, after they were presented to him on his retirement in 1969 as Commonwealth Director of War Service Land Settlement. Mr Colquhoun recognised the historical significance of the items and recorded the desk's history in a hand-written note that was found in a drawer when it was received by the Trust. The desk and chair

were then used by the Executive Director of the National Trust (ACT) until 2004, in a previous, much larger office of the Trust.



The C S Daley Office Chair (c 1926-27), after conservation [Photograph: John Tucker]



Charles Studdy Daley (1887-1966)

[unknown photographer: National Library & ACT heritage Library, 00792, Canberra Times Collection]

### **Charles Studdy Daley**

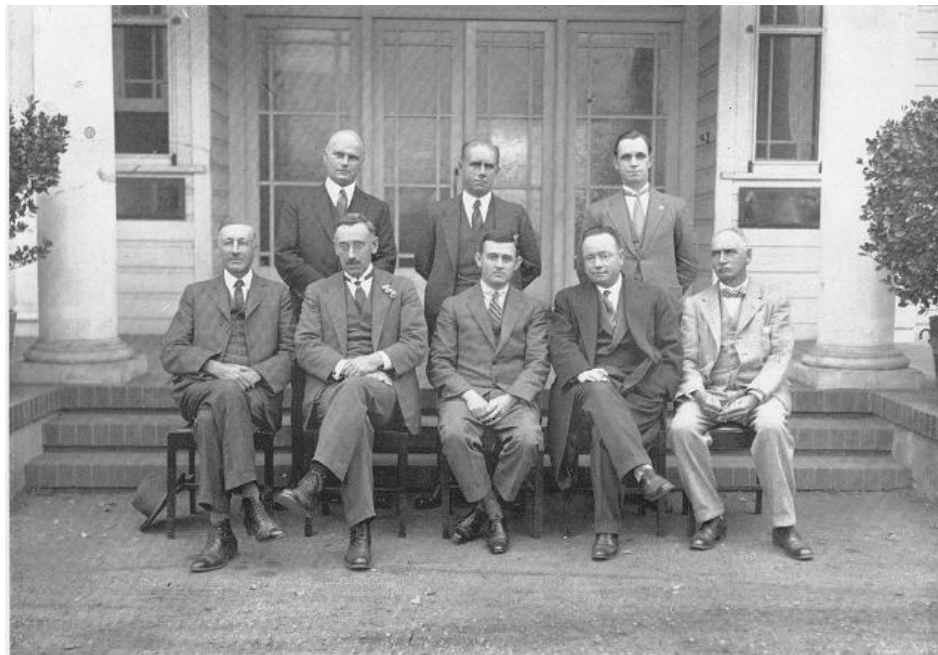
Charles Studdy Daley (1887-1966) was born in 1887 in Maldon, Victoria. He was an exceptional man who played a pivotal role in Canberra's early history and development. In 1905 he joined the Public Works Branch of the Department of Home Affairs of the Federal Government, located in Melbourne. He later studied at the University of Melbourne (BA, 1914; LLB, 1921). He also attended classes in accountancy, architecture and engineering at the Working Men's College.

His career was centred on the planning and development of the new capital in Canberra, including the conduct of the international competition for the design of the city in 1911-14. He remained a Public Servant and took up residence in Canberra in 1924. He remained Secretary of the FCC until its abolition in 1930. Thereafter, he became the Civic Administrator of Canberra in the Department of Home Affairs as well as becoming a member of the Capital Territory Advisory Council. He was awarded an OBE in 1927 and referred to this period as 'Canberra's golden age'.

Daley was a member of the Council of the Canberra University College and the Australian National University for 28 years and a founding member of the Canberra & District Historical Society in 1953. In 1963 he was made an honorary associate of the (now) Australian Institute of Architects (AIA).

He recorded his memoirs in a weekly series of articles, *As I Recall*, published in *The Canberra Times* between 1964 and 1966. These were also published in his very readable book, *As I Recall – Reminiscences of Early Canberra* (Mulini Press 1994), where his articles are grouped under headings such as "The Foundation of the Capital", "The Problematical King O'Malley", "Creating a City", "Landscapes and Gardens", "Some Memorable People" and "The Canberra Community".

He died in Canberra on 30 September 1966, aged 79 years.



*The first A.C.T. Advisory Council, 1930, outside the Federal Capital Commission's offices at Acton. Left to right (standing): H. E. Waterman (Secretary), P. A. Gourgaud, R. Rowe; (seated): T. M. Shakespeare, J. A. L. Cumpston, C. S. Daley (Chairman), P. E. Dean, F. K. Gell.*

[unknown photographer: National Archives of Australia]

### **Assessment and conservation**

The wood and brown leather-topped partner's pedestal desk and matching office chair of wood, with leather upholstery and a caned seat with a circular leather cushion, were probably made in the mid-1920s together with other furniture designed by JS Murdoch, FCC Principal Architect for the Provisional Parliament House, Canberra. The desk is made of Queensland maple and measures 1981mm wide x 915mm deep x 796mm high. It has 14 drawers, eight of them lockable, including a secret drawer. The desk used by Daley from at least c1927 is very similar to four desks in Old Parliament House (OPH) which includes the desk of former Prime Ministers but, in the opinion of one expert, is a finer example. Identical examples of the office chair can be found at OPH, which reportedly were intended for Ministers.

After the donation of the desk and chair, the Trust decided to have both items restored, where appropriate, and conserved. Mr Greg Peters, Director and Head Conservator, Patinations in Fyshwick, was approached and prepared a Conservation Report in 2002. The Report states that the desk and leather top were more or less in original condition. Minor repairs and conservation were undertaken, including refreshing the traditional French polishing and using traditional leather wax on the surface. The office chair had been reupholstered at some stage in vinyl, and this was removed and brown leather applied using traditional techniques and materials. The seat required re-caning. A round hollow cushion in leather was made after studying an identical chair in original condition. The plastic castors were removed and traditional brass and

porcelain castors were fitted. This process took more than 50 hours, at a cost of \$3,534.37 (including materials) to the Trust.

### **CS Daley Memorial Gardens**

Following Daley's death, the CS Daley Memorial Gardens were established in 1967, in the original Griffin Centre, in recognition of his public service and contribution to the people of Canberra and Australia. After demolition of the Griffin Centre and the Memorial Gardens to make way for a new building complex, the brass plaque attached to a large rock marking the gardens was moved to its present location in Glebe Park, not far from the 19<sup>th</sup> century style rotunda.



CS Daley Memorial Gardens 1967 plaque, relocated to Glebe Park. [Photograph: Archives ACT].

### **Conclusion**

The story of CS Daley and his desk highlights the possibility that there could be many more, yet unrecognised, historical items tucked away in the community, which will hopefully come to light and be added to our heritage assets.

### **John Tucker**

6 February 2019

#### **Sources:**

*'This Desk & Chair..'* (handwritten & typed one page note on the history of the items). TT Colquhoun (undated). NT (ACT).

*'As I Recall – Reminiscences of Early Canberra'* (Mulini Press 1994).

*Daley, Charles Studdy (1887-1966)*, by Peter Harrison. Australian Dictionary of Biography.

*Conservation Report to National Trust of Australia (Tax Invoice No 271)*, by Greg Peters. 26 February 2002. NT (ACT).