

June 2024

National Trust of Australia

Northern Territory



E Newsletter

Well the dry season and winter have finally arrived across our beautiful Territory and with it a plethora of activities.

All the more reason to lend a hand at your local branch, enjoy the company of friends, share the load and plenty of good times.



O'Keeffe House in Katherine

Did you know:

O'Keeffe House was intended as a recreation hut, built by the army in World War II, but became the Officer's mess. It was a simple structure with the walls and ceilings made from bark, cypress pine and flywire and the roof from corrugated iron. The floor was local aggregate and concrete. When the war ended the shortage of housing was immense and most people in Katherine scraped together homes from whatever materials were left behind by the army. It is one of the few structures from the war to have survived in the Katherine region.

In 1963, Johnno and Olive O'Keeffe purchased what would become known as O'Keeffe House. Johnno turned out to be an excellent handyman, making furniture from all sorts of scrap and territory timbers. Olive loved her garden, so between them they made their own little paradise between the trees on the banks of the Katherine River.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The end of the wet and start of the dry is always a busy time - fire breaks to be cleared, demolding of walls and ceilings, cleaning up and getting ready for the tourist season. In some areas, unfortunately the repairs to buildings are from vandalism with broken windows and doors.

The Barkly had a reasonable drenching this year from cyclonic influences, which is good for the country. However, most of the roads failed again with communities being isolated. The Borrooloola Old Police Station emerged unscathed apart from a coating of mold which was thicker than some lawns in town. A small number of dedicated members demolded the building over a four day period in April.

The headstone of James May, who died in 1876 near Yam Creek, has been in a shed in Darwin since 1972. It would appear that it was never placed on the grave. There are several versions or accounts of his death, and we will eventually interpret the event along with the headstone which has been returned to the Pine Creek Museum.

The Heritage Festivals in Darwin and Alice Springs have been well attended, in particular the talks in Darwin with Andrew Couch travelling from Adelaide to speak on the Overland Telegraph Line. Andrew has written two books, his last being on the OTL, "*Connecting the North*". Andrew and Prue are long time Territory residents recently retired to Adelaide. While here, Andrew took the opportunity to visit some of our other heritage sites. The pilgrimage to Arltunga gold mining precinct in Alice Springs has also become popular with local history buffs.

Tourism in Central Australia has provided funding for two voice pillars at Newcastle Waters. Jones Store has been nominated as one site with Peter Jones supplying stories from the time his family operated the Store in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Myilly Point Heritage Precinct is about to have some of our trees trimmed. Some are out of balance and becoming dangerous while others are rubbing against the houses and have potential to cause damage. This is scheduled for early July.

Pine Creek Repeater Station is to finally have the defective roof gable windows repaired. The other end was repaired some four years ago, and this should ensure the building is watertight for years to come.

One of our service providers was recently scammed. It is important to be continually vigilant in relation to finance matters in the current climate of increased scams via technology. This matter has affected the Trust, and we anticipate support from our bank Westpac on this matter.

Time to get out and about and enjoy the cooler dry season climate. There is a mountain of things to see and do. Safe travelling. Eddie Webber



DARWIN BRANCH UPDATE

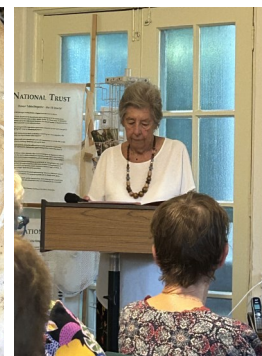
The Darwin Branch members have been extra busy during the month of May with the 2024 Darwin Heritage Festival.

Commencing with an Open Day at the Myilly Point Heritage Precinct, during which tours of the heritage houses and grounds were held every hour. The excitement ramped up as the Deckchair Cinema fundraiser came around soon afterwards on Sunday 5th May. This proved a very popular evening for locals as we were greatly supported. Almost 300 people attended and Salvatores Café provided yummy Italian dinners. Our National Trust Darwin Branch volunteers assisted in the serving of the meals and we raised a good amount of dollars.

Several Speaker's Nights were held during the Festival. On Friday 10 May, author Andrew Crouch engaged the audience at Burnett House with lively historical tales from his research into the Overland Telegraph Line, the focus of his recent book, *Connecting the North*.

A week later, Her Honor the Honourable Sally Thomas AC, a former Supreme Court Judge and first female Administrator of the Northern Territory, presented the Barbara James Memorial Lecture, an annual event for the Darwin Branch. Barbara James (1943-2003) played a pivotal role in uncovering and protecting the heritage of the Northern Territory. She is remembered with great admiration as she was one of the first people to recognise the significance of the Myilly Point Heritage Precinct to the city of Darwin, advocating for, and saving the houses from demolition and the site from further development in the 1970s and 1980s. Her Honor gave an entertaining talk incorporating Barbara James and herself, as a young lawyer and magistrate in Darwin. The audience responded positively to her recounting of past incidents in her extensive experiences in the Northern Territory.

Continued on page 4



The Festival had its share of disappointment too. Unfortunately, two days prior to the sold out Mother's Day High Tea, the caterer for the event became ill and was unable to proceed with the event. Such issues need to be managed as quickly as possible to keep public faith, so within a few hours patrons were advised personally of the cancellation and their ticket costs fully refunded. A sad end to a wonderfully planned event, but these things happen and we were very sorry for the need to cancel.

However, the Heritage Festival in Darwin closed on a high note with excellent attendance at History House on Saturday 18 May, where a range of books, published or supported by the Historical Society of the Northern Territory, were available for sale. Likewise, families enjoyed the Open Cockpit Day at the Darwin Aviation Museum the next day.

Following the Heritage Festival, our regular Devonshire Teas commence on Sunday 26 May in the grounds of Burnett House and will continue fortnightly until the end of October. Interspersed with these will be our monthly Speaker's Nights and the occasional Quiz night, which are a lot of fun.

On behalf of the Darwin Branch of the National Trust NT, I would like to thank each and every one of our members who attended and supported our events during the first half of this year. With excellent numbers in the audience or at the events, it certainly makes the hours of preparation undertaken by our committed volunteers very worth while.

I also wish to acknowledge the excellent media coverage of our events through the ABC Radio and the NT News with the well researched article by journalist George Yankovic. We look forward to engaging with you in our regular upcoming dry season events.

Helen Spiers - Chair Darwin Branch



REMEMBERING CYCLONE TRACY

The water in the kitchen was pink ... I saw Dad bleeding in the water

RAY Casey is probably alive today because his wife, Mavis, and daughter, Sue, wrapped themselves around his bleeding and unconscious body to give him warmth in the ruins of their home.

Sue was in Darwin on holiday when the cyclone hit.

She said: "We were sitting in the kitchen area and all of a sudden there was an incredible explosion. The windows just blew out."

"There was this great storm, we lost power, and Dad told us to move to the bedroom."

Petrified

"Things got worse. All the windows blew out. I was petrified about Dad because we hadn't seen him."

"I told Mum 'I've got to go and find Dad' and I crawled out on my hands and knees."

"There was this enormous flash of lightning and the water in the kitchen was pink! I saw Dad lying bleeding in the water."

"There was no movement at all. I couldn't



Garry Casey in the ruins of his home

rouse him. It's hard to believe I suppose but I dragged him back to the bedroom. Mum and I lay over him, his whole body was so cold."

"I was screaming for God to stop it because He was the only one who could."

"The house just kept rocking. The noise was so shocking ... I was petrified."

Mr Casey recalls: "I was suffering from hypothermia and very bad shock because of the loss of blood."

"At 5.30 am some neighbors came and took

me out to the hospital to be stitched up."

Mr Casey stayed on for six days to help with the evacuation of 30 000 people.

"Ella Stack (a former Darwin mayor) was my doctor," he said.

"She gave me a certificate and ordered me evacuated immediately. I just tore it up."

"I did most of the evacuation of civilians out of Darwin, then ran into Ella again."

"She said, 'You still here, well you won't be for long, I'm putting you under police guard'."

Mr Casey and his family were evacuated on New Year's Eve.

Sue's brother, Garry, now with the NT police, was driving home to Nakara when cyclone Tracy struck.

"I went to bed after 11.30 but things started to get worse," he said.

"I got up, put my combat jacket and my old army boots on, got my torch, and walked out to the kitchen to get a drink."

"I felt chilly. I looked up and the ceiling and the roof were gone."

"As I walked past the lounge room, the whole wall and everything just took off with me."

Mr Casey found himself in freefall along with his lounge chairs and two dogs, one his own, the other a neighbor's.

He said: "Somehow I got hold of the railing outside and held on to that. The two dogs and the chairs were flying through the air."

"I crawled back across the floor. Two of the bedrooms were still intact."

"My wife at the time was standing in the corridor screaming."

"They made it down stairs where the two dogs had miraculously made it back."

"There wasn't a mark

on them," Mr Casey said. "We stayed in the storeroom for the rest of the night."

"It collapsed in and the steel cupboard I was sitting against wrapped itself around me."

"I was crunched over with my chin on my knees ... it was terrifying."

"The only thing that kept my sanity was my torch because I had a light and my cigarettes and I could talk to the dog. I could hear Debbie screaming."

"I put my hand through a hole to let her know I was all right and she said she was going next door to get help."

"I don't know how long she was gone. She crawled back and the neighbors had said 'get stuffed, we're not moving'."

"Debbie then lifted the concrete blocks off the top of the cupboard, enough for me to get out."

Mr Casey had been given the keys to a neighbor's home to look after while they were on holidays.

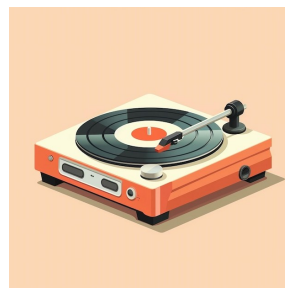
"That was one of the jokes of the cyclone. When they came back I gave them their keys. There was no home," Mr Casey said.

12—Northern Territory News

Who remembers this song that hit the charts in January 1975?

"**Santa Never Made It into Darwin**" is a charity single recorded by Bill and Boyd. It was written by the band's William Cate. Funds raised supported the Australian city of Darwin, Northern Territory, following the damage wrought by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, 1974. The song peaked at number 2 on the Australian Kent Music Report. At the 1975 Australian Record Awards it won Song of the Year. It also won APRA Song of the Year at the 1976 Country Music Awards of Australia.

[Santa Never Made it to Darwin Bill & Boyd \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



GULF BRANCH UPDATE

Through late February, March and early April, the Gulf Branch was isolated with not only the flood waters from Cyclone Lincoln and Cyclone Megan which came along cutting the Barkly Tablelands, Carpentaria and parts of the Stuart highway also isolating parts of Borroloola with both Rocky Creek and the McArthur River rising. The following low depression travelled through the Gulf, onto the Barkly and down through Queensland .

Once again, the “Old Borroloola Police Station” sat on the rise looking down at the flood water of Rocky Creek and the McArthur River surviving another cyclone season. The mould growth on her interior walls was extreme with nearly six weeks of steady rain the grounds were inundated with water, but after two days of solid work, by Gulf Branch members in April, with the sun shining and fans on full blast we were able to remove the worst of the



mould and grime from walls, windows, pictures and artifacts, wash curtains, dry out and clean out display cases and restock brochures in preparation for the year ahead. A special thanks to Ted, Patsy, Janet, Sharon and Eddie for all of your work.

Locals are still busy cleaning up gardens and clean their own homes while road crews are up and down the major roads, working on repairs as sections start to dry out. Still a massive task ahead with many major wash outs. Hopefully with more manpower local roads around Borroloola, will also be repaired as they are a challenge for both locals and tourists. The fishing fraternity are still coming in not to be deterred, by a little bit of mud and water. A trickle of tourists are starting to arrive and with the fish biting and the McArthur River looking serene and quiet again ,all are lured down to the banks.

Ted Firkin, our caretaker, has been kept busy with the constant rains helping the grass to grow even more rapidly than usual. The constant battle with the weeds has been a nightmare with spraying and hand pulling to get them back under control. Now lawns are tidy, fence lines clean and sprayed in preparation for the dry season.

Unfortunately, our first Outback Tours Group bookings for the season have been delayed. Hopefully, Highway Number 1 from Cairns via Burketown to Borroloola has sustained though a lot of wash outs. The first running grade will have hopefully been undertaken by then and will be passably. To date we have 20 Tours booked for the 2024 tourist season. Local members held their first meeting for the year in April, with planning underway for a Night of Yarns under the stars with Billy Tea and Damper on May 24, hopefully the first of many such evenings coordinated by Sharon.

Gulf Branch Members where excited to see the final draft of “Borroloola Shared Stories” – Book 3 ready for publication. This project is a combination of current and historical stories over the years and once funding for printing is secured we will see the fruits of our labours. We were very grateful for CBF funding for artwork and design and a kind donation from McArthur River Caravan Parko towards printing. We are planning a public launch and Open Day later in the dry season at Borroloola and in Darwin.

INTERESTING PAST FROM PINE CREEK

James May - Born 21 August 1851 and died 29 July 1876 (aged 24 years).

James May arrived in Darwin on Monday 19th April 1875 aboard the 530 ton "Claud Hamilton" from Port Adelaide. James was a teamster involved in hauling goods from Port Darwin to the goldfields at Pine Creek.

The Northern Territory Times and Gazette on the 16th of September reported his death. He had passed through the Shackle near Yam Creek and camped for the night some six miles from Granite Crossing. There were signs of his having had an evening meal and camped in his bed under the wagon. It is surmised that he died that evening or next morning. His body was found several days later by a passing traveller. A large dog had been feeding on the head and left side of the body presenting a sickening spectacle. The dog was destroyed, and May's body was taken to the Shackle for burial.

An inquest into the death was held in Palmerston in September. May had been involved in an accident days before his death, falling from a galloping horse and injuring his rib cage. He spoke to several persons about feeling pain in his ribs before starting off with his team. Several witnesses were called at the inquest and the jury returned a verdict, "That the deceased was found dead, but there was no evidence to show the cause of Death'. The supposition is that the poor fellow ruptured some blood vessels, as blood was found where his head had been lying before being dragged away by the dog. No signs of native tracks were observable, and the loading on the wagon was intact.

A public subscription was raised for the provision of a grave headstone. By the time the headstone had arrived from Adelaide, all those involved in the burying James had moved on and the actual location of the grave had been lost. The headstone was offloaded at the Shackle and lay there undisturbed until around 1972 when Telstra were laying underground communication cabling and unearthed the headstone. It was brought to Darwin and since that time had been stored in various locations until it was taken into protective custody by John Matthews, a long term Territory resident and surveyor with lands.

The headstone has now been returned to the Pine Creek Museum for safe keeping.



ROADMASTERS HOUSE UPDATE

A good crowd attended the recent interesting talk at Burnett House by Andrew Crouch on the Overland Telegraph Line (OTL). The talk was based upon his research that is the subject of a book titled “Connecting the North”. This thoroughly researched and well-presented work is based upon the diaries of some of the Overland Telegraph Expeditioners.

Roadmasters House Museum has a display of material on the OTL including instruments used by pioneering Territory surveyor Gilbert McMinn who was involved in constructing a section of the line and building the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. Before that, McMinn had been a member of the Goyder Survey Expedition that in 1869, surveyed the land that has evolved into the city of Darwin and the rural hinterland.

After his work on the OTL, McMinn held several positions in Territory government administration through the 1870s and 80s. These included OIC of the Lands & Survey Branch, Magistrate in the then wild frontier town of Borroloola, and acting for a period in the top job of Government Resident. Gilbert McMinn is commemorated in several Territory place names – McMinn Street in Darwin, McMinns Lagoon in the rural area and Mount McMinn near Urapunga on the Roper River

Pictured below are photos showing the surveying and drafting instruments from the Gilbert McMinn Collection on display in Roadmasters House. Museum attendant Ralf Koberstein is pictured holding McMinn’s binoculars while standing next to an Oppenheimer telegraph pole of the type used on the OTL. Ralf has recently retired after serving 44 years as a cartographer with various NT Government Departments and has joined Trevor Menzies and Greg Brand as Roadmasters House attendants.

Roadmasters House Museum is open from 10.00am to 1.00pm Tuesday to Friday.

Ralf with McMinn’s binoculars



The Gilbert McMinn Collection

TRUST HOUSES CLOSING AND OPENING DATES

Alice Springs (McDouall Stuart Branch)

Best contact Joel 0432 826 185 for tours.

Hartley Street school: 10.30 - 2.30pm Monday to Friday and 1 - 5pm Sundays

Stuart town Goal: 10.30 - 2pm Monday to Friday



Darwin Branch

Best contact Helen 0417 828 449

Burnett House: 10 - 1pm Monday to Saturday

Sunday Devonshire Teas – held regularly during the dry season. Details on Trybookings

Monthly Speaker's Nights - usually on Friday night - advertised on Facebook.

Borrooloola (Gulf Branch)

Best contact Janet 0429 625 832

Old Borrooloola Police Station: 7am - 5pm all year round

Katherine Branch

Best contact Merriel 0429 807 491

O'Keeffe House: 9 - 12noon Wednesdays and Saturdays (until September)

Cost: \$10 Devonshire Tea per person, entry \$5 per adult

Devonshire Tea/Nursery/Historical Displays

Available for event hire

Katherine Railway Precinct is currently closed until new volunteer.

Available for event hire

Pine Creek

Best contact Tanya Brown 08 89768201/0437 756 936

Pine Creek Repeater building/library: 9 - 12 noon Monday to Friday

Pine Creek Railway Heritage Precinct: currently closed until new caretaker arrives

Roadmasters House in Darwin

Best contact Trevor Menzies 0418 892 897

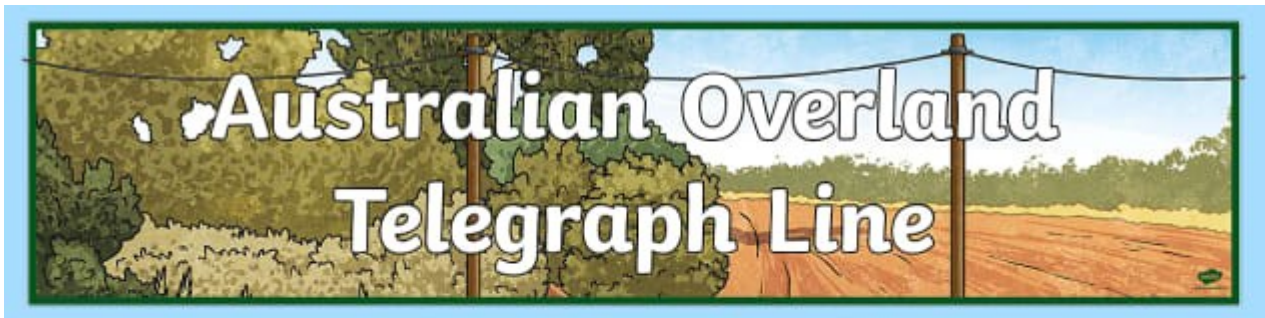
Open 10 - 1pm Tuesday to Friday

Tennant Creek Branch

Best contact Wayne Green 0448 896 216

Tuxworth Fullwood House: Open Monday evenings or by appointment

Please note: days and times may change pending volunteers availability



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