

# The First Government House



*A Story for Early Primary Students*



Produced by the Northern Territory Department of Education,  
Education Policy and Programs,  
Quality Teaching and Learning, 2019.  
Contact: [christine.collins1@nt.gov.au](mailto:christine.collins1@nt.gov.au)

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# Darwin Long Ago

Government House has been the home for the Administrators for more than one hundred years. Back then, the Administrator organised how the town was run.

If you look out the front of Government House, there is a road there but all those years ago, there was no road. It was only a dirt track. Horses pulled wagons loaded with supplies along it. In the dry season, the wagons would make dust fly up and in the wet season, the track would get very muddy.

Across the road, now, is Parliament House. Back then, there was no Parliament House. It wasn't built until 1994. There were only rickety little shops and rough little houses.

*Left: A wagon carrying a heavy load.*

# Palmerston

Back then, Darwin was a very small town called Palmerston. At first, Palmerston was just a little camp of about sixty people at the bottom of the cliffs, below where Government House is today. Later, they decided to move to a new spot at the top of the hill because they thought it was cooler.

One of the most important decisions about where to set up the camp was water. They couldn't just turn on a tap and get fresh running water. There was water nearby at Doctor's Gully but that wasn't the best place for their camp.

Mr Goyder found some "spots where the well sinkers could try for fresh water." So the men dug down deep into the ground until they found fresh water. Then they could lower a bucket down, fill it with water then lift it back up to the surface.

*Right: Palmerston with Fort Hill in the background*









*Above Left: Captain William Bloomfield Douglas.*



*Above Right: Harriet, grown up with her husband, Mr Dominic Daniel Daly*

# The First Administrator

The next job that the men did was build the huts to live in. That included the very first Government House.

The first Administrator to live there was Captain William Bloomfield Douglas. He came to Palmerston by ship. He was a brave man. Before he came, he had sailed around the world. He had even fought pirates.

When he arrived in 1873, he brought his wife, Elen, his five daughters, Harriet, Nelly, Mary, Minnie and Alma, his two sons, William and Bloomfield and their maid, Annie.

# Inside the First Government House

The first Government House was very different to what it is now. It was very rough and it was too small for Captain Douglas' large family.

Captain Douglas' daughter, Harriet, kept a diary. She wrote down what their house was like. She said, "The sleeping rooms were in a large log hut divided by partitions."

A partition is a wooden wall to make separate places for people to sleep.

"The spaces between the poles (of the walls) were plugged with paperbark."

*Right: The buildings in Palmerston.*











# Windows and Floor

They didn't have glass, so there were no glass windows. They had to think of a way to stop the rain and the bugs coming in.

This is what they did:

“Our windows were frames filled with unbleached calico.”

The floor was very simple as well.

Harriet said, “The floor was mud, pressed flat, and mixed with gravel, sand and stone. The floor was a great trial. Every clean dress we put on was soiled around the edges immediately.”

*Left: The houses for the single men are on the left of the road and the houses for married men with families are on the right.*



## So Hot!

Their lounge room was called a 'sitting room' and it was in a separate building from the sleeping room but joined by a covered walkway.

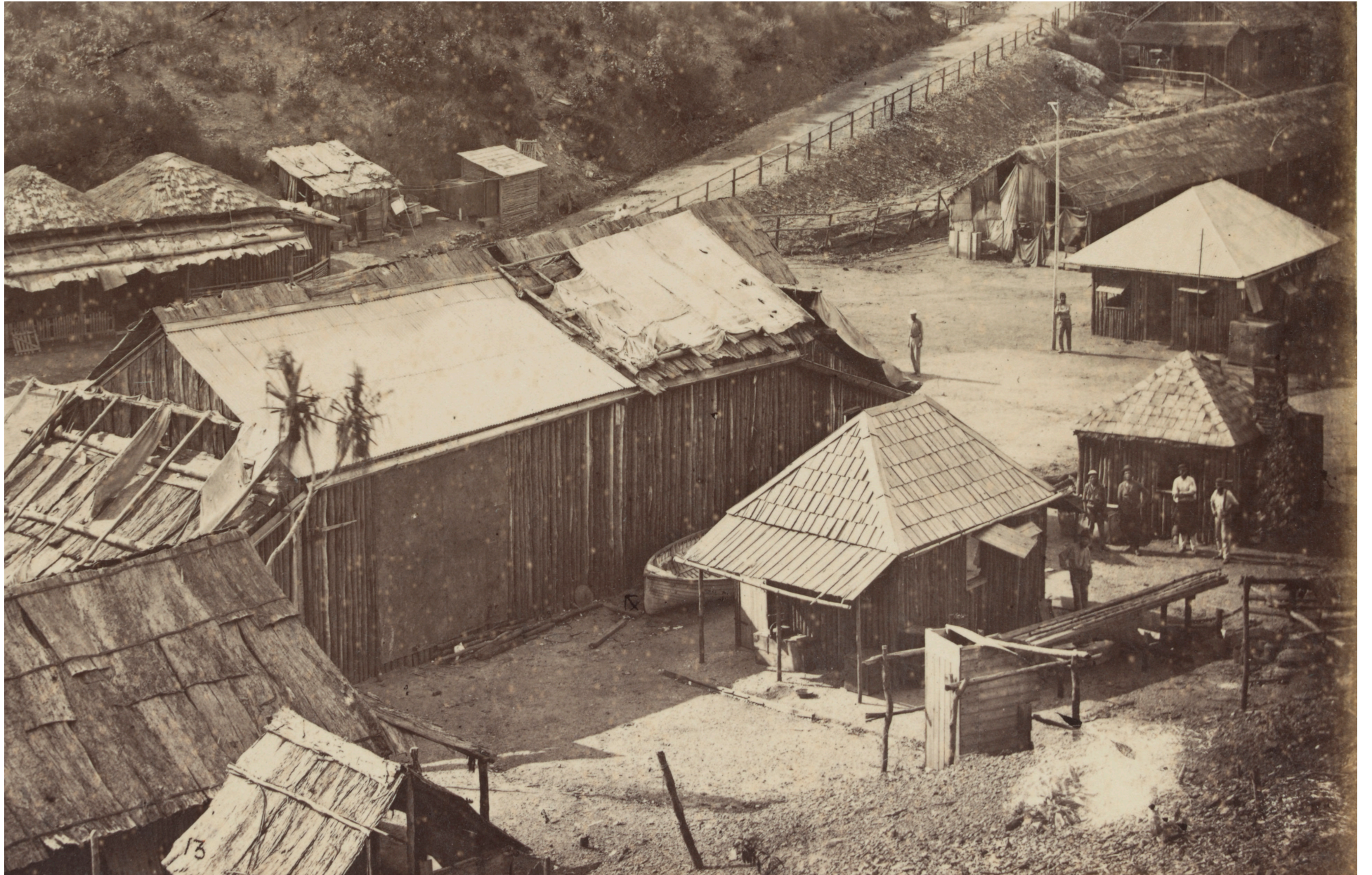
Harriet said, "The sitting room was a galvanized iron hut about 20 feet long... and it had the luxury of a wooden floor. Its windows were sheets of iron propped open with a stick. The iron roof was shaded by bark but it was very hot...In fact, it was so hot during the day, that no one could sit in there."

They made a verandah outside of the house. This is how they built it: "We made a verandah... by means of saplings fixed in the ground, and covered with a canvas awning."

The family dragged out a table and their most comfortable chairs. It was their favourite part of the house and they spent most of their time there.

*Right: A verandah at the front of a house in Palmerston.*









*Left: A chiffonier*



# Furniture

They owned a lot of furniture that was big and heavy. It took many days for it to be unloaded off the ship and brought to the camp.

There wasn't much room for it all in the little house. It was all squashed in and made the house very crowded.

It reminded Harriet of a shop that sold second hand furniture because the “chests of drawers, sideboards, chiffoniers, tables of every description and shape elbowed each other.”

A chiffonier is a special name for a cupboard.

# Lighting

There was no electricity then so there were many things they didn't have.

There were no lights, no washing machines and no fridges.

For lights, they had fires, which were good for keeping the mosquitoes and sandflies away.

They also used tallow lamps and tallow candles. Tallow is the fat that comes from boiling down dead animals, often sheep.

Tallow lamps were very smoky and smelly. Tallow candles would splutter and the wick always needed trimming so the candle wouldn't go out.

*Right: A handmade candle holder.*









# Cleaning

The family had to wash all their clothes by hand. There were a lot of dirty clothes from such a big family so they asked the Larrakia women to help them.

The women filled a tub with water, scrubbed the clothes with a bar of soap then rinsed them in fresh water. They hung them on a line to dry.

Harriet did not like everyone in the camp seeing her underwear on the clothes line.

There were no shops. All the supplies were kept in a big storage hut and it was one man's job to look after all the supplies for the camp. He was like the shopkeeper.

*Left: Washing clothes by hand.*

# Cooking

There were no fridges or ice. Fresh food would go rotten quickly in the heat so they had to find different ways to store their food. Harriet said that everyone missed fresh meat the most.

“For months nothing but tinned meat was to be had, a flavourless substance...called ‘blanket’.” Maybe it tasted like a blanket!

They used the tin meat to make curry, stew, hash, or mince.

Harriet said, “For a long time there was no garden, and our supply of vegetables had to be drawn from tinned sources. Our bread was baked for us by one of the Government cooks.”

Harriet’s mother also baked delicious scones and cakes in a camp oven. The camp oven was a round iron pot that stood on three legs and had a tightly-fitting lid. Hot coals from the fire were put above and below the pot to bake the bread or cakes.





*Above: A camp oven and a bucket of water.*



# Toilets

There were no flushing toilets so the men built 'outhouses'. These were toilets that were outside and shared with other families.

A deep hole was dug in the ground. It was called a 'long drop'. A little building was built over it. A round hole was cut in a plank of wood and the plank was put over the hole in the ground. The plank was nailed to the walls so you didn't fall in!

People also kept chamber pots under their beds to use at night. Harriet tells us why:

"There were monsters that used to come so close to the camp that at night we often heard the clash of their teeth as they snapped their hideous jaws, perhaps swallowing some dainty morsel... At times we could even hear their bodies grating on the shingle as they moved off into the water, making a noise like a boat being launched from a stony beach."



*Above: Crocodiles on the beach.*





# Getting in Touch

Phones and computers hadn't been invented. The only way that people in Palmerston could talk to someone outside of the camp was by writing a letter and giving it to a ship to take with them. It would take months for a letter to be delivered.

Mr Goyder said that people in Palmerston were always watching and waiting for a ship to arrive because “most of all they craved the mail and newspapers the ship would bring - news from home!”

*Left: The ship 'Gulnare' on the river at Southport, near Palmerston.*



# Getting Around

Cars weren't invented either. Everyone had to walk everywhere or they rode one of the horses at the camp. Many horses were kept in a stable at the camp.

Harriet said, "These rides were the greatest joy of our lives...We often rode to Doctor's Gully, where there was a lovely waterfall...At times we varied our ride by going to Fannie Bay, a long white open beach, about seven miles from home."

*Right: The horse stable in Palmerston*









# Having Fun

No one was allowed to swim in the water at Palmerston so they had to find other things to do.

Harriet said that at night many of the men played instruments, including concertinas and flutes, and sang songs.

The Douglas family even brought a piano with them. Harriet said the Larrakia people were amazed when they first saw it. Harriet opened up the piano so they could look inside and see how the sounds were made.

Sadly, it got damp in the next wet season, and sounded terrible. Soon after, it was finally eaten by termites, so that was the end of the piano.

*Left: An old-fashioned piano.*



## A New House

Finally, Mr Douglas decided that they needed a better place to live in, so he planned to build a new house up on top of the hill, overlooking the camp. This is where the second Government House was built and it has been there ever since.



