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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

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R E P O R T.

relating to the proposed

construction of a

SUPREME COURT BUILDING

at

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

R E P O R T:

SUPREME COURT BUILDING.

DARWIN. N.T.

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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

SUPREME COURT BUILDING, DARWIN, N.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 construction of a Supreme Court Building at Darwin, Northern Territory, has the honour to report as follows:-

S E C T I O N I. INTRODUCTION.

Historical.

1. The Committee Report of 1955 outlined the early history of the Court in the Northern Territory. It is interesting to note here, however, that, as early as 1884 provision was made for the appointment of a permanent Judge to reside in the Northern Territory. Until the Commonwealth Government took over the Territory from the South Australian Government, the Judge functioned also as Government Resident.
2. A Supreme Court building was erected on the Esplanade before the turn of the century, but the old building was taken over by the Navy shortly after the first Japanese raid on Darwin in World War II. Three Naval huts were adapted for court purposes after the war, and the improvised buildings are still being used.
3. In 1955 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works investigated the proposal for a Supreme Court Building in Darwin, with the principal aim of establishing the need for a Supreme Court in Darwin, a suitable site, and its probable cost. The main import of the eight recommendations of the Committee in that Report was that there was an urgent need for a Supreme Court Building; that planning should proceed, and a new proposal should be submitted to the Committee in due course. Other recommendations were that attention should be given to completing a Master Plan of Darwin, in order to determine rights and titles to the land and engender confidence in future development.

S E C T I O N II THE PRESENT PROPOSAL.

The Building.

4. The building now proposed is to take a different outline from the

one that the Committee considered in 1955. The original plan overall was a square, but the new plan is to be T shaped, with the long arm of the T parallel to Mitchell Street, and the top of the T facing Herbert Street.

A wing to house the court offices and the library will project from the front of the building, and will balance the end of the Herbert Street wing, forming an interesting main entrance on the centre line of Bennett Street. The structure will have a length of 220 ft. to Mitchell Street, and 130 ft. to Herbert Street. It will be composed of basement, ground and first floors, and will accommodate two supreme courts and a Police court in the main building. The wing facing Herbert/^{Street} will be self-contained and will house the various law offices, in its two floors.

Cost.

5. The estimated cost, based on the sketches available, and subject to final plans and specifications, was stated as £421,000, and it is expected that construction could be successfully completed in three years.

S E C T I O N III. THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

General

6. The Committee studied the plans and took evidence in Melbourne from officials of the Department of Works responsible for planning the proposal, and from officers of the Attorney-General's Department connected with the project. The Committee visited the High Court and the modern Arbitration Court in Melbourne. A visit was also paid to Darwin, to inspect the site and obtain evidence from those concerned with the court work of the Northern Territory, as well as from independent witnesses and persons in a position to help the Committee with information pertinent to the inquiry.

Need for the Building.

7. As the Committee's 1955 Report had fully covered the question of the necessity for the building, and had established that court proceedings in Darwin were being carried out under shocking conditions, the Committee on this occasion took cognisance of the full evidence gathered on the former visit. Certain additional evidence relating to the more recent activities of the courts, and further points emphasizing the urgent necessity for the building were submitted and taken into account by the Committee. In this connection it is now only necessary to reiterate the previous recommendation that there is urgent need for new court buildings in Darwin.

Change of Plans.

8. One aspect of the inquiry was the necessity to study the site and the form of the building, owing to the fact that major changes had been made since the proposal was previously submitted to the Committee. The addition of an extra court made it desirable to change the design of the building, and this in turn necessitated some alteration in the site, with consequent effect on the adjacent administrative buildings project.

Site.

9. Although the site remains substantially the same as in the former proposal, the fact that the building is to be turned round, and is to occupy a larger site, made it necessary to reconsider many of the factors accepted in connection with the old plan. The long building now proposed is to have the main entrance centred on the line of Bennett Street, and will take up part of the land upon which one of the four administrative buildings was to have been located. It was therefore necessary to include in the scope of this inquiry the alternative provision to be made for the administration buildings in this area.

10. The Master Plan.- Following the Committee's interest in the planning of this area in particular, one of the Committee's 1955 recommendations emphasized the desirability of completing authoritative planning in a Master Plan. This was advisable both in the administrative and commercial location, as well as in the wider residential sections of the area. The Committee is now informed that a two stage investigation had been commenced into the town planning of Darwin. Dr. Karl Langer, architect and town planner of Brisbane, was commissioned in 1955 to undertake stage 1, which related to the planning of suitable areas for a government administrative centre and for municipal buildings. Stage 2 was to involve the broader issues of Darwin town planning generally.

11. The stage 1 section of the investigation appears to have been completed with general satisfaction, and it is this portion which deals specifically with the area containing the Court site. The evidence indicates that there has been confusion regarding the second stage of planning, and, in

the absence of decisions based on adequate planning, development is apparently proceeding rapidly in various sections on a zoning plan but without complete co-ordination. There is difficulty in applying to the court for variation of covenants, and because of the absence of concluded action regarding the master plan, a lot of expansion is of necessity being postponed.

12. Extended Site.- The new siting of the court building will entail the elimination of one of the four proposed administrative office buildings adjoining the court house site. It was explained to the Committee, however, that, in the first stage of the master plan, alternative land had been allocated to the Navy, and the area situated on the opposite side of Mitchell Street would be available for development as an administrative area and government centre. This would provide space for the administrative block displaced to make more room for the court building. The Committee is therefore satisfied that the use of the site as now suggested is desirable, and the site will provide an adequate area for the court purposes.

Accommodation.

13. The courts.- As a result of advice received from the Attorney-General's Department that the time was not far distant when a second Judge would be required in the Northern Territory, the accommodation planned was increased from that previously submitted to the Committee. A structure was designed to house three courts instead of two with the object of using one as an inferior court until required later. Chambers for a second Judge and staff were also included.

14. In association with the courts, provision has also been made, at the lower ground floor level, for police room, cells and toilets, records, storage and air-conditioning plant room, and strong room associated with the Registrar's office. Also at this level is the Judge's private entrance and garage.

15. The Library.- The library wing provides space on the ground floor for court offices, while the Library itself, on the first floor, has an area of 55 ft. by 30 ft. flanked by a private reading room 25 ft. by 15 ft. and a room of similar size for Librarian and book repairs. The Committee noted that some difficulty is experienced by persons desiring to use the Library, through various volumes being unobtainable from time to time, and the desirability of

establishing a duplicate library was referred to in the evidence. The Committee's investigations indicated that there would not be sufficient space in the Library for the suggested duplication, but, as the Crown Law wing is planned with sufficient space for considerable expansion, it will be possible to set aside an area for library purposes in that wing if required.

16. The Crown Law Offices.- It has always been regarded as desirable to separate the functions of the Court from the Crown Law and associated offices, and the ideal would have been to house the Court in a separate building of its own. This question was considered in the original submission, but it was generally agreed that a more appropriate and imposing building could be constructed for Darwin circumstances, if the offices and the Court were combined in one building. It was also considered that separate entities could be substantially achieved by idoneous planning and siting of the building. Some evidence in this inquiry still emphasized that the Court should be in a separate building. It is claimed, however, for the proposed plans, that the situation of the offices in the Herbert Street wing, which has only one connecting door at the end of the Court building, is a satisfactory solution of the problem. This arrangement not only keeps the Crown Law offices in their own section of the building with a minimum of physical contact, but it has the desirable effect of screening the Court entrance from the vicinity of the Hotel in Herbert Street. It will also be convenient for officials who have to make frequent visits to the Court and the library. The Committee is therefore satisfied that, when all the factors are considered, the accommodation required is planned in the most appropriate way in this proposal.

The Building Plans.

17. The Lower Ground Floor.- Provision is made at the lower ground floor level for police rooms, cells, records and storage, air-conditioning and other plant room, and strong room associated with the Registrar's office. There is also the Judge's private entrance adjacent to the Judge's garage, and a private entry for officers of the legal profession who may enter the building from the Esplanade side.

18. The Ground Floor.- The Supreme Court No.1 is situated at the end of the building nearest to the Legislative Council building, and has the jury

room, witness room, and solicitors' room between it and the Supreme Court No. 2. The main entrance hall adjoins the No. 2. Supreme Court, and separates it from the Police Court and associated utility, press, and witness rooms. These three courts face on to a long vestibule looking on to Mitchell Street.

19. The court offices are accommodated in the ground floor section of the Library wing, which juts out from the centre of the building. This wing separates the Supreme Court entrance from the entrances to the Court offices and Police Court.

20. The ground floor level of the Crown Law wing, facing Herbert Street, contains space for the Registrar-General's office and the Public Trustee's office, separated by an entrance hall from Herbert Street.

21. First Floor.- The upper part of the Supreme Court No. 1. continues through to the first floor level, and has the Judge's chamber adjoining it. The space on this level which is over the other two courts, provides rooms facing the corridor for the second Judge's chamber; associates and typists, as well as magistrate's rooms and typist area.

22. The library occupies the whole of the first floor area of the library wing, and has a room on each side of it on the corridor for a private reading room, librarian and book repairs room. Part of the adjoining space is taken up with air conditioning plant room, utility and rest rooms.

23. The upper part of the Herbert Street wing will accommodate the Crown Law offices, where adequate provision is made for expansion in the future.

Design.

24. The three courts are planned in line at ground floor level, but due prominence is given to the main Supreme Court by its size and position in the planning, and by carrying its ceiling height through two normal floors. The level of the courts and the main ground floor will be 4 ft. 6 inches above the natural ground level at Mitchell Street. In this way an elevated podium is provided which emphasizes, in the traditional manner of the courts, the appearance and dignity of the building, and at the same time reduces considerably the amount of excavation necessary to provide the lower ground floor accommodation already described.

25. The plan form has developed with a colonnaded entrance forecourt which will be centred upon the axial line of Bennett Street. The colonnade, which is of slender columns, protects the entrances on the main Mitchell Street front, and it is claimed that they impart a classic dignity which is traditional with court house architecture.

26. Solar screens. - To permit efficient air-conditioning it is necessary to reduce the thermal load, and this has been achieved by screening all windows with a wall of perforated precast cement units which, while admitting natural light, preclude most of the direct sunlight. The use of this device on most of the surfaces of the building was an important factor in the design effect, and the Committee paid attention to the aesthetic influence on the design as well as the practical necessity for it.

27. The first impression of the drawings was that the building would present a cage-like appearance, and the Committee was not favourably disposed towards it. However, further study of the model and of detail photographs, as well as an inspection of an existing example of somewhat similar treatment on a building in Darwin, revealed that variation in colour, and perspective viewing of the building would create a more pleasing general appearance. It was explained that the main object of the sun screens is to create a depth of the unit itself, so that the sun does not penetrate completely through to the other side of the component. As the sun is at an angle, the size of the interior opening of the concrete casting is so designed that it precludes the sun striking through to the glass behind. It also has the effect of cutting down the very intense glare experienced in tropical areas.

28. A doubt which arose in connection with the screens was that, while they would no doubt be effective with the sun at an angle, they might not be so efficient when the sun was low in the sky, particularly on the western side. The Committee's inspection of the existing example in Darwin indicated that the screen design adopted there had not been designed to exclude the sun at certain angles, and further information was sought on the matter. It was pointed out that a number of charts had been used to show the penetration of the sun at various times of the year and during the day, and that the design could be varied to provide appropriate amounts of sun penetration. It

was stated that the designers had budgetted for some sun penetration at certain afternoon periods; and the air-conditioning plant had been planned to cope with it.

29. The Committee was not happy with the fact that, at the times when there was sun penetration, there would be disconcerting shadow patterns on those working in the affected areas. The Committee therefore came to the conclusion that the precast thermal screens are desirable for the building, but that further study should be given to designing units for the different orientations in order to give protection from the sun penetration and also complete freedom from shadow patterns.

30. Character of the building.- In the Report on the previous plans the Committee expressed a measure of disappointment that the building did not offer the characteristic, dignified impression which would make it stand out as a court building, and it was recommended then that "the final plans should indicate a somewhat more imposing aesthetic appearance in contemporary style, suitable to the judicial activities to be conducted in the building".

31. The designers claim that they have achieved this in the present proposed building, and give it as their opinion that it will be a building of a conservative modern approach, with a very satisfactory line. At the same time it is pointed out that, with limited funds and a comparatively small building, it is not possible to achieve the monumental effect to be seen on buildings in some other countries.

32. The Committee always recognised that old-fashioned elaborate architecture would be inappropriate and impractical in Darwin, and that some features planned to conform to the Darwin climate should be incorporated in the design. It nevertheless took some effort to regard this design as portraying characteristic judicial significance. A thoughtful study of the perspective stimulates the conclusion that the tall, slim columns on the Mitchell Street frontage give dignity to that facade, but this is not evident from other views of the building. The opinions expressed by experienced architects were in favour of the design as one of merit, which would result in a building of impressive and dignified appearance, and yet serve the purpose for which it was designed, and the Committee therefore accepts that evidence.

33. Distinctive motif.- The ends of the wings on each frontage were planned as windowless walls in re-constructed stone, and they present a marked contrast to the screen-covered remainder of the building. Their plainness catches the eye, but it is considered that they should present a suitable contrast if carried out in carefully selected materials, with a certain amount of pattern, as indicated in the sketches.

34. Most witnesses agreed that something further was needed to identify the special character of the building. During the inquiry the suggestion was made that a suitable motif might be designed and placed on one of the walls, and the matter was further investigated during the inquiry. The Committee now recommends that the severity of the appearance of the Library Wing, facing Mitchell Street, should be relieved by an appropriate and characteristic motif which would, at the same time, indicate the judicial character of the building, and identify the structure as the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

Construction.

35. The main framework and floors are to be of reinforced concrete. Doors, frames, and windows, will be of non-ferrous metal, either bronze or aluminium. The roof is to be covered with galvanised steel troughing. This is a new method that has been adopted in Australia and other parts of the world during the last ten years or so. It is particularly appropriate because it is possible to construct with it a weather-tight roof surface over a span of something equivalent to 60 feet.

36. Darwin stone.- The desirability of using Darwin stone for the Court building was considered, as this material has been used to some extent for buildings in the past. It was stated, however, that its suitability, generally, is of limited value. It is a stone which will not cut very readily, and the final effect is thought to be hardly suitable for the Supreme Court building.

37. Acoustics.- One of the most important problems to be studied in the construction of the Supreme Court building will be the exclusion of external noise as well as the internal acoustics generally. The Committee inspected the modern Arbitration Court in Melbourne where the latest methods of acoustic treatment have been applied, including the canopy placed above the judges' dais. In contrast to this the Committee experienced a great deal of difficulty, during the hearings in Darwin, because of the very poor internal acoustics and the very high level of exterior noise in the Legislative Council Chamber there. With
/ open louvres

To facilitate natural ventilation, there is nothing to diminish the noise from the adjacent offices, or of the passing traffic in the street. It was stated in evidence that, at this stage of the court design, there are no prepared studies of the acoustic characteristics of the court rooms themselves, but when the working drawings are under review, acoustic studies will be made, and appropriate materials will be used to give the right resonant quality.

38. The Committee's experiences, as well as the evidence from witnesses accustomed to court hearings, emphasize the fact that the acoustic properties of the courts will demand very critical examination and careful study. The Committee expresses its concern at the poor acoustics of the Legislative Council Chamber, and urges that special attention be paid to the question of the internal acoustics in the courts; to the elimination of any mechanical noise generated by air-conditioning machinery, and also to external noises likely in this rather busy location.

39. Air-conditioning.- The principle of installing air-conditioning in the court building was recommended in the Committee's 1955 Report, but the details of the provision for the building were further studied by the Committee in this proposal. The plans provide for air-conditioning for all areas except those for the basement, toilet blocks and utility rooms which would have natural or mechanical ventilation.

40. The refrigeration plant would consist of two chilled water plants having a capacity of approximately 100 tons, each consisting of compressor, chilled water cooler, evaporative condenser, and chilled water circulating pumps. This plant would be located in the basement with space provided for additional plant to serve the adjacent administrative block No.3 in the future. All plant would be fully automatic to ensure correct temperature and humidity conditions. Unit coolers would be installed in the records, strongroom and police rooms for the preservation of documents, and provide reasonable conditions for the occupants of these spaces.

41. The six plants which will serve the courts and certain offices will admit outside air. The so-called unit coolers will re-circulate air only. It is anticipated that a caretaker, or some person, not necessarily an engineer, will operate the plant.

42. The Committee noted that there was some opposition in Darwin to the general use of air-conditioning, however, almost every witness agreed that there is a need for air-conditioning in portions of the building like the library, where expensive books are subject to deterioration, and also in other areas where privacy is necessary.

43. The amount set down in the estimate for air-conditioning was £77,150, with operating costs of £5,000 per annum. Although the Committee recommends that air-conditioning of the building is necessary, further efforts should be made to ensure that the utmost economy should be observed in the type of equipment decided upon, and the amount of capital to be expended on this item should be reduced to a minimum.

Cost.

44. The estimated cost of the proposal, stated to be based only on the sketches available, and subject to final plans and specifications was set down as follows:-

Court house building, with external paving and electrical work	£324,600
Mechanical equipment.	6,400
Air-conditioning.	77,150
Drainage.	1,050
Landscaping	1,800
Contingencies.	10,000
	<hr/>
	<u>£ 421,000</u>

The time given for possible completion of the building, stated to be in 1962, was based on the assumption of careful job management, regular supplies of materials, freedom from abnormal climatic conditions, and suitable labour being available.

45. The estimated cost of the previous proposal was £300,000, so that the present estimate shows a substantial increase. However, it was stated that the increase is reasonably consistent with wage trends, the building trade wage in Darwin having risen approximately 30%.

46. The Committee made further inquiries into the question of the cost, and it is realised that it is very difficult to estimate building costs for this type of structure in Darwin, where heavy freights and uncertain shipping deliveries add greatly to normal costs. The best evidence which the Committee was able to obtain on this question indicates that the estimates appear to be reasonable.

Tape Recorders.

47. During the inspection of the High Court the Committee was interested in the system of tape recording being used there. Inquiries were made concerning the desirability of including provision for similar recording in the Darwin courts. It was stated in evidence that the system used in different courts depends upon the Judge. the present Judge in Darwin generally prefers the South Australian practice of having evidence taken direct on to the typewriter. It is considered that, if a Judge in the future prefers to use tape-recorders it will only be necessary to instal microphones and wiring, as was done without difficulty in the High Court in Sydney and Melbourne. Further evidence revealed, however, that there is a certain amount of difficulty at times with the switching, in Full Court sittings, but that difficulty is not likely at Darwin, where it is unlikely that more than one Judge will be sitting at the one time. In view of the constant development and improvement of equipment in these days, the Committee is convinced that tape-recording will be in demand in the courts in due course, and it is therefore recommended that adequate provision be made in the building for the necessary wiring and facilities, in order to avoid alterations and delays if tape-recording is required in the future.

SECTION IV. THE COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS.Summary of Recommendations.

48. The following is a list of the Committee's conclusions in summary form only, arrived at after study of the proposal, model, plans, and the evidence involved. The full recommendations are contained in the body of the Report, and may be referred to in the paragraphs quoted at the close of each of the following recommendations.

	<u>Paragraph in Report.</u>
(1) There is an urgent need for the building.	7
(2) The use of the site as now suggested is desirable, and the site should be adequate for its purpose.	12
(3) The accommodation required is appropriately planned.	16
(4) The precast thermal screens are desirable, but further study should be given to designing units for the different orientations, to give protection from sun penetration, and complete freedom from shadow patterns.	29
(5) After careful study of the matter, the Committee accepts the evidence of experienced architects that the design is of merit, and will result in a building of impressive and dignified appearance.	32
(6) The proposed design is recommended, but the Committee considers that the severity in appearance of the Library Wing, facing Mitchell Street, should be relieved by a motif or emblem which would, at the same time, indicate the judicial character of the building, and identify it as the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.	34
(7) Special attention should be given to the acoustics of the courts to eliminate external and internal noise.	35
(8) The best evidence obtainable indicates that the estimated cost is reasonable.	46
(9) Provision should be made in the building for suitable facilities to allow for the installation of tape recording apparatus when required in the future.	47
(10) Air conditioning is necessary, but further efforts should be made to bring the capital cost to a minimum.	43

(Allen Fairhall.)
Chairman.

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

8th October, 1959.