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The Hygienic Holiday

The Country Women's Association and the Reform of the Queensland House

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In the early 1920s while geographers and public health officials engaged in heated exchange over the climatic effects of the tropics on European productivity, fertility and racial selectivity, the Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) took a more practical approach to facilitating settlement. They argued for the development of easily accessible tourist facilities along the coastal plains of Queensland to provide relief for women from the humidity and isolation felt by those in remote communities. However, when the QCWA developed their first holiday huts, not only were they a place for leisure, but also a location for testing ideas of appropriate housing standards for tropical Queensland.

This paper examines the development of the seaside homes movement and the search for economic solutions to the tropical house. Studying newspaper reports on seaside holidays for countrywomen and debates about the one roomed house, it explores the relationship between Walter Burley Griffin's 'doll houses' and their translation in the architecture of the Townsville architect Charles Dalton Lynch and C. V. Rees. The paper proposes that the QCWA's attempts to improve the living conditions of women provided Lynch and Rees with the opportunity to test ideas about the ideal tropical house. The more relaxed atmosphere of the holiday enabled experimentation with previously strict separation of living from sleeping areas. The renewed emphasis placed by tropical medicine on physiological comfort, allowed the privileging of physical comfort over social comfort. In doing so, the Townsville Huts anticipate many of the civilising concerns of what would come to be defined as "Tropical Medicine."



How did local architects in Townsville try to find cost effective ways for “climatically appropriate housing” when Queensland was seen as a global experiment in the tropical settlement of Europeans?

In June 1924, the Queensland Premier, Sir Matthew Nathan, launched a fund-raising appeal for sea-side homes and rest-houses for the Queensland Country Women’s Association (QCWA). Sir Matthew spoke about the problem of housing in the tropics, reminding his audience that they were in “one of the newest countries for white settlement under tropical conditions.”¹ He acknowledged that most people thought that comfortable houses cost more to build. However, he argued that this need not be the case, if “first class authorities on tropical hygiene, in building construction, and in domestic work—the last, of course, a woman—come together to deal comprehensively with the question.”² His comments reveal a number of political concerns about the home as without affordable and comfortable housing, the project to expand the tropical settlement of Europeans in Northern Australia could not happen. The welfare of rural women became a national priority.

1. “Health and the Housing Problem,” *Brisbane Courier*, 1924, 6.

2. *Brisbane Courier*, 1924, 6.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, women were considered a risk to the whole project of white settlement in tropical Queensland.³ While doctors at the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine downgraded the dangers of the tropics to the health and productivity of working men, the well-being of women, as Nikki Henningham has argued, was a source of national anxiety.⁴

3. Nikki Henningham, “Hats Off Gentlemen, to Our Australian Mothers!”: Representations of White Femininity in North Queensland in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 117 (2001): 311–21.

4. Henningham, “Hats Off Gentlemen, to Our Australian Mothers!,” 311.

Experts in tropical medicine, such as Adolf Breinl and W. J. Young, worried that that the thermal conditions of the home and the lack of domestic servants, reduced the ability of women to work efficiently, while their confinement at home made them nervous.⁵ They blamed the poor standard of construction, while architects blamed ‘a prejudice against novel ideas’ by their clients. Yet architects themselves carefully quarantined the introduction of foreign ideas, for fear of reducing the morality of the British Australian Home.

5. Anton Breinl and W. J. Young, “Tropical Australia and Its Settlement,” in *Collected Papers 1–24* (N.p.: Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine, 1919): 16, 23.

The story of the adaptation of the Australian home to the influence of climate, economy and the ideals of leisure forms a distinctive theme to much writing on everyday Australian domestic architecture. While the Queenslander house was celebrated by Robin Boyd as evidence of the influence of climate to create a

6. Robin Boyd, *The Walls Around Us: The Story of Australian Architecture* (Melbourne: Cheshire for the Children's Library Guild of Australia, 1962), 25–27.

distinctive regional tradition and an appropriate precedent for modern architecture,⁶ this paper explores the tensions that came with attempts to reduce the size of the home, and the search for alternatives to the verandah. The first architect of seaside resorts for country women, the Sydney architect, F. Ernest Stowe, assumed in 1913 that reducing the size of the house to a single room, risked the moral degeneration of its inhabitants. Yet, eleven years later the architects Charles Dalton Lynch and C. V. Rees designed a holiday camp in Townsville for the QCWA, comprising solely of small self-catered huts, each effectively an enclosed room that doubled as bedroom and living space. Though Stowe's site planning for seaside resorts influenced Lynch and Rees, the progressive early ideals of the QCWA, along with their need to create attractive new facilities to bring in new members, gave greater freedom for experimentation. This experimentation extended not only to novel planning arrangements but also enabled Lynch to put into practice principles for economical tropical housing he had first proposed to Breinl and Young at the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in 1919. While the QCWA brought the opportunity of a holiday by the sea within the reach of ordinary rural women for the first time, their development of the seaside homes at Kissing Point, Townsville reflects concerns within the architectural profession about the social and environmental effects of reducing the cost of house construction and is an early attempt to find alternative solutions to the tropical house.

The Seaside Camp Association Model

The model of a seaside camp with self-contained chalets sought to offer a solution to allow country women cope with the isolation and climate of rural Australia. The Seaside Camp Association movement started in Sydney in April 1913 following the previous year's harsh summer. The concept of charitable climatic holidays was not new and was based on the medical understanding of fresh air, light and bathing as an environmental cure. Since the eighteen nineties, the Fresh-Air League provided mountain and seaside holidays for poor children from the cities and mining towns. However up to 1913, no organisation existed to look after the needs of rural families.

The solution to rural hardships was a cheap holiday. Initially, the secretary of the Seaside Camps Association, Alice Currie, envisaged "a tent city" of either "neat white tents, or wooden cottages,

7. "The Tent City," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 30, 1913, 7.



in close proximity to the shore.⁷⁷ The Association successfully lobbied the state government to grant them land at Narrabeen lagoon, on Sydney's northern beaches. The Seaside Camp Association argued that it was not a charity and sought to maintain the economic independence of guests, by reducing the cost of their holiday but still asking them to pay a nominal rent. Such rent could cover maintenance but still required the initial cost to be met by donations. To fundraise, individual donors could pay for an individual cottage and in return they had the right to name it.



Figure 1. Model Camp for Seaside Camp Association by F. Ernest Stowe.

With a site available, their honorary architect and engineer, F. Ernest Stowe, drew up plans. Instead of tents, he proposed a series of thirty wooden huts arranged in crescent rows with a communal kitchen serving meals. The designs received widespread publicity, published in the regional and building press.⁸ But not everyone was enthusiastic about bringing bush mothers and their children to the seaside, in particular those that lived nearby who associated camps with unsanitary conditions. Much was made of the sewerage, water supply and street lighting design, more to appease the neighbours, than to improve the health of the visiting families.⁹ However, clouds were gathering in Europe and World War I intervened, allowing the residents of Narrabeen to maintain their stretch of shore for themselves.¹⁰

Currie did not give up on the idea, presenting her model camp to the recently formed Country Women's Association in Sydney in 1923. The Country Women's Association was formed in New South Wales in April 1922, spreading to Queensland by August of that year.¹¹¹² One of the first recommendations to the Country Women's Association was to lobby for reduced railway fares to make access to the seaside more affordable.¹³ This overcame the problem of getting there, yet without friends on the coast, staying there was a costly affair.¹⁴

8. "The Seaside Camp," *Building*, February 12, 1914, 59–60; "Little Wooden Huts," *The Barrier Miner*, February 16, 1914, 3; "Seaside Camp Association," *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, February 26, 1914, 3.

9. "Little Wooden Huts," *Barrier Miner*, February 16, 1914, 3.

10. "Seaside Mountain Camps: A Scheme for the Inlander," *Brisbane Courier*, September 13, 1928, 20.

11. "C.W. Conference. Permanent Organisation Formed," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21, 1922, 5.

12. Muriel Pagliano, *Country Women: History of the First Seventy-Five Years* (Brisbane: The Queensland Country Women's Association, n.d.), 3.

13. "C.W. Conference," 5.

14. Pagliano, *Country Women*, 8.

The provision of seaside homes became part of the initial mission of the Queensland Country Women's Association. Though the Southern half of the Association provided the first seaside homes at Redcliffe near Brisbane in 1923, their model was essentially an adaptation of the boarding house where individual families were offered room and board in a shared house. Currie's model of self-contained memorial huts was adopted by the Northern branch in 1924 for a site at Kissing Point, Townsville.

Figure 2. "Holiday Homes, Kissing Point, Townsville." *Daily Mail*, May 09 1924, 15.

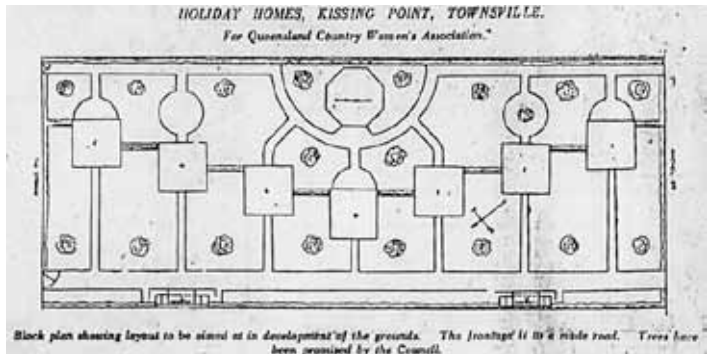
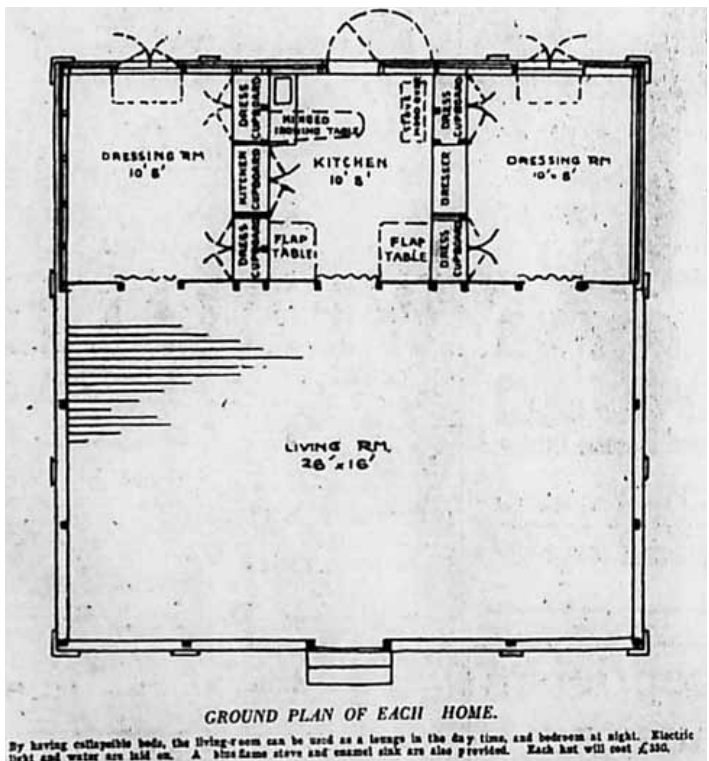


Figure 3. Ground Floor Plan of Each Home, "Holiday Homes, Kissing Point, Townsville." *Daily Mail*, May 09 1924, 15.



The layout of the Kissing Point Homes closely followed the master-planning principles established by F. Ernest Stowe at Narrabeen, New South Wales. Individual huts, arranged in a



crescent shape, faced the sea. The funding model of memorial huts paid for by individual donors was continued. Interestingly the first hut was paid for by Alfred Daking Smith of Charters Towers, whose Sydney residence, Berith Park, was designed by Stowe in 1909.¹⁵ It seems likely that Daking Smith's funding and his connection to Stowe, prompted the translation of the earlier scheme from Narrabeen to the tropical North of Queensland.

15. "Berith Park: Billyard Avenue," Wahroonga Conservation Group, http://www.wahroonga.org/berith_park.htm.

It fell on local architects, Charles Dalton Lynch and C. V. Rees to design a suitable hut for a country women's holiday. Lynch was known for his proposals for tropical architecture in both the local press and medical journals.¹⁶ They proposed that each hut would consist of only a single room, with dressing areas and kitchen screened off a main space containing six beds. By day these would be places to sit, and by night a family could sleep there. The huts were one room deep, without verandahs but containing a large interior space 26feet wide by 26feet deep. The buildings had a hipped roof, with wide eaves, while the walls clearly stopped short of the eaves to enable ventilation. The orientation of huts was to the southeast, slightly off the recommended east-west orientation, but still enough to catch prevailing winds and directly face the beach. The interior layout of the building was described at length in an article in the Brisbane *Daily Mail* on May 09, 1924.¹⁷ The paper focused on the conveniences of the huts, but did not question the shared living and sleeping space. The gas stove, built-in washbasin and water connection were considered noteworthy not the eight people sleeping in one room. The lack of interest in the shared living and sleeping arrangements is surprising as a decade earlier, such proposals created considerable apprehension within the architectural community, best evidenced by Stowe's criticism of the one room house. For though Stowe influenced the master-planning, the interior layout contradicted everything he stood for in terms of economical house design.

16. "Tropical Architecture," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, November 04, 1920, 5. See also Breinl and Young, "Tropical Australia and Its Settlement"; R.W. Cilento, "The White Man in the Tropics with Especial Reference to Australia and Its Dependencies," in *Service Publication* (Melbourne: Division of Tropical Hygiene, 1925).

17. "The Country Women's Page," *Daily Mail*, May 09, 1924, 15.

The One-Roomed House

To reduce dwelling costs, architects had effectively two options open to them—either they could reduce the cost of building elements by using cheaper materials or they could integrate functions and save on space.

It was the former strategy that F. Ernest Stowe proposed for his 400 pound bungalow designs published in *Building* in November

18. F. Ernest Stowe, "The £400 Bungalow. Economy and Comfort in Home Building," *Building*, November 12, 1913, 43.

19. Stowe, "The £400 Bungalow," 43.

20. Robin Boyd, *Australia's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1961), 2. See also Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1960).

21. "The One-Roomed House. Is It Desirable," *Building*, August 12, 1915, 103–4.

1913. He sought to maintain the traditional characteristics of the bungalow which he saw defined by its wide, low-pitch roof that gave an appearance of "compactness and snugness."¹⁸ Stowe presented a series of house plans of three to five rooms, all containing a covered 'piazza' to the front, rear verandah, kitchen, bathroom and a range of bedrooms. Their appearance conformed to the newly introduced Californian Bungalow, many with their main entrance from the side. However though Stowe emphasised their compact planning and details such as flower boxes that would make a "cheerful and comfortable home", his main means of reducing cost consisted in replacing the roughcast half-brick-work with "a form of vertical studding laid over with steel lathing covered and flushed up in one thickness with 'compo'."¹⁹ In effect, Stowe's strategy characterised the "material triumph and aesthetic calamity" Robin Boyd so disparaged in the Australian home.²⁰

Where Stowe sought to build cheaply and offer more space for less money, his colleague on the Town Planning Association, Walter Burley Griffin had more radical ideas. In 1915. Griffin first proposed in Melbourne, his design for a one-roomed worker's cottage. It completely dispensed with separate enclosures for living and sleeping. Rather Griffin believed that the cost of the internal construction could be reduced "by abolishing the partition walls and all chimneys but one, which is built in the centre of one large room, having fire openings on four sides." This was not only economical to construct, but he claimed, also economical to maintain.

Such spatial changes involved integrating separate functions in the building. While both Stowe and Griffin, dispensed with separate dining and sitting rooms in favour of the new concept of "living room", Griffin's reduction of the house to a single room received a robust critique by Stowe in the July 15 edition of the *Melbourne Herald* in 1915.

Stowe feared cultural degeneration by importing a concept whose roots he traced to the Chicago tenement and "poorer Japanese homes where the British idea of the sacredness of family privacy and modesty does not exist."²¹ To Stowe, Griffin was upsetting the rigid segregation of day and night-time activity in the British Australian home. By way of xenophobic scaremongering and seeking to shame Griffin, he used the image of the bath house to invoke his fears of dismantling the rigid segregation of the sexes and screening of bodily functions. Stowe claimed that "this lack of modesty in Japan is illustrated by the common practice of the



sexes bathing together in quite a nude state in common public baths”. Instead Stowe saw himself as a defender of the regulated, Australian suburb which “gives to the mother and the child, for whom the home exists, that environment of privacy and quiet so necessary for healthy, mental and physical development.”²² Although population growth may have been at the heart of the White Australia project, sexual impulses, motherhood and femininity were to be strictly regulated and protected by judicious selection of any foreign ideas.

22. “The One-Roomed House,” 103–04.

Stowe’s attacks did not perturb the Griffins who managed to build a working prototype of the one-roomed house concept in two houses, firstly in Frankston, Victoria in the Mornington peninsula in 1919 and then the following year in their celebrated home, Philotia. The kitchen, bath and bed were placed into niches along the building envelope and surrounded a central square living space. Adjustable drapery gave a modicum of privacy.²³ Burley Griffin knew there would be trouble getting building approval for such a radical reconception of what constituted a dwelling. Instead he claimed to the council that the design for what would come to be their main residence was simply a doll house.²⁴

23. Donald Leslie Johnson, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin* (South Melbourne, Vic.: Macmillan, 1977), 60.

24. Johnson, *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, 62.

Yet by 1924 when Lynch and Rees designed the huts at Kissing Point, they too adopted the one-roomed house concept. In contrast, their planning was far more pragmatic, containing none of the nuances or spatial richness found in the Griffins’ “doll house.” In an adaptation of the mess hall, huts integrated the bedroom and living room by “having collapsible beds that can be used as a lounge in the daytime and bedroom at night.”²⁵

25. “Holiday Homes, Kissing Point, Townsville,” *Daily Mail*, May 09, 1924, 15.

It seems surprising that the many newspaper reports on the huts never questioned this aspect of the design given earlier resistance to a shared living and bed room. In the more relaxed holiday atmosphere, some conventions could be challenged with little comment. When the first hut opened in 1924, the living room was described as “cheery” by the *Brisbane Courier*, with a casual mention that the beds were disguised as “settees with coloured covers and cushions bearing the C.W.A. sign.”²⁶ Though essentially a single volume, visual privacy still had to be addressed. Two screened dressing rooms at the rear of the space maintained the privacy that Stowe had thought so essential to mental and physical development.

26. “By Northern Seas. Townsville’s Holiday Hut,” *The Brisbane Courier*, October 23, 1924, 11.

At the heart of this debate about the one roomed house therefore was a debate about bedroom behaviour. As the social historian,

27. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols. (1939, Oxford; B/well, 1982), 139.

28. David Walker, "Australia, Asia and Cultural Anxiety: Inaugural Aha Anniversary Public Lecture, Given at the Grand Hotel, Mildura on 29 September," *History Australia* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-7

29. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 139.

Norbert Elias, has argued in his classic history of manners, *The Civilising Process* from the sixteenth, up to the early twentieth century, the bedroom became increasingly separated from social life, relied on to screen the most 'animal' drives from public view.²⁷ Though Elias was largely describing differences in European manners, one of his key conclusions was that in order to understand any change in behaviour that sought to civilise a group, it is necessary to investigate the fears that gave rise to such changes in conduct.

Stowe sought to maintain Australia's British heritage, which Griffin was threatening to overthrow with his importation of Japanese and American practices. Australians, located at the periphery of the British Empire, feared imperial decline, as David Walker has argued, lending a "survivalist anxiety," particularly to the sense of any Asian influence over the country.²⁸ On the other hand Lynch and Rees could, in 1924, freely adopt the one room house plan, for a set of holiday homes in tropical Queensland, without any comment about cultural degeneration in the local press. When Griffin and Stowe first argued about the one roomed house, Australia was in the middle of the Great War. The C.W.A. arose out of the experiences of that war, in particular the necessity for the wives of soldier settlers in outback Australia, to find coping mechanisms to overcome issues of isolation and loneliness. The holiday was one such means of coping. Yet it also offered a different set of social expectations regarding domestic behaviour. Elias highlights a general relaxation in attitudes towards the bedroom between the pre-war and post-war era which he connected with "the growing mobility of society, with the spread of sport, hiking and travel, and also with the relatively early separation of young people from the family community."²⁹

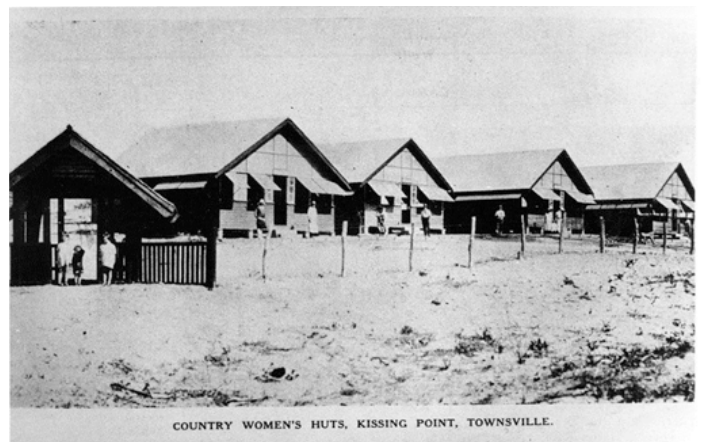


Figure 4: "The Country Womens Association (CWA) Huts at the Strand, Kissing Point, 1932." Townsville: Townsville Library, 1932.



Climatic Reform

Changing post-war attitudes to bedroom behaviour, and the different social norms of the holiday may help explain how the one roomed hut came to be accepted. However, the design of the building envelope of the huts reveals firstly how the CWA renewed emphasis on physiological comfort in tropical medicine sought to reform entrenched attitudes to housing, and secondly how Lynch demonstrated his critique of medical beliefs that the external verandah was the “panacea for all tropical house troubles.”³⁰

30. “Tropical Architecture,” 5.

With the enactment of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, there were few new sources of domestic labour in Northern Queensland.³¹ The lack of servants in the home came to be seen as one of the chief differentiators of the tropical Australian house and its Imperial counterparts and a cause for reform of the dwelling. In Queensland, the need for the housewife to conserve energy in the face of a sapping tropical climate, recast British and American solutions for efficient kitchen layouts and labour saving devices to remove “drudge” from the home. In Kissing Point, Lynch and Rees reduced the kitchen to a mere ten by eight foot galley with space for ironing, cooking and washing. They located it within the hut on the south-west side, with head-height partitions between the two dressing rooms and the main living room. A glazed door opened to the outside to provide light, access and ventilation if left open. The pictorial in the *Brisbane Courier*, on the opening of the first hut, paid special attention to the hut’s kitchen. It noted how it was equipped, singling out the gas stove, gas copper and gas iron, along with the concrete tubs in the laundry, claiming that they did “much as to keep housework down to a minimum”.³² Labour saving devices as David Jeremiah has argued, were a means for the middle class in Britain to maintain their lifestyle in the face of rising labour costs and post-war social change. In contrast, the holiday homes of the QCWA were a means for Australia’s rural class to take a break from their everyday lifestyle and access conveniences that were previously out of reach. By today’s standards the kitchen may seem small and rudimentary but the convenience of the huts and associated laundry was luxurious to holiday-makers who came from homes without even an “indoor water tap inside the dwelling.”³³ In Kissing Point, holiday makers were still expected to cook, clean and wash for themselves. However labour saving devices considerably reduced the amount of time and effort to do this, allowing members devote more time for leisure, rest and play.

31. B.W. Higman, “Testing the Boundaries of White Australia: Domestic Servants and Immigration Policy, 1901–45,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 22, no. 1 (2003): 1–21.

32. “By Northern Seas. Townsville’s Holiday Hut,” *Brisbane Courier*, October 23, 1924, 11.

33. Pagliano, *Country Women*, 126.

34. Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 114.

35. Breinl and Young, "Tropical Australia and Its Settlement."

36. Breinl and Young, "Tropical Australia and Its Settlement," 21.

The director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine, Anton Breinl and his associate W. J. Young were interested in links between climate, physiological comfort and productivity following the work of their contemporary J. D. Haldane on how the humidity of mines in England affected worker output.³⁴ Their landmark paper on "Tropical Australia and its Settlement" from 1919 included work by Lynch and his previous partner, Walter Hunt. Breinl and Young saw the need for comfort not only as a means to increase productivity, but also a way to overcome the unsettled nature of workers attracted to Northern Queensland. The problem for the doctors was that most houses were both substandard in their climatic adaptation and its inhabitants were willing to put up with discomfort due to the "unsettled mental condition of a migratory population".³⁵ Experts struggled to find a suitable, economical model for housing. While Breinl and Young could offer pronouncements on climatic design in 1919, they were not knowledgeable in the procurement of buildings. They turned instead to Lynch and Hunt for recommendations "for small dwellings suitable for North Queensland and costing from £200 to £600." Lynch and Hunt outlined thirteen recommendations regarding ideal orientation, verandahs, ventilation strategies, minimum size, efficient circulation, the need to raise buildings off the ground, cyclone resistance and daylighting. Most of them were unremarkable and agreed with other recommendations for tropical dwellings that Breinl brought reader's attention to in the same paper. However it was Lynch and Hunt's preference for enclosed space rather than open verandah that broke with tropical orthodoxy. Though Lynch and Hunt recommended nine foot verandahs to the front and rear of a building, they noted that:

3. Buildings should not be more than one room in depth.
4. The size of a room built under the most favourable circumstances should be regulated by the number of prospective occupants. Eight hundred cubic feet per head would be a fair minimum.
 - a. Side verandahs and excess widths to other verandahs should not be constructed at the expense of the size of the rooms. Large rooms and limited verandah space are infinitely better than small rooms and wide verandahs.³⁶

Lynch and Hunt's suggestion that "large rooms and limited verandah space are infinitely better than small rooms and wide verandahs" called into question earlier medical references in the



paper that advocated using wide verandahs to shade walls on each side of the house. During a period when the verandah became, as David Bridgeman puts it “the defining characteristic of a building in the tropics,”³⁷ Lynch and Hunt’s rejection of the verandah is significant and points to alternative solutions to the provision of domestic thermal comfort.

37. David Bridgeman, *Acclimatisation Architecture at the Top End of Australia* (Canberra: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 2003).

Analysing the Kissing Point huts, one finds that Lynch followed through on at least nine of the thirteen recommendations himself and Hunt gave in 1919 for an economical tropical house. The Kissing Point huts must be viewed as a practical test of the earlier theory, in particular demonstrating that it was possible to create comfortable houses in Northern Queensland without resort to the verandah. Lynch and his colleagues placed greater emphasis on ventilation, arguing for houses to be only one room deep, with walls separated from the eaves—in effect turning the interior into an adjustable verandah. Period photos of the huts show little evidence that Lynch and Rees included mechanical details Lynch had recommended such as roof ventilators or ceiling fans. Other than consideration for cyclone resistance, the QCWA huts must be considered a very early built example of architecture that embodied the research on climatic adaptation for Europeans by the Australian Institute for Tropical Medicine.

It seems likely that though Lynch and his colleagues understood how to adapt a building to the tropical climate and had amassed a wealth of experience, they struggled to find clients to implement their recommendations. When Breinl and Young published their paper in 1919, they referred to “a leading firm of architects with twenty years’ experience in the north,” who claimed never to have designed “one cottage as they know a cottage should be designed, on account of the prejudice against the introduction of novel ideas.”³⁸ So why was it that five years later the QCWA—which we think of today as a conservative organisation—were open to Lynch and his colleagues’ more radical ideas about climate? Firstly, the QCWA were a newly formed organisation looking to make their mark. They stepped in to improve the welfare of rural women because government and religious organisations were not doing this. In fact, from the outset, they claimed to be “non-sectarian and apolitical.” Their early days were not marked by conservatism, but liberation, seeking to improve the social wellbeing and health of countrywomen. The seaside homes fitted easily into this mandate. It was not simply about giving country women a cheap holiday, but also meant, as the Governor Sir Matthew Nathan recognised, that

38. Breinl and Young, “Tropical Australia and Its Settlement.”

39. "Country Women's Association: £25,000 Appeal." *Longreach Leader*, June 13, 1924, 6.

their members would associate health with recreation.³⁹ In tropical Australia, the control of climate had become intertwined with the health of Europeans. While doctors at the Australian Institute for Tropical Medicine downplayed the risks of climate to male productivity, they began to associate the uncomfortable internal environment of the average home with tropical nervousness which they believed was exacerbated by women's confinement at home. The main solutions, proposed by both tropical medicine and architects like Lynch, Hunt and Rees to deal with climate focused largely on the design of the building envelope. It was the building envelope with its awnings and openings that modified the thermal environment and according to the thinking, protected the health of those inside. While the QCWA did not propose to reform their members' homes, they did emphasise the health benefits of a holiday, though this was more about the benefits that came from the location and a change of scene.

However, it should come as no surprise that it was in Townsville that the QCWA adopted a prototypical tropical house in their design of the huts at Kissing Point. One of the driving forces behind the formation of the Northern branch of the QCWA was Dr. Phyllis Cilento, who shared many of the beliefs of her husband, Dr. Raphael Cilento, director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine. It was at Cilento's house that the branch was formed in 1923, while the first objective for the newly-formed branch was the provision of seaside homes. This was a project that offered the perfect platform to address medical and social anxieties about the welfare of women.

Conclusion

As to the adoption of the one roomed house, over a more conventional house plan, one can only hypothesise. While holidays may have created a more relaxed attitude towards the bedroom in the inter-war period, family propriety was still important. Every hut contained two 'dressing rooms'—small, screened spaces at the back of the house. Perhaps the primary reason for the 'one roomed house' was connected with both comfort and economics. The houses were economical in both material and space. Certainly they needed to be economical to make it easier for each regional branch to raise funds for their construction. For thermal reasons also, a single space worked well. Lynch and Hunt believed that a tropical house should be at most one room deep. This enabled free



flowing ventilation, which a screen wall around a bedroom would inhibit. A louvred screen would not give any acoustic privacy, while visual privacy for dressing and undressing was provided by the two dressing rooms. Also, by reducing the size of the huts to twenty six feet by twenty six feet, and providing adjustable shutters, Lynch and Rees eliminated the need for a verandah, therefore proving that a verandah-less house could control climate in the Australian tropics.

Rather than describe the amount of space that came with each hut, the QCWA and newspapers described the modern conveniences and independence the huts provided.⁴⁰ Therefore it was not the quantity of space but the reduction of effort that denoted comfort and an improvement in living standards. Yet in the end, the combined living and bedroom space did not prove successful, nor did the complete absence of any verandah. The huts at Kissing Point were demolished in 1984 but a near-identical hut in Bowen, designed by Rees in 1925, still survives. The form of the original hut remains, with the addition of a front verandah. The dressing rooms have since been converted into small bedrooms and the main living space was subdivided to provide a master bedroom. The building is in poor condition and though not heritage-listed, merits conservation as a prototype of what would become known as “tropical architecture,” for its role in popularising the holiday and for the connection with improving the lives of ordinary women.

40. “By Northern Seas,” 11.

The limited budget of the project, paid for through voluntary fundraising allowed Lynch to put in practice his earlier recommendations to the Australian Institute for Tropical Medicine for economical tropical housing. In the architecture of the huts this allowed for the reconfigurations of the internal arrangements placing greater emphasis on the thermal rather than social performance of the building skin. At the same time the reforming nature of the Queensland Country Women’s Association and their personal connection via the Cilento family to the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine, meant that for a time it was open to novel solutions.

Therefore, the development of the QCWA seaside homes in Townsville cannot be explained simply as an early example of ‘tropical architecture’ that found new techniques to control climate. Its genealogy reveals how the holiday house became a testing ground about acceptable living standards of Europeans in tropical Australia.