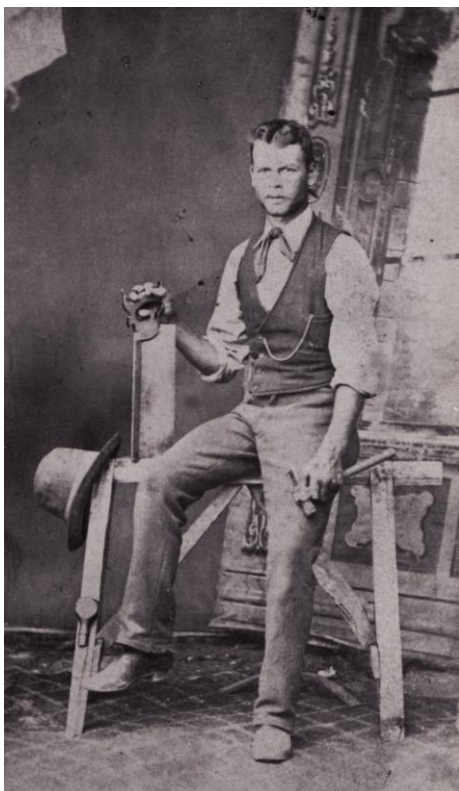


## **The Master Builder who built Canberra - Frederick Young**

While the architects of early Canberra are well acknowledged, the constructors of many significant buildings are largely unrecognized. Do you know who laid the foundation stones for Canberra's Commencement column, who built the famous Yarralumla Woolshed, who built the three storey extension of the Yarralumla homestead for Frederick Campbell, who constructed the administration offices at Acton, and was involved in building the spire at St John's Anglican Church in Reid? His name was Frederick John Young.



*Fred Young c 1871. CDHS photograph 2136, RID 15389*

On 12 March 1913 the foundation stones for a commencement column were laid on Kurrajong Hill and Australia's new capital city was named 'Canberra' by Lady Denman. Six year old Evan Armstrong was a small boy in the milling crowd of adults, straining to get a view of the proceedings, when he found himself hoisted onto the shoulders of 'a big kind faced policeman'. From his vantage point, Evan could see the Governor General, the Prime Minister and the most important man of all - his grandfather, Fred Young.

Frederick Young was born in 1854 in the Jembaicumbene gold fields near Majors Creek to the south of Braidwood. His mother died shortly after his birth and his father, a sailor, died when Young was five. Margaret Cregan and her husband Eddie were also living on the gold fields when she lost a baby around the time of Young's birth. When Young's father returned to the sea he asked the Cregans to care for his son and after his death they raised him as their own.

Despite an absence of schooling, Young taught himself to read, write and set type while working at a printer in Braidwood. At the age of nineteen he moved to Queanbeyan and began working for a builder, John Kealman, possibly as an apprentice. He was involved in the building of the gaol, post office and public school in Queanbeyan and worked on the construction of the steeple on St. John's church in 1878. According to one story, while working on the top of the steeple he took off his vest and placed it nearby, but a gust of wind blew it into the air and it fell to the ground. Unfortunately, his watch was attached to the vest and he expected it to be broken. However when Young climbed down from the church steeple he found it was still working.

He married Amelia Webber of Rob Roy in 1876 and the Youngs lived at Duntroon for several years before Fred built his family home, 'Belle Vue', on land near Uriarra Road in Queanbeyan, just before it crosses the railway line into the ACT. Young Street in Queanbeyan marks the location of their home.

Prior to leaving for England in 1890 Frederick Campbell selected a site for a dairy on the river flats of the Molonglo River on his Yarralumla estate and hired Young to build it. The dairy was later known as Riverview. Upon his return he found that Young had ignored his instructions and built the dairy on a nearby rise. Campbell was angry with Young, but shortly after the Molonglo flooded and inundated his selected site while the dairy itself remained high and dry. Young earned himself a £100 bonus and an unexpected opportunity.



*Riverview c 1932 with Kitty, Robert, John and Jack Corkhill in front.  
CDHS photograph 1055, RID 14758.*

Impressed by his craftsmanship and initiative, Campbell hired Young to build the three story extension to the Yarralumla homestead, a project he started in 1891. Young built further extensions, including the large reception room where the first Federal Cabinet meeting of 1924 was held. The Governor-General now lives in this house. Young built the Victorian gothic Burnima homestead near Bombala for Henry Tollemache Edwards in 1896, the stables, outhouses and laundry at Yarralumla in 1902 and in 1904 built the Yarralumla shearing shed. Many Canberrans will recall attending the many dances and occasions at the Yarralumla Woolshed. The following

year he was commissioned by Andrew Jackson Cunningham to remodel and extend Lanyon homestead.

In 1911 Young was appointed as the foreman of Works in the Federal Territory and amongst his first tasks was the construction of the administration offices in Acton. It was he who supervised the delivery of the stones and the construction of the commencement column, grandstands and public facilities for the ceremony on Kurrajong Hill in 1913. For Evan Armstrong, the years would not dim his memory of the laying of the stones. 'I can quite distinctly remember Grandfather and the little silver trowel that he used as I'd never seen one before, and he just marked out the position where the stone was to be, and then someone else taken over and moved it into place. I was tremendously proud of my Grandfather up there.'



*The man standing on the stones is Fred Young supervising the commencement column stones being placed on 12 March 1913. Source: Michael Hall.*

Fred Young left a huge legacy to the people of the Canberra region which deserves to be better recognised. He died in Queanbeyan on 30 July 1943 aged 89 and was buried in the Anglican section of the Riverside Cemetery.

**This Quick Read is based on an article by Michael Hall 'A Splendid Destiny' in *Canberra History News* edition 445, February/March 2013, pages 6-20.**