

Alice Springs Supreme Court opening

Extract of speeches

The full transcript of the opening can be found on the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory website www.supremecourt.nt.gov.au/media/speeches.htm

JOHN STIRK – Lawyer Director, Povey Stirk Lawyers & Notaries

This is the third of the court houses in Parsons Street. Parsons Street triangulates the various locations the courts have sat. It is not a masonic conspiracy. The first court house was completed in 1928. The *Northern Australia Act* gave complementary authority to the Supreme Court of Central Australia and sittings were to be held in Alice Springs on the same basis as those to be held in Darwin. Sadly, on 1 June 1931 the *Northern Australia Act* was repealed and the Northern Territory was administered once again as one entity.

Where the 1980 court house is now erected was a residence inhabited by another well-known figure of the times, Creed Lovegrove. There were stockyards for holding horses and camels for the police mounted patrols. On 6 July 1935, the first sittings of the Northern Territory Supreme Court in Alice Springs was held and a court room was added to the building for its use as a court house.

When I came to Alice Springs in 1980 the old court house had been expanded to include the judicial flat and the judicial garden with its lemon tree under which Gin and Tonics were served after court on summer evenings. The last Supreme Court sittings of the court house were in May 1980.



Senator Durack, the then Attorney General had progressed the construction of the new Alice Springs court house using some of the structural features that would then appear in the High Court.

The opening was on 9 July 1980 and was a far grander affair than today.

The Supreme Court did not formally sit until August of 1980 when the four Judges of the court, Sir William Forster, Jim Muirhead and the two fifty year olds, John Toohey and John Gallop conducted the formal opening of the Supreme Court.

RUSSELL GOLDFLAM – President, Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory, Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission

The building, and the room are, of course, important. But what gives them life and what gives life to the law administered in these buildings... is not their architectural style or scale, but the people in them. The judges, the lawyers, the staff, the witnesses, the onlookers and, most importantly of all, the parties and, as has often been said, the losing party, which in this Supreme Court means in the vast majority of matters, the accused in a criminal proceeding. In the vast majority of those cases here in Alice Springs, that accused is Indigenous. And what is he, and more often than ever now, she, to make of this place, and the people who lay down the law in it?... For the foreseeable future, we should expect that many Aboriginal people who enter this building will feel that they are entering a foreign country, where the law that matters to them does not matter.

TANIA COLLINS – Inhouse Counsel and Supreme Court Practice Manager, Central Australian Aboriginal legal Aid Service

In speaking here today at the opening of this new Supreme Court I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the Arrernte people, traditional owners past, present and future of Mbantua where we meet. This building is in the spiritual heartland of Arrernte country. Adjacent in the

Todd Mall is a very important spiritual site, an old gum tree that plays a very important role in the dreamtime of this region.

The physicality of this new building looms over it just as our law literally looms over all Aboriginal people of Central Australia...

It is a privilege to be part of this ceremonial sitting representing the second oldest Aboriginal service in this country... It has been staffed, and continues to be staffed, by dedicated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in helping the rich and diverse Aboriginal people of this region navigate and comprehend our complex criminal justice system. I look forward to assisting them in the future in this new building.

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