



# Suggestion 4

Ronald Sait

7 pages

ACT Redistribution suggestion uploaded from the AEC website.

Name: Ronald Sait

Organisation:

[REDACTED]

Additional information: Suggestion for Canberra's third electorate is "CAMPBELL". A marker stone opposite Lake Tuggeranong College marks the southern boundary of a land grant to Robert Campbell Senior. This land grant extended north to the current Duntroon Military College. The Campbell family had a significant influence on the early development of Canberra & Sydney (see They Built A Nation, F.Clancy, 1939)

## Campbell, Robert (1769–1846)

by [Margaret Steven](#)

This article was published in [Australian Dictionary of Biography](#), Volume 1, (MUP), 1966

Robert Campbell (1769-1846), merchant, pastoralist, politician and philanthropist, was born on 28 April 1769 at Greenock, Scotland, the youngest surviving son of ten children of John Campbell, laird of Ashfield and writer and town clerk of Greenock, and his wife Agnes, née Paterson. After some unprofitable commercial experience in Greenock, Robert at 27 went to India to join his elder brother John, a partner in the Calcutta agency house of Campbell Clarke & Co., established in 1790. In January 1798, a few months after his arrival, Robert was admitted to a partnership and in July 1799 the Clarkes gave up their interest in the firm which became Campbell & Co.

In 1796 Campbell Clarke & Co. had sent their first cargo to New South Wales in the *Sydney Cove*, which had been wrecked off the Australian coast. In April 1798 Robert Campbell left in their ship, the *Hunter*, for New South Wales on another attempt to develop a trading connexion there. Apparently satisfied with the prospects, he sailed for India in the *Barwell* in August 1798, and returned to Sydney with another cargo in the *Hunter* in February 1800. With the governor's permission he took up residence on land bought in 1798 at Dawes Point, where he had begun to build warehouses and a private wharf. By 1810 another wharf had been added, behind which in its own garden stood Campbell's house 'finished in an elegant manner with colonades & two fronts'.

Though Campbell's request for permission to establish himself at Sydney as a resident merchant apparently was never pronounced upon by the British government, Campbell & Co. was soon heavily involved in the Australian trade, having £50,000 worth of goods in its Sydney warehouses in 1804. The firm also engaged to fulfil contracts for supplies from India, mainly livestock for the Sydney and Derwent settlements, which Governor [Philip Gidley King](#) calculated had brought them £16,000 from the government alone between 1800 and 1804. Their trade expanded so steadily that by 1808 Campbell had already had bills defaulted on to the extent of £10,000. Within a few years these regular shipments to the colony noticeably ameliorated the previous pressures of scarcity and monopoly. Though Governor King had occasion to criticize Campbell & Co.'s attempts to import excessive quantities of spirits, the merchant's name became synonymous with fair trading, reduced prices and generous credit, and was publicly acknowledged by small settlers, officers and governor alike. A memorial from 200 settlers in 1804 concluded, 'But for you, we had still been a prey to the Mercenary unsparing Hand of Avarice and Extortion'.

In search of profitable return cargoes Campbell engaged in and largely initiated the colonial sealing industry. In January 1805 Campbell and his family travelled to England in his *Lady Barlow*, with a cargo of colonial-caught oil and fur skins for the English market, in technical contravention of the rights of the East India Co. He believed that it was time for a more generous definition of the commercial rights of New South Wales as the colony lacked established staples and was hampered by trade monopolies. Though the *Lady Barlow* was duly seized for illegal entry to the Port of London, her position was resolved with no great commercial loss to Campbell. With the support of [Sir Joseph Banks](#) he even secured permission for a second colonial cargo to follow the *Lady Barlow*. Under this impetus a bill was drawn up to recognize New South Wales as a regular colony and to qualify it for certain valuable trade concessions, but the Grenville ministry lost office in March 1807 before it could be passed.

Campbell, now a man of substance and identified with colonial aspirations, returned to the colony in his *Albion* in August 1806. Governor [William Bligh](#) was told that he had performed 'the greatest services to the inhabitants . . . that the price of his merchandise was the same in time of scarcity as in abundance, that he had advanced a great sum of money, and protected the poor and distressed settler; and that in fact he was the only private pillar which supported the honest people of the Colony'. Campbell, whom Bligh 'always found ... just and humane and a gentleman

like merchant', was drawn into the restricted colonial society which gravitated around the governor. Bligh, convinced of dormant opposition to his regime, turned to the merchant for advice and support. Campbell, with an intimate knowledge of the colonial economy, quickly became involved in public administration. In May 1807 he was appointed a magistrate and Naval Officer, and in June he became, in effect, colonial treasurer when management of the police and orphan funds devolved on him. As Naval Officer Campbell became responsible for the official action taken to retrieve the spirit stills illegally imported by [John Macarthur](#). During the events which culminated in the deposition of Bligh, Campbell showed himself active and courageous. Publicly, by association, and privately he espoused the governor's attempts at reform, convinced that it was his liberalizing economic measures that had goaded his opponents into open rebellion. In Campbell's opinion Bligh 'wished to administer justice to all ranks of people'. Campbell's attitude exposed him to the hostility of the rebels and this had such adverse effects on his business interests that he claimed he was never fully able to repair the damage.

When Bligh was deposed, Campbell, who had been dining at Government House, was put under military arrest and subsequently was dismissed as treasurer, Naval Officer and collector of taxes. On the grounds that he was suspected of trying to establish a trading monopoly in collusion with Bligh, the rebel faction supervised the activities of Campbell & Co. with expensive officiousness, supporting without investigation any damaging allegations concerning irregularities in their trade. In June 1809 Campbell was tried for disobedience in refusing to officiate as coroner; he argued that as he had been charged officially with certain offences he deemed himself incompetent to hold any civil situation until such charges had been disproved; but the court, whose authority Campbell refused to acknowledge, found him guilty and fined him £50. Although his business partner and his brother-in-law, Commissary [John Palmer](#), were both goaled by the rebels, Campbell openly remained a supporter of their victims and a focus for Bligh's allies.

In January 1810 he was one of the first of those reinstated in their former offices by Governor [Lachlan Macquarie](#); two months later when he resigned as Naval Officer, 'conceiving the Duties interfered with his Mercantile Pursuits', Macquarie thanked him for his 'Zeal, Fidelity & Attention'.

On 12 May Campbell, with his family, sailed unwillingly for England in the *Hindustan* to appear as a witness for Bligh at Lieutenant-Colonel [George Johnston](#)'s trial. In April 1812 he gave evidence before the select committee on transportation. During this enforced exile Campbell attempted to look after his business affairs. This personal intervention was timely, for early in 1811 his London agent failed, being over £30,000 in Campbell's debt. He contrived to postpone collapse in Sydney; but when he returned to New South Wales in the *Sydney Packet* on 18 March 1815 he found his house, goods and lands mortgaged and his business too encumbered with liabilities to be maintained. Campbell & Co. was liquidated and for the next few years Campbell was engaged in sorting out the neglected and complicated business of the previous five years in an attempt to honour his obligations, while his family lived frugally on the produce of his farms and rental of warehouses and land. In 1816 and 1817 he sat on the Court of Civil Jurisdiction. In November 1816 he participated in the informal meeting of magistrates and principal merchants that resulted in the establishment of the Bank of New South Wales in which he was an original shareholder. Governor Macquarie supported the conversion of the leases of the land on which Campbell's business stood in 1814 and 1816, and granted him 1500 acres (607 ha) in the Bathurst district in January 1818. Campbell was secretary of the Savings Bank instituted in July 1819 to encourage the 'Industrious Poor of the Colony'. His association with this institution was so strong that the Sydney branch became known as 'Campbell's Bank'.

By 1820, despite continuing liabilities Campbell's fortune had begun to revive. In April he announced the establishment of an agency and commission business on which, with great perseverance and industry, he was to rebuild an imposing mercantile establishment. In 1821 he entered the intercolonial trade, combining the wheat exports of a growing Derwent market with the needs of the local fishery, and sending commissions to such settlements as Newcastle. His connexions with London and Indian houses revived, aided by the increased handling of wool. By 1825 Campbell was a shipowner again, having acquired the old *Active* which was sent to Calcutta in 1826 'converted into quite a new vessel at vast expense'. In 1826 Campbell's wharf became a

private one for the first time, and next year Campbell admitted his two eldest sons to partnership in the re-established Campbell & Co.

With the revival and extension of his business Campbell became prominent again in public affairs. Already recognized as 'father of the mercantile community', he was requested to allow his name to be placed first on the list of members of the newly established Chamber of Commerce, and became a member of its original committee. On 17 July 1825 Campbell was appointed one of three private members of the newly constituted Legislative Council. Reappointed to the enlarged council in 1829, he remained a member until it was replaced by the reformed council in 1843. Campbell alone of the private members opposed any part of Governor [Sir Ralph Darling's](#) controversial Stamp Act, but later he was one of those who signed a memorial dissociating themselves from those who forwarded charges against Darling to England in the form of an impeachment. In 1830 Campbell was one of six who petitioned the King on the need to abolish transportation to New South Wales and encourage free immigration instead. He agreed with Darling in opposing the general introduction of trial by jury, but in 1833 incurred unpopularity with Governor [\(Sir\) Richard Bourke](#) by his adamant opposition to the jury bill, passed by the council when Campbell was absent. In 1837 Bourke complained to the Colonial Office of Campbell's unfitness as a representative, because of his insistence in claiming that the government had awarded him £8000, and not £4000 as had been generally understood, as compensation for the loss of his ship *Sydney* while it was under government contract. Certainly the original award had not been over-generous but Campbell refused to repay the Treasury bills that by mistake had been paid to him in England as well as in New South Wales, until forced to do so by legal proceedings in 1840. Nevertheless, in 1844 Gipps included his name in a list of colonists whom he considered eligible for a local order of merit.

In May 1803 Campbell had purchased the 900 acres (364 ha) of [William Cox's](#) Canterbury estate, mainly to accommodate the overflow of imported cattle rejected by the government, which by 1806 made him the largest private holder of cattle. By 1810 he had increased his land by purchase to 1611 acres (652 ha) on which he ran 640 cattle, 266 sheep and 20 horses. In January 1825, for the land which he was allowed to select in part compensation for the loss of the *Sydney* (in addition to the money he received), he took 4000 acres (1619 ha) in the newly discovered Limestone Plains area in Argyle County, the present site of Canberra, which he stocked with sheep in 1825. In April 1829 the grant was made 5000 acres (2024 ha), having been 'over-valued' in 'that remote part of the Colony'. However, Campbell realized its potential and in 1827 had received permission from the governor to buy another 5000 acres (2024 ha) across Molonglo River. An adjacent grant of 1060 acres (429 ha), authorized in December 1830, brought his holdings to the maximum allowance of 2560 acres (1036 ha), though Darling thought this still not proportioned either to Campbell's services to the government or to what other settlers were accustomed to receive. During the 1830s, however, Campbell consolidated his holdings by purchasing some 8000 acres (3238 ha), so that by the 1840s he owned the choicest selections of the Limestone Plains, while his stock squatted on immense runs at Delegate and Mount Cooper, and he had other interests at Boorowa and Bathurst. Before 1830 Campbell did not visit his Argyle land, which he later named Duntroon after an ancestral home of his clan; but he lived there increasingly after the death of his wife in 1833.

For many years Campbell was associated with the London Missionary Society which acknowledged his 'constant kindness and effective acts of friendship shewn towards our Society and its concerns'. The society's missionary activity in the Pacific was early blended with speculative trading and Campbell acted for it as agent, banker and supplier at half his usual commission. Campbell also was friendly with the society's agent, [Samuel Marsden](#), who furnished him with an introduction to William Wilberforce on his first visit to England. Campbell transacted Marsden's personal business during his absences from the colony and bought sheep for him in England. In 1807 and 1820 he acted as agent for the society in place of Marsden. In 1825 Campbell was appointed one of the trustees for land granted to the society at Yawanba (Reid's Mistake) for an Aboriginal mission. This connexion perhaps drew Campbell more closely into ecclesiastical society. In 1808 [Rowland Hassall](#), a former missionary and another of his intimates, acknowledged Campbell's generous subscription of thirty guineas to the Portland Head Society for the Proagation of Christian Knowledge.

Bred a Presbyterian, he was connected with this church's activities for many years, endowing and attending Scots Church in Sydney. In August 1828 he signed a petition for government assistance for the salary of a schoolteacher for a school connected with this church and in 1831 was signatory to a petition for government aid for support of an itinerant minister of the Scottish National Church. In 1842 he joined the Presbyterians of New South Wales in their request that the government-supported stipend of two Presbyterian ministers be continued. A growing connexion with the Church of England, strengthened by the affiliations of his wife and intimates was emphasized by generous endowments. He supported the plans and petitions which preceded the establishment of The King's Schools at Sydney and Parramatta in 1832. Campbell's interest in St John's Church at Canberra provided for at least half the cost of construction. In 1837 he gave land and money towards the cost of building St Peter's Church, Cook's River, and contributed funds towards an Anglican cathedral for Sydney. Other churches, at South Bargo, Yass and St Philip's in Sydney, shared in his bounty. During his later years he was increasingly attracted by the stability of the Church of England and in March 1843 Bishop [William Grant Broughton](#) administered his first Communion to him in a church of his own building. Campbell died at Duntroon on 15 April 1846, and was buried at St John's, Parramatta.

In November 1801 he had married Sophia Palmer (1777-1833) the commissary's sister; they had seven children, John, Robert, [Charles](#), Sophia Ives, Sarah, George and Frederick; six of these survived him to maintain the tradition he began.

### Select Bibliography

- C. E. T. Newman, *The Spirit of Wharf House* (Syd, 1961)
- M. Steven, *Merchant Campbell 1769-1846* (Melb, 1965)
- and for bibliography.

### Related Thematic Essay

- Karen Fox, [A City and its People: Canberra in the ADB](#)

### Related Entries in NCB Sites

[view family tree](#)

- [Campbell, Sophia](#) (wife) 
- [Campbell, John](#) (son) 
- [Campbell, Robert](#) (son) 
- [Campbell, Charles](#) (son) 
- [Campbell, George Palmer](#) (son) 
- [Palmer, Susannah](#) (sister-in-law) 
- [Palmer, John](#) (brother-in-law) 
- [Campbell junior, Robert](#) (nephew) 
- [Close, Sophia Susannah](#) (niece by marriage) 
- [Palmer, George Thomas](#) (nephew by marriage) 
- [Stephen, Lucy](#) (granddaughter) 
- [Campbell, Frederick Arthur](#) (grandson) 
- [Campbell, Frederick Arthur](#) (grandson) 

- [Brooks, Richard](#) (business partner) 
- [Hassall, Thomas](#) (employee) 
- [Kable, Henry](#) (acquaintance) 

## Citation details

Margaret Steven, 'Campbell, Robert (1769–1846)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/campbell-robert-1876/text2197>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 7 November 2017.

This article was first published in hardcopy in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 1, (MUP), 1966*

View the [front pages](#) for Volume 1



**Robert Campbell** (1769-1846), by unknown artist  
 National Library of Australia, [nla.pic-an11030057-206](http://nla.pic-an11030057-206)

## Life Summary [\[details\]](#)

### Birth

28 April 1769  
Greenock, Renfrewshire, Scotland

### Death

15 April 1846  
New South Wales, Australia

### Cultural Heritage

- [Scottish](#)

### Religious Influence

- [Anglican](#)
- [Presbyterian](#)

### Occupation

- [anti-transportationist](#)
- [banker](#)
- [benefactor \(general\)](#)
- [general merchant](#)

- [grazier \(cattle\)](#)
- [grazier \(sheep\)](#)
- [magistrate](#)
- [Member of Upper House](#)
- [public servant](#)
- [squatter](#)
- [wharfinger](#)

## Australian Dictionary of Biography

An initiative of the [National Centre of Biography](#) at the [Australian National University](#)

© Copyright Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2006-2017

[Copyright](#) · [Disclaimer](#) · [Privacy Policy](#) · [Contact Us](#)