

East Block building, Canberra

Canberra's East Block building, which now houses the National Archives of Australia, was one of the three original buildings – along with the interim Parliament House and the West Block building – in the city's Parliamentary Triangle precinct. Originally known as Secretariat Building No. 1, East Block was designed by government architect John Smith Murdoch, who also designed Parliament House and West Block. Construction work commenced in 1925 and the building was ready for occupation in 1926.

The original name – Secretariat Building No. 1 – denotes the early intention that following the completion of Parliament House, and the move of the seat of government from Melbourne to Canberra, each Minister would be supported by a small secretariat, but most departmental staff were to remain in Melbourne. The secretariats would occupy East Block and West Block (then known as Secretariat Building No. 2).

East Block's best known tenant was the General Post Office. From 1927 the original Canberra Post Office operated from the wing of the building facing Queen Victoria Terrace, and became the point from which distances to and from Canberra were measured. Other government agencies housed in East Block included the Department of Commerce, the Department of Trade and Customs, the Auditor-General's office, and the Prime Minister's Department.

After comprehensive restoration and renovation, East Block was occupied by the National Archives in 1998.

Records relating to East Block

The National Archives in Canberra holds a considerable range of records including correspondence files, photographs, and architectural plans and drawings relating to the design, construction and subsequent maintenance of East Block. Examples of these are included in the tables below.

Correspondence files

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Secretariat Building No. 1, now known as Commonwealth Offices, East Block	1924–28	A6270, E2/28/2240

<u>Engineer's Drawing M3155A. Secretariat Building & Post Office Canberra. Heating</u>	1925	CT86/1, E
<u>No.1 Secretariat Building. Supply & installation of hot water system. (McAuley Bros. contract). Payment file</u>	1925–26	A6270, E2/26/656
<u>Commonwealth Offices (East Block) – additional work</u>	1927–30	CT86/1, 298
<u>Commonwealth Offices – East Block and West Block – internal renovations</u>	1934–36	A292, C6558A
<u>Erection of a new office block. Commonwealth Offices, East Block. Contractor – C Banks.</u>	1937	A295, 420
<u>Prime Minister's Department – East Block accommodation</u>	1951–67	A463, 1966/2911 part 1
<u>Alterations to East Block – final stage</u>	1963–65	A463, 1963/1387

Photographs

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Sheaffe papers</u>	1902–63	M4071
<u>28 photographs recording the construction of Parliament House and the Secretariat (now East Block)</u>	1924–25	M4071, 63
<u>Mildenhall photographs of early Canberra</u>	1921–35	A3560
<u>East Block under construction – north-east aspect</u>	1926	A3560, 36
<u>East Block from Parliament House</u>	1926	A3560, 143
<u>East Block from Queen Victoria Terrace</u>	1921–31	A3560, 304
<u>Parliament House and East Block under construction</u>	1926	A3560, 640
<u>Early stages of construction of East Block</u>	1925	A3560, 825
<u>East Block under construction</u>	1924–25	A3560, 827
<u>Parliament House and East Block from north</u>	1926	A3560, 2306
<u>East Block from west (Camp Hill)</u>	1926	A3560, 2384
<u>Policeman at East Block wearing helmet</u>	1927	A3560, 3682
<u>East Block offices and Canberra post office</u>	1934	A3560, 7412
<u>Entrance to East Block offices</u>	1927	A3560, 7756
<u>View of East Block</u>	1927–35	A3560, 7788

Architectural plans & drawings

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Aperture cards for ACT architectural plans and drawings</u>	1921–59*	A9663
<u>Foundation plan and cable tunnel details</u>	1924	A9663, A923
<u>Ground and first floor plan</u>	1924	A9663, A924
<u>Sections and elevations</u>	1924	A9663, A925
<u>Concrete stairs and entrance porch</u>	1925	A9663, A1057
<u>Half inch detail of front</u>	1925	A9663, A1099
<u>Bike shed</u>	1937	A9663, 7168

Detail of letter on front elevation	undated	A9663, 20201
<u>Boiler house</u>	undated	A9663, 20913
Detail of entrance door handles	1953	A9663, 22180
Reconstruction of paving	1954	A9663, 22468
Details of glazed partitions on ground floor	1954	A9663, 23749
Extensions – 1957	1957	A9663, 24499

* Most items in this series are not individually dated. The series date range provides some indication of when individual items were created.