

STURT ADDRESS 2022

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ANTIPODEAN DREAMS

Good afternoon. A very warm welcome to the 227th birthday celebration of Captain Charles Sturt. This year is the 55th anniversary of the birthday address. A tradition that is believed to have commenced in 1967, to celebrate the life of Charles Sturt and to recognise his contributions to Australian history. The birthday celebration is also an opportunity to thank all members of the community who invest their time, energy and finances into the Museum.

We find ourselves in a unique setting this year away from the colonial home of Charles Sturt, The Grange. Important upgrades to the Visitor Centre and exhibits are currently taking place. This year's birthday address will therefore focus on The Grange, including its past and present uses, as well as future plans.

For definition sake, the block of land housing the museum is known as the Charles Sturt Museum Precinct. The precinct comprises of the red-bricked house (i.e. The Grange), the adjacent Visitor Centre containing exhibits (i.e. former Caretaker's Cottage), the heritage gardens, and the park surrounding the house. The museum has welcomed tens of thousands of visitors through its doors over the years, from all age brackets. Current as of 2022, the museum's new website (<http://www.charlessturtmuseum.com.au/>) as well as its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/charlessturtmuseum>) are most informative resources. Please remember though to "Like" and "Share" us on Facebook when you visit the site.

Let's take an initial detour to discuss the role and significance of museums in society. By their very nature, people are curious and will visit a museum if there is a connection with the subject matter. Ideally, they will leave with fond memories of the experience as well as having learnt something new. A museum is therefore an important component of urban tourism and an important service to the community. At a micro level, the museum holds precious historical and cultural resources, and it takes the role of publicising, displaying and disseminating information. At the macro level, a museum is a powerful symbol of urban cultural development and cultural diversity. Our Charles Sturt Museum Precinct therefore plays a very important role in the public urban space of our wonderful city of Adelaide and the state of South Australia. At the micro-level, the Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust has direct influence while at the macro level we are usually governed by external forces.

Let's now return to the Grange and take a look at the micro- and macro-level activities and dynamics at play over the years. As a Trustee of the Board, I will also be sharing some of my reflections and insights too.

Part 1. A Brief History of The Grange before it became a Museum

The Grange and the adjacent Nursery Wing was built from 1840 to 1841, and it was a central feature of the 390-acre Sturt property.

Charles Sturt and his family lived in the home from 1841 to 1853. Following the family's departure to England in 1853, The Grange was leased to a variety tenants while still under the ownership of the Sturts. It was then sold in 1877, whereupon the land was subdivided to create the village of Grange. Over time, The Grange became more and more dilapidated and there was real risk of demolition in the 1950s. Demolition would mean the loss of a key component of the history of South Australia.

A public groundswell to save the Grange ebbed and flowed from the 1910s to 1950s, that coincided with key historical events, such as:

- Unveiling in 1916 of the Captain Charles Sturt Memorial in Victoria Square, as well as fund raising for the memorial in the years prior.
- On and off again lobbying for funding over a 40-year period.
- The 1951 Commonwealth Government's Jubilee Celebrations featuring a re-enactment of Charles Sturt's epic journey down the River Murray.
- Formation of the National Trust of South Australia in the 1950s and their adopting of The Grange for their first initial funding lobbying.

Part 2. First Generation Museum: 1967 to 2002

Here are some key dates and activities in the history of our museum, that represent a lot hard work over the years from many dedicated individuals:

- 1956: The Grange was purchased by The Henley & Grange Council, and with the strong support of the Mayor, D.J. Newlands.
- 1960: The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust (herein the *Trust*) was formed and incorporated, with the support of the Premier of South Australia, Sir Thomas Playford. The aim of the Trust was to secure and restore The Grange and to acknowledge Charles Sturt's contribution to South Australian and Australian history. In order to fund the restoration works, a public appeal was launched.
- 1961: Construction began on the Caretaker cottage, believed to be built on the foundations of the original Nursery Wing.
- 1965: Restoration commenced on the Grange exterior.
- 1966: Restoration commenced on the Grange interior. Total cost of new build and restoration was £8,740. This is the equivalent of about AUD\$250,000 today. During the restoration works, the title of The Grange was gifted to the Trust. Following restoration of the house, furniture, artworks, documents and artefacts belonging to Captain Charles Sturt and his family, were given to the Trust by the Sturt family in England. As of today, the Museum holds of collection of 824 items.
- 1967: The Charles Sturt museum, comprising of The Grange and Caretaker's Cottage, was officially opened by the Governor of South Australia, Lieutenant General Sir Eric Bastyan.
- 1969: The Grange was declared a Historic Relic.
- 1978: The Grange was placed on the Register of the National Estate.
- 1980: The Grange was registered as an item on the State Heritage of South Australia.

Today, the Charles Sturt Memorial Museum is registered under the History Trust Act of South Australia, while the National Library of Australia has classified the Sturt Collection as significant.

From 1967 to the early 2000s, the museum experience involved a tour of The Grange, by the Caretaker team. In the 1970s one room of the cottage was converted into a tea room. It had, however, become increasingly clear to the Trust Board over time that a change was needed to accommodate latest developments in museology, and for the museum to remain relevant and engaging.

Part 3. Second Generation Museum: 2004 to 2022

In 2006 the Trust adopted the following guiding principles in developing the second-generation museum.

- To conserve, manage and promote, with imagination, creativity and excellence, the history of Captain Charles Sturt and the role he played in the early exploration and settlement of Australia.
- Develop the precinct as an educative and interpretive centre directed towards the local community, special interest groups, general public and educational institutions.
- Create innovative, effective and attractive exhibitions that illustrate the historic themes associated with Charles Sturt's legendary achievements.

From 2004 to 2006, the caretaker's cottage and tea room were developed into an Exhibition Gallery Wing. From 2006 to the beginning of this year, the museum experience involved a walkthrough of the Exhibition Gallery followed by a guided tour of The Grange and heritage gardens.

The Trust in 2021 considered it time to rejuvenate the Exhibition Gallery Wing in light of new developments in museology. Select key criteria in the design included:

- Visitor Centre that promises a high-class venue that will facilitate a 21st century museum experience while offering a window into the colonial life of South Australia.
- A mixture of methods to engage visitors of varied age groups. Methods such as interpretive displays using artefacts to lend weight to the stories, digital delivery of stories and interactive displays

- The gallery should be child friendly with emphasis on exploration of the museum precinct to tie in with Education Programs with the Children's University of Australasia.

Part 4. Third Generation Museum: 2022-onwards

I am very pleased to present to you *Antipodean Dreams*, which is the name of the first exhibition planned for the refurbished Visitor Centre. Antipodean Dreams is a metaphor for understanding the complex forces that combined to define and shape the European cultural perception of Australia in its golden age of exploration. There is also a lot that we can learn from Charles Sturt, his life and family, his strength of conviction, his perseverance and his quest for discovery. Learnings that will also help us better understand ourselves and our potential in our own endeavours.

The exhibition is housed in four galleries, where each gallery tells us a story about the life of Charles Sturt and Australia at the time, by drawing upon inspirational images, key text, thoughtful graphic design and physical objects. The four exhibit themes are:

- Encounters
- The Quest
- The Art of Nature
- Family Legacy

Let's now delve in some detail into these themes.

Gallery 1: Encounters

This exhibition will address key activities in Charles Sturt's life. Examples include:

- His years in the British military that commenced in 1813 when he enlisted aged 18, and the influence this experience had on him as a person.
- In 1826 he was despatched to New South Wales, tasked with leading a military escort transporting convicts. It was in Australia where Sturt saw opportunities in exploration and public service.
- In 1829 he set forth on one of the most famous journeys of discovery in Australian annals, to follow the course of the Murrumbidgee River.

Gallery 2: The Quest

"I have a strange idea that there is a central sea, and I should go fully prepared for a Voyage. You, I am afraid will condemn this but there is a destiny for us all and unconsciously we are the instruments in our own hands of its fulfilment."
Charles Sturt 1844.

This exhibition portrays Sturt's last expedition, namely the Central Expedition of 1844 to 1846 into the interior of Australia in his search for an inland sea. By the time of this expedition, Sturt had resigned his commission, was married with children and had moved to South Australia to live in The Grange. His career as a civil servant was on the decline.

The exhibit will take us into the hearts and minds of those on the journey and especially that of Charles Sturt. Reference to Sturt's diary, for example, reveals his anxiety about the overwhelming and even impenetrable harsh Australian landscape. A landscape that severely challenged his European sensibilities. He, however, came to appreciate how Aboriginal people co-existed with country.

Gallery 3: The Art of Nature

This exhibition interprets the fascination that Charles Sturt had with natural science and gardening. A fascination that started from his early childhood that eventuated in collecting and recording botanical plants, animals and birds while he was undertaking his various expeditions.

We will also learn about the gardens created by Charles and his wife Charlotte, that contained local and imported plants, such as white roses, hibiscus and poppies, as well as chilli bushes, fig trees, and banana plants.

The exhibition will also touch on Sturt's friendship with the world-famous ornithologist at the time, John Gould (1804-1881) who visited Sturt in Australia. We understand Charles Sturt in this gallery through his letters, paintings, drawings and jottings.

Gallery 4: Family Legacy

"Quiet and unpretending, but generous, were the hospitalities of The Grange. Music was the speciality of the house. Mrs Sturt played well on the harp, and delighted to collect friends who, with piano, violin, cello and flute, made up a small but effective orchestra for open air performances. This quiet intercourse led to a warmer intimacy than could have sprung from more formal entertainment." Beatrix Sturt 1899 (Charles Sturt's daughter-in-law)

This exhibit includes Sturt's early childhood, years of military service, his marriage to Charlotte Green, his children, as well as his life and career in general. It examines the legacies of Sturt's life including how history influenced his beliefs and attitudes, and considering the forces at the time that defined success in the British sense – that is being financially independent and influential in society. It also addresses Sturt's close relationship with his wife Charlotte, as well as the nurturing of their children. Of significance is Sturt's engagement with Aboriginal people and his growing awareness of the impact of colonisation upon their culture and existence.

There are limited sources of information that reflect on Charles Sturt's family life. Such sources that will be drawn upon for the exhibit include his letters, diaries and journals, as well as a biography compiled by Beatrix Sturt in 1899.

Part 5. Next Steps

Construction of the new Visitor Centre is well underway. The current works have been initiated by a bequest as well as donations from Trustees and friends of the Museum, the general public, and organisations such as the History Trust of South Australia and City of Charles Sturt. The Copland Foundation has provided financial support for the new exhibition. At the time of delivering this address, the total cost of construction is about \$439k and we are currently \$107k short. Total costs of exhibits will amount to about \$100k and we are currently \$50k short. There are also additional extras of \$20k. The Trust is therefore actively seeking funding through grants and donations.

Volunteers are a key element to the success of the museum, and the Trust is always on the lookout for dedicated volunteers. Volunteers to join the Board to participate in the running of the museum, as well as volunteers to maintain the historical garden and surrounding facilities, and to also conduct tours. Please do spread the word to your networks to become involved in activities to support the museum, to in turn support our community. We all have a duty to ensure that the legacy of Charles Sturt, via the Charles Sturt Museum Precinct, will be learnt and enjoyed for generations to come.

The official launch of the new Visitor Centre and Exhibition will be held later this year. It is expected to be a splendid event attended by many of our friends, and members of the community.

In closing, it is through history and museums that we accumulate experience, lessons, wisdom and knowledge, for the benefit of all generations.

"The best benefit we derive from history is the enthusiasm it excites" (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German Poet, 1749-1832)