Once his position was assured, Murphy sounded out the possibility of his son Claude being appointed as his private secretary. Pointing out that he needed to have someone in the position who would work with him outside normal official hours, and with whom he could discuss sensitive community issues, he left it to Hunt’s discretion to advise if this would be acceptable.\footnote{1}

Aware of the ambiguous nature of his dual role as Administrator and Chief Magistrate, he was also anxious to provide greater professional status and financial security for his Court Registrar. He continued to promote a salary increase for Stephenson but his requests met with only limited success. Both Hunt and his new Minister, John Andrew Arthur, the Member for Bendigo, shared Glynn’s view that sharp increases in the salaries of Norfolk Island administrative staff might be politically unpopular. After further representations, Arthur was persuaded to agree to a compromise position and Stephenson’s salary was raised from 70 to 104 pounds.\footnote{2} However, Hunt was able to facilitate the appointment of Murphy’s son as the Administrator’s private secretary and, accompanied by his wife Edith, Claude took up this position in February 1915.

The next few months were relatively uneventful, with the main focus on continuing the projects initiated under the New South Western
Wales regime. At first, apart from contributing to war fund collections, the war had had only a minor impact on the Norfolk Island community. Rifles and ammunition were sent from Sydney and volunteer training and paid look-out patrols were established. There were some concerns regarding enemy shipping. On 18 October 1914, Murphy had written to Hunt that they were awaiting the arrival of the Mindini, observing: ‘We hope she has not been collared by the Germans some of whom are still prowling around somewhere in these seas’.3 During the next few months a number of Norfolk Islanders volunteered for active service and left for training in Australia.

In the meantime, arrangements were underway for an official Parliamentary visit to Norfolk Island. In December, Murphy wrote that he had been shocked to learn that their Minister had died. He thanked Hunt for sorting out his son’s appointment and reported that he could accommodate 6–7 parliamentarians. He had earlier invited Hunt’s sons, Bob and Bruce, to spend part of their Christmas holidays on Norfolk Island and confirmed that there would still be room for them. However, Hunt responded that he was not sending the boys at this time, as the members and their wives would give Murphy and his officers quite enough work. To facilitate all the arrangements, a departmental officer, J. A. Carrodus, would accompanied the party. Hunt warned that: ‘Sometimes these people are a little troublesome. It may be that they will expect a good deal more from Norfolk Island than they will find.’4

Murphy replied that he was sorry that the boys were not coming. The party would travel on the Levuka, and as no extra liquor could be shipped, he hoped that the members of the Parliamentary party were a teetotal crowd. He again expressed his appreciation of Hunt’s support: ‘Thank you for assisting so successfully in the appointment of my son as Secretary. I feel relieved to find that I shall not have the responsibility & uncertainty of dealing with a stranger.’ He added a final request for Hunt to check if one of the NSW school inspectors could come over on a ‘holiday’ and visit the school. Hunt’s notation ‘Done 20/1/15’ was written on this request.5
The Parliamentary Visit

A Parliamentary party of 10 politicians, nine family members and J. A. Carrodus spent three weeks on Norfolk Island. They left Sydney on 24 December and returned via Lord Howe Island on 20 January 1915.\textsuperscript{6}

In addition to daily informal meetings, various social events, including a cricket match at the Melanesian Mission, were organised. A public meeting was held on 12 January and this provided an opportunity for Islanders to raise matters of concern. These ranged from complaints about the high cost of administration and the need to return to a fully elected Council, to a proposal favoured by Charles Nobbs, but considered engineeringly unsound by Murphy, that the hill above Cascade Landing should be blasted and the material dumped onto the shore in order to improve port facilities. Henry Menges, a long time German resident, pointed to the anomalous situation which existed in having the Administrator also holding the role of Chief Magistrate.

Other complaints related to past events and, as was evident from questions later raised in the House, many of the politicians were confused as to the exact nature of the injustices inflicted on the islanders by the present Australian administration, as opposed to past wrongs for which the British or New South Wales governments might be held responsible. In a report to the Minister on 4 February 1915, Carrodus stated that the members had received so many representations that the public meeting had been held to enable all complaints to be heard. He cautioned that ‘as is usual in the course of a parliamentary visit to a new territory, there were a great number of residents with grievances or alleged grievances,’ and concluded:

The Administrator, Mr. Murphy, and the Collector of Customs, Mr. Stephenson, could not do enough for us. They did everything possible to ensure the comfort and pleasure of the whole party during the stay. The parliamentary visit entailed an enormous amount of extra work on these two gentlemen.
Murphy — anxious that they would enjoy their stay — organised that Stephenson would assist with arrangements. This action, well-meaning as it was, rebounded, with criticism later made that resident government officials did not seem to be fully occupied. Nobbs, whose initially positive view of the transfer to the Commonwealth had not extended to any endorsement of the Administrator, had had an excellent opportunity to place his grievances before a captive audience. Murphy felt that some of the parliamentarians listened too readily to these criticisms. They did not understand the personalities involved and the rivalries and tensions between different community leaders.

Carrodus had taken the minutes of the public meeting and this record would be placed on the official departmental file. Murphy was concerned that complaints and recommendations had been recorded without further information or clarification. He and his officers had gone to a great deal of trouble to look after the visitors. This meant that the visitors may not have been made aware of some of the existing community divisions and administrative difficulties. Feeling he had to answer the public complaints from Nobbs and others, he dashed off a long, candid, and uncharacteristically defensive, letter to Hunt. ⁷

Private

Government House,
Norfolk Island.

5th Feb. 1915

My dear Hunt,

I am sending this via Vila, as we understand there is a chance of it catching the “Pacifique”.

I had not time to fully go into Carrodus’ report of the Public Meeting held here on 12th Jan. He hurriedly typed it off from his notes and I sent [it] on as it was given to me. I have not paid Quintal’s salary yet, as I don’t know when he joined the Expeditionary force. Charles Nobbs seems to think that I am intentionally delaying the payment of orders he holds to collect it. My chief offence though is in presiding at
Executive Council Meetings, where the dominating influence he used to exercise over Allen Buffett no longer avails. They tell me he pumped a lot of gratuitous information into the sympathetic ears of such of the members as were inclined to take him seriously. My salary was excessive, my duties consisted in answering about a couple of letters a month, and a Secretary was altogether unnecessary etc.

You will observe that the only Norfolker who had any grievances to ventilate was C.C.R.N., the others are all strangers, viz., Anderson, Pinkerton, Waterhouse and Menges. The last mentioned being a German, naturally attacked the administration of British justice.

But it is the same old story over and over again. When anyone comes here vested with any authority, the same old tales of woe are poured out. Charles Nobbs sought to convey the impression that the reconstruction of the Council was his own idea, but you know differently from that.

**Ex.Co.**

The totally elective Council was given a fair trial and found to be defective. Now that the Public Works are to be paid out of our appropriation, it is necessary that at least half of the Council should be nominated by the Government. Apart from this, the progressive element, who are not of Pitcairn descent would not stand a show of being elected by the Pitcairn descendants. The Executive Council can at any time suggest legislation; there never was anything to prevent it.

Carrodus did not quite catch the tenor of my remarks re the proposed new council, what I said was that I had recommended that the Ex.Co. should consist of 12 members but not that they should be all elected.

**Menges**

Menges talked a lot of rubbish, when he said that he heard the Chief Magistrate discussing case after case before sitting on the bench. Captain Elliott never had much time for Menges, and it is hardly likely that even if he were discussing a case improperly he would do so in the presence of a third party. It was nothing more than a stab in
the back. The cases are never previously discussed, in fact for that very reasons I never sign a summons or a warrant, and Stephenson was made a J.P. on my recommendation, in order that I should not previously hear one side of a case.

**Anderson**

Anderson was on his old pet scheme of connecting Nepean Island with Norfolk Island, but personally I don't think much of the Anderson proposal. Too expensive, I don't think anything but concrete blocks would be effective and they are too expensive.

**Cost of Administration**

Charles [Nobbs] in this is hitting off at me. He pretended to understand that the residents would be called upon to pay the whole cost of Administration, well knowing that not only were they not asked to pay this in the past, but that their lands were granted free of charge, and he was one who got about 27 acres for practically nothing. He wanted the meeting to understand that my salary was something new, but he did not tell them that it was less than I was receiving as Administrator before the Island was transferred to the Commonwealth. In any case, he has never had any opportunity of ascertaining what the duties are, of either Chief Magistrate or Administrator. He touched the key note of his attack when he let the remark slip that he hoped he could occupy the position. Captain Elliott used to hold the same opinion, when he was Chief Magistrate, i.e., that he was hoping to become C.M. His line of argument presumably is that Norfolk islanders should be allowed to govern themselves, when he might perhaps be considered as a candidate. His remarks about the secretary are a supplementary dig at me.

**Norfolk Island Fund**

Again we have Charles on the Norfolk Island Fund, this he considers should be used exclusively for the descendants of Pitcairners or Pitcairners themselves. He complains that they were never shown a Balance Sheet of this Fund. I explained to the meeting, although Carrodus didn’t take it down, that the reason was that Sir Frederick
Darley, when acting as Lieutenant Governor, decided that they had nothing whatever to say in regard to the fund, as they had not subscribed anything towards it. He declined to give them any information, and practically told them to mind their own business. There are registered papers which you have amongst the records sent to you from Sydney. I think they demanded the information as a matter of right. The exclusiveness of the Norfolk Island Community was tried at first as an experiment, but was found to be a mistake, deterioration was found to be setting in, owing to intermarriage and inbreeding, and that now is the great social problem here today. With regard to the Medical Fee of 15/- (shillings) per annum, Charles himself has a family of about a dozen children, for which himself and his wife included he pays 15 shillings a year and gets medicines and drugs thrown in. He can't plead poverty, as he is the biggest landowner by far, and he is also the largest stockowner.

**Education**

Pinkerton’s remarks with regard to education, are reasonable. There is no doubt that some provision should be made, either for inspection or for independent sets of examination papers to be sent periodically. The examination might be placed under members of the Mission Staff, and the papers sent on to the Education department for report.

**Liquor**

Once more Charles dilates upon the liquor question. He is not very explicit, but his remarks are directed against the Cable Station and the Mission, who have separate permits. He says *let us have no class legislation*. So much for his consistency. When referring to the Norfolk Island Fund, he wanted it to apply only to the Pitcairners or their descendants, but that’s so like him.

I am pleased to say that we have now practically solved the Lemon Problem. The lemons are squeezed into casks and shipped to Sydney, where there is a ready sale for it amongst cordial manufacturers. The lemon gatherers get 3/6 per thousand, which seems to pay good wages. Our export last month were more than 1,000 [pounds], and then
about 400 [pounds] worth was left behind, as the Steamer could not wait over Sunday. The lemon juice is worth about 1/6 per gallon f.o.b. here, or about 3[pounds] per cask. We understand that the consignees make a big profit, by some special treatment. Of which I hope we will be able to get particulars, and glean the benefit before long.

We are doing the same with our passion fruit, the pulp is squeezed into barrels and casks, a preservative is added and shipped to Sydney. A cask of this is worth about 9 [pounds] here. Locally the passionfruit are bringing a penny per lb. We want to find out the special treatment for this pulp also. I understand that salicylic acid is used as the preservative.

E.H. Chandler and Thomas Adams are the two principal lemon dealers. Chandler informs me that he has 24 permanent employees at the factory, besides 50 Passion Fruit pickers and 60 lemon pickers. I should think Adams must have nearly as many. If the February boat called, Chandler informed me that he would have about 1000 [pounds] worth to ship, and Adams about 315 [pounds] worth. I received your cable the other day saying that Tambo might call, but that there was no chance of a boat about the middle of February. The Tambo hasn’t turned up yet, I wonder if anything has happened to her. Hope not.

Kind regards to Mrs. Atlee and the children.

Yours sincerely.

(signed) M. V. Murphy

A few days later he wrote again, outlining the problems which arose in marketing crops due to the very tight shipping schedules and delays in loading and unloading cargo. As resident Administrator, Murphy was now fully involved in all aspects of life on the Island. Details of liquor permits, quarantine regulations and infringements, control of infectious disease, bird egg harvesting, rifle competitions, births, deaths, funerals, and problems of dangerous weather conditions, which made loading and unloading of cargo and passengers difficult, were all meticulously recorded in the Administrator’s diary. On 10 February, a boating accident occurred, and Reverend Long and a member of
Melanesian Mission staff were drowned. Life was very full. There was little time to brood over what sort of overall impressions the visiting politicians had gained during their visit. In fact, most members of the visiting party had gathered very positive impressions. Hunt was able to report that ‘the Members all got back safely and everyone of them is full of praise for what you did to make them comfortable’. He sought to soothe any wounded feelings Murphy might have felt from the criticisms levelled against him by suggesting that he should assess the repairs needed for Government house and other buildings:

    We can easily spare two or three hundred pounds out of our vote and there is one thing I would like you to remember when dealing with us — we get no end of blame if we exceed our estimates but we do not get any thanks at all for the savings on them.

He included the news that his son Bob had passed all tests to become a Cadet Midshipman at the Naval College, adding: ‘If he will only work and behave himself his future is assured’. Aware that Murphy might feel the need of some official reassurance, he concluded:

    That was a very sad thing about the poor missionary losing his life. We got an appreciative telegram from the Bishop in reply to our message. If there is any event on the Island at any time in regard to which you think a message from the Minister would be appreciated you could always send me a telegram and I will see that it is promptly attended to.

Over the next few months, questions in the House, particularly from one of the Parliamentary party, J. H. Catts, showed that Nobbs, Menges, and several other businessmen had been very persuasive in their arguments. They were now also able to make use of these additional political contacts to air ongoing grievances. Questions regarding the transfer of the Norfolk Island Fund from the Governor of New South Wales to the control of the Commonwealth caused further confusion. On 29 March, in response to a query from Murphy as to the status of the Fund, Hunt replied that:
Sir Gerald was rather annoyed at what he called the “Commonwealth’s mismanagement” in taking over the funds, but as a matter of fact we had done our part up to a certain point, and were only awaiting the completion of some formalities by the N.S.W. State authorities, who do not appear to have been in any hurry over the matter. However, I hope the matter will soon be adjusted, but can assure you that the delay has not occurred at this end.

During the June estimates debates, questions were again raised regarding land tenure, resident rights and the Norfolk Island Fund. Although details had been provided many times before, and often related to past events, the complaints received by politicians were usually recounted in the present tense. Murphy was again asked to respond. He did so at length and one can only imagine his annoyance at being called upon, some months after the event, to answer questions which could, from his point of view at least, easily have been settled during the Parliamentary visit.\(^{11}\)

Government House
Norfolk Island
17th August 1915

Memorandum for the Honourable the Minister for External Affairs

Adverting to your telegraphic message of 7th August, re Parliamentary debates of June 2nd, 9th and 10th, respecting eviction of tenants from old houses, I have the honour to report that there have been no evictions of recent years, not since 1908, after the question of the Crown’s right to the houses was determined by the Imperial Government.

There are papers referring to the whole matter in a file marked “Houses”, they were sent to the Department of External Affairs about July 1914; various petitions were made concerning them from time to time.

The origin of the house trouble, from what I remember, was a petition to the Imperial Authorities signed by some of the residents, about 15 years ago, in which they laid claim to all the lands on the island; to the
houses in the Government Reserve in Kingston; and to the Norfolk Island Fund. This was referred by the Home Government to the Governor of N.S.W., and he sought advice of the Attorney-General, and an opinion was obtained from Mr. Edmund Barton, now Sir Edmund, one of the judges of the High Court of Australia. This opinion was to the effect that the houses situated in the Government reserve at Kingston were the property of the Crown; that the only land that had been granted to the residents was that conveyed in their deed of grant (each head of a family having received a free grant of about 50 acres); and that they had no authority over the Norfolk island Fund, to which they had not contributed, and which was held under trustees appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The question of the Crown's right to the houses was dealt with locally by Governor Sir Harry Rawson himself, and conveyed to the residents by him personally during his visit to the island in May 1903, when the substance of his intimation was to the effect that the matter had been decided by the Imperial Government, and could not be reopened. He, however, promised to give the Pitcairners a Permissive Occupancy of the houses free of rent for three generations. Some accepted, others declined. Those who accepted have since remained in undisturbed possession, free of rent. Those who declined were compelled to give up possession, in the early part of 1908. A form of licence under which they were to be permitted to occupy, is enclosed.

The impression conveyed by Hansard's report is that some injustice was done to an old maiden lady, her young widowed sister and her two young children. This is not correct and I am unable to account for such a wrong impression. The following will show how easily facts may be misrepresented.

The house referred to was originally allotted to John Quintal. He had not occupied it for many years, having lived in another house of his own about two miles distant, leaving his daughter and her husband (the Robinsons) in charge; and they and their family occupied it for many years. Old Johnny, as he was called, was one who refused to accept a licence to occupy, but being an old man more than 80 years of age, the
Governor allowed the house to remain in his charge during his life time. Eventually he died; so did Mr. Robinson, and a year or two later Mrs. Robinson passed away, she also during her life was allowed to occupy without interference. The only one who occupied the house ultimately was Miss Robinson who had only recently returned from Sydney, being absent from Norfolk Island for nearly twenty five years. She informed me that it was her intention to reside upon a Crown lease, for which she had made application. This would leave the house practically vacant. In the mean time a younger sister, Mrs. Buffett, whose home was in another part of the island, on the death of her husband, came with her two children to stay with her sister, but not, I was led to understand, to live there permanently. She has since gone to Sydney for an indefinite period. There was therefore really no one remaining whose permanent home the house in question was. As it was the property of the Crown the question was one of the payment of rent of the next tenant, as in the case of other houses in the vicinity. All the other Robinson children on the island have independent homes of their own.

In the meantime Miss Robinson decided to withdraw her application for a Crown lease and to continue her residence in the old house. this she was permitted to do at a nominal rent of 7:10/– a year.

Miss Robinson’s application for the house was made before the arrival of the Parliamentary Party. Copy of her application is enclosed, with my reply thereto, from which it may be seen that some erroneous information has been supplied to Mr. Catts, the nature of which was not conveyed to me during his visit.

I have no recollection of his asking me what justification there was for giving them notice to shift, as such notice was never given, vide my memorandum to Miss Robinson of 4th January. The question was simply one of the amount of rent Miss Robinson should pay, as quite independent of me it was decided that the house was the property of the Crown. She and her brother, who acted for her, never made any objection to paying rent, and the matter was practically settled before Miss Robinson’s formal application and before the arrival of the Parliamentary Party.
I can only imagine that subsequently the old claim to the houses was revived, and Mr. Catts' sympathies enlisted against the action taken in the past, the policy of which is not my province to discuss.

I remember Mr. Catts' conversation relative to the house in question, it was simply in regard to the Crown's right to it, not in regard to the eviction, rental or anything else; that had previously been settled with satisfaction to all concerned, so far as I was aware.

It was in general reference as to what use the houses were to the Crown that he was informed that the Government were paying 25 pounds a year rent for a cottage for the constable.

I may state that quite a wrong impression has been conveyed. It was not the practice for the occupants of these houses to will them. Since the original occupation of all the houses in the Government Reserve, an examination of the wills shows that in only one instance has one of these houses been mentioned in a will.

In regard to the policy of allowing the Pitcairners to administer their own affairs; they were allowed to do so for more than 40 years, when, after careful investigation it was found necessary to effect a change. The reasons are all given in the official papers laid before the Imperial Parliament, and published. The numbers of these papers were furnished to Mr. Carrodus during the visit of the Parliamentary Party, and published. The reasons given by various Royal Commissions of investigation are complete, and were regarded as conclusive, as may be determined on perusal.

These papers were available for the perusal of any of the Parliamentary Party, and they were so informed during their visit.

M. V. Murphy

Administrator

Murphy's documented response was apparently accepted for the moment. However, he was aware that the administration was definitely 'on notice', particularly as far as Nobbs and other local opponents were concerned. Upon their return, members of the
Parliamentary party had completed individual reports and more general observations of the Island. These were finally published some months later, with a forward by Hugh Mahon, now Minister for External Affairs, and an introductory synopsis of the report Hunt had provided to Glynn after his January 1914 visit.\textsuperscript{12}

Most of the comments regarding the Parliamentary visit were fairly superficial. Members commenting in glowing terms on the friendliness of the Islanders and the hospitality provided by the Administrator and his officers. A few were more perceptive. W. Elliott Johnson noted that the convict ruins had been dismantled, and that this, from a tourist and historical point of view, was a great pity. However, comments by J. H. Catts were the most damning. He considered that there were too many public officials on the Island. Although these officials were good people, he pointed out that several could be utilised elsewhere. His conclusion was that:\textsuperscript{13}

The present system of administration is costly to the extent of being farcical. Under such a scheme there can be no corporate responsibility in the people and no public spirit. No colony or community in the world ever made progress in similar circumstances. Fancy an Administrator, Administrator’s Secretary, Collector of Customs, Secretary to the Executive Council, Postmaster, and police constable with two auxiliary assistants, to administer a code of laws equal in size to one of our Australian Union rule books — with an absence of crime, as Mr. Atlee Hunt points out — fancy this array of officialdom with Government House as the emblem of authority, to govern some 300 adults on 8,000 acres of land! And there are honorary Executive Councillors. It is true some of the salaries are very small. The Island is, however, much over-officered. The administrator (Mr. Murphy) as well as his officers, are men of ability and integrity. But surely their services could be utilized by the Commonwealth where their experience and energies could be profitably employed. Norfolk Island administrative functions and duties could be organized so that an administrator and a police constable could comfortably and efficiently discharge them.
A different opinion was provided by Senator Blakey, who had concluded that the Administrator had a very delicate balancing act to perform. Probably unaware that detailed explanations had been made on many occasions, he suggested that, as questions had been raised about the use being made of the Norfolk Island Fund, a full statement should be made to clarify the situation once and for all. At the same time he considered that Murphy should be given more discretion with regard to small details and expenditures, instead of having to refer all such minor matters to External Affairs.

Settling in as the Administrator

The tensions caused by the visit of the Parliamentary party gradually subsided. Claude and his wife Edith created a pleasant household for Murphy. In April, there was a brief visit from the members of the controversial Royal Commission on Mail Services between Australia, New Hebrides, Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, but this proved to be only a minor diversion [See Chapter 7].

Hunt had approved a request for a piano for Government House and assisted in settling outstanding matters related to Murphy’s transfer to the Commonwealth. Once Murphy had provided the forward estimates for Norfolk Island it was also time to gain approval for the earlier request for a salary increase for Stephenson. Hunt had already explained to his Minister that Stephenson’s work as Court Registrar, Justice of the Peace, and Collector of Customs, were more onerous than had perhaps been evident when he helped entertain the Parliamentary visitors. On 31 May, he wrote that he was glad Murphy was more comfortably settled, and he imagined that ‘much is due to the presence of Mrs. Murphy Jr.’ He then reported on his successful intervention.14

Going back to your letter, I fully explained to the Minister exactly what you have pointed out with regard to Stephenson, as Carrodus assured me of the fact. That particular matter has assumed a new aspect. When your estimates came up involving as they did an increase to Stephenson
from the 1st July, I thought it was a good opportunity for the Minister to reconsider his previous decision, so I just submitted your recommendations as they stood without comment of any kind. The Minister approved making no special mention of Stephenson.

I will look up the matter about your transfer to the Commonwealth and see what has to be done, if anything, and also the matter about your son’s salary.

The increase in salary meant that Stephenson was now in a position to fully support his growing family. Murphy’s letter of 19 June reflected his appreciation of Hunt’s assistance. 15

I was pleased that the Minister had approved of Stephenson’s increase. I presume I can pay him from the 1st July, and I shall do so unless I hear to the contrary. [Hunt had pencilled ‘Correct’ beside this] he will be going to his own home next month. Mrs. Stephenson finds the new baby requires the whole of her attention, and there is really no reason now for them to remain. It is their own wish to get into their own quarters again, but we shall miss them very much.

During the first two years of Commonwealth administration, a number of transitional matters continued to be slowly and painstakingly resolved with the Governor of New South Wales. The file of copies of despatches from the Governor General’s Office, both to the New South Wales Governor and to the Colonial Secretary’s Office, record the minute details of transfer arrangements. Bank passbooks, stocks, securities and other financial records were carefully checked and audited, even where quite small amounts were involved. The draft memorandum of transfer was then reviewed by the New South Wales Governor’s Office, and additions, corrections, and other changes requested were made. Memoranda were then exchanged with the Prime Minister and the Premier. 16

A curious example of the interplay of personalities and protocol was the complex and drawn out series of negotiations regarding the old Imperial Norfolk Island Seal, which could not be used after the Commonwealth took control. No conclusion was reached during
Murphy’s term as Administrator, and a final decision as to its future resting place was not made until 1974 [See Chapter 7].

Many other personnel and financial matters also had to be finalised. These often required explanations and recommendations from the Administrator, through his Secretary to the Minister. Voluminous correspondence in the ‘Norfolk Island — Transfer to Commonwealth’ file, documents the actions taken to transfer of 5,300 pounds in the Norfolk Island Fund and other moneys related to Norfolk Island. Other memoranda were concerned with establishing procedures, to provide for career paths and promotion for New South Wales officials seconded to the Commonwealth.17

The first annual report of the Administrator, for the financial year ending 30 June 1915, was optimistic. It recorded a marked improvement in the value of exports (from 1,193 pounds in the 1913–14 period to 4000 pounds in 1914–15), noting that:

The principal exports are lemon juice, passion fruit pulp, coffee, oranges, lemon seeds, potatoes, onions, hides, horsehair, wool, and a small quantity of arrowroot. Occasionally horses and poultry are shipped to the South Sea Islands.

A severe drought and difficulties in obtaining seed from Australia had hampered further agricultural development. War restrictions on transport were already beginning to have an effect. Shipping schedules were to prove increasingly problematic during Murphy’s term as Administrator. Nonetheless, knowing that Hunt, as Secretary of the Department, needed a success story, the report concluded on an up-beat note.18

On the whole, the outlook is brighter, and greater facilities for commercial expansion have been provided since the Island was accepted by the Commonwealth of Australia.

During the next financial year, Murphy continued to promote the lemon industry, despite some problems with lemon ‘pirates’ who had taken to stealing the lucrative crop and selling them back to the dealers. He also had to deal with complaints by Henry Menges against
Stephenson, the Collector of Customs, when a case of whisky was impounded. As the regulations limiting the import of alcohol were a sensitive issue among local residents, Murphy had to be very careful to appear impartial at all times. It was reported to him that more ingenious ways of obtaining alcohol were planned. On 7 October 1915, in a memorandum to the Collector of Customs (clearly ‘for the record’), he advised him to take precautionary measures as alcohol was said to be concealed in the casks imported for lemon juice.

The impact of the war was also becoming more evident on Norfolk Island. Over 250 pounds was raised in a collection to contribute to the fund for sick and wounded soldiers. Lieutenant H. C. Grover, Inspector of Rifles, was sent over from Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, to supervise the establishment of a Rifle Range, and the look-out patrols were stepped up. In August, the tragedy of war really struck home: Private Allen Fletcher Buffett, son of Executive Council President Allen Buffett, was killed in action. Murphy wrote to the Department of Defence seeking assurance that Private Buffett’s belongings would be returned to his father, and further letters were exchanged. By the end of October 1915, 25 Norfolk Islanders were in the Armed Forces, 2 had been killed, and several wounded.

In April 1916, Murphy and his family visited Melbourne and were entertained by Hunt and his wife. The following month he wrote a personal letter to Hunt in which he described his involvement in a potentially embarrassing situation that illustrated the very public way his private life had to be lived. The Church of England chaplain had publicly criticised him from the pulpit on the grounds that he did not regularly attend church services. This had caused quite a stir in the community and was quickly reported to Murphy. It was well-known that the Administrator was not a member of the Church of England and was not required to attend services except on official occasions. The chaplain’s stipend was paid by the Government so he was, technically, a member of the Administrator’s staff, and was called in to explain his public criticism. Murphy ended his semi-
humourous but somewhat testy account of the incident by saying that, as the chaplain had fully realised that his comments were ill judged, and could be misconstrued as mischievous, it was best to let the matter drop. Nonetheless, he must have felt considerable annoyance at being publicly castigated, as it would have delighted opponents such as Nobbs and Menges. It may also have seemed prudent to let Hunt have his version of events, in case some other report was sent to the Department or direct to the Minister.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite these minor community upheavals, the more serious tragedies of war, and the continuing problems with shipping, the Administrator reported in 1916 that:\textsuperscript{21}

> During the year we have been steadily improving. There is more money in circulation, and the rate of wages has an upward tendency. The advantages offered to new industries are being appreciated, and two additional engines have been imported — one for the treatment of lemons; the other for a saw-mill. These will provide employment for many of our residents and assist in the development of local products.

Leading lights and signals had been installed at Kingston, and the Treasury had approved additional funds to build a jetty at Ball Bay and to upgrade the landing places at Kingston and Cascade. A continuing problem was the lack of an effective communication system between the Island and company steamers. As there was no wireless station on the Island, messages regarding times of arrival could not be received direct. This meant that: ‘Much inconvenience and delay are caused by these messages having to be picked up by some wireless station and transmitted to us by cable.’

At the same time, there had been a decline in the area of land under cultivation. This was partly due to the development of the lemon industry, but Murphy must have been disappointed that the demonstration plots, which he had so enthusiastically promoted, did not find equal support in the community. Although help in procuring seed and the provision of expert advice continued to be offered, ‘the residents did not, to any great extent, avail themselves
of the offer’. The report ended with the obligatory positive comment on the economic prospects for Norfolk Island:

The prospects of increased trade continue to present themselves; large quantities of sugar are being imported; and great numbers of empty casks arrive by every steamer to be filled for export.

Each succeeding year, since the acceptance of Norfolk island by the Commonwealth, shows a marked improvement in the general condition of commercial affairs.

One wonders whether the choice of the word ‘acceptance’ in the Administrator’s reports for both years was significant. It was clearly important that he minimised any internal problems and emphasised the economic benefits that would accrue from additional expenditure on shipping and communication facilities. Problems, which did not need to be mentioned, included arguments with Nobbs and others when plants or stock were imported against quarantine regulations. There had also been sporadic conflict between Nobbs and other members of the Executive Council, probably reflecting underlying historical tensions with regard to his ancestor George Hunn Nobbs. In a private letter to Hunt on 7 October, Murphy mentioned that Nobbs had been annoyed when Howard Christian was elected Council President and was often ‘vexatious in Council matters.’ In November 1916, Nobbs wrote to the Prime Minister complaining that he had been fined in the Magistrate’s Court for importing plants.22

I contend that this was purely a case of malicious persecution, owing to the fact that the Chief Magistrate, who is also Administrator, is ex-officio Chairman of the Executive Council, in which place there exists a difference of opinion between us on certain matters affecting the community. I am unable to appeal from this decision, owing to the fact that provisions are still incomplete whereby any of the residents may take this procedure — I therefore appeal to you for fair play and justice.

Whatever the merits of the case, the appeal by Nobbs for fair play was not answered for several months. The Government was
recovering from its defeat in the Conscription Referendum and there had been a restructuring of departments. Hunt was now the Secretary of the new Department of Home Affairs and Territories, so was still responsible for Norfolk Island. His new minister was Frederick William Bamford, the Member for Herbert in Queensland, who had been a member of the 1915 Royal Commission on Mail Services that had so annoyed the Governor-General.[See Chapter 7] In a personal letter, Hunt wrote to Murphy that they were ‘fortunate to have a most sympathetic Minister’. 23

Of course you have met him, and I think you will agree that as Chairman of the New Hebrides Royal Commission he looked with a very kindly eye on Norfolk. Incidentally I may say he has a very high regard for yourself.

**Glynn returns as the Minister for Home and Territories**

Bamford’s term as Minister was short-lived. Early in 1917, Prime Minister Hughes was at the helm of the new coalition War Cabinet with Glynn once again responsible for Norfolk Island, this time as the Minister for Home and Territories. Murphy wrote to Hunt on 19 February: ‘I received your telegram informing me of the new War Ministry. They appear to be a strong team, and you will no doubt feel quite at home in renewing your association with Mr. Glynn.’ The change of ministers, while clearly acceptable, was not without some regrets. When Hunt wrote to thank Murphy for his generous hospitality in entertaining his sons over the vacation, he observed: ‘Mr. Glynn is a very delightful man to work with in many ways but we shall sorely miss Mr. Bamford whose practical commonsense and vein of live humour made him exceptionally easy to get on with’.24

Hunt did not add, but perhaps this was taken for granted, that when a particular departmental viewpoint was presented, Bamford was more likely to be persuaded and unlikely to ask too many questions. Although quite a capable politician, he was also more easy-going than Glynn, whose conscientious and hardworking
approach to his responsibilities was praiseworthy, but sometimes tedious. As Minister for Home and Territories, Glynn was now responsible for a very extensive and diverse portfolio yet he nevertheless expected to be briefed in detail before agreeing to any proposal put before him.

Most of those on the Island appeared to have been satisfied that the Administrator was conscientious and approachable. However, Charles Nobbs continued to harbour resentment that an Islander had not been selected for the position, and that many locally important decisions were made by the Minister on the advice of the Administrator. As a successful businessman with a large family to support, he objected to the various import and export regulations which seemed to limit opportunities. At the same time, he made good use of political and other personal contacts, so departmental officials were careful to follow correct procedure in dealing with his complaints.  

In February 1917, he again wrote directly to Prime Minister Hughes, complaining about ‘the intolerable conditions under which the affairs of the Island are being carried out by the present Administrator’. A major source of his annoyance was that a recent resolution had been ruled ‘out of order’. He pointed to the inherent difficulties in the dual roles of Administrator and Chairman of the Executive Council and called for immediate changes, submitting that:

\[
\text{It is entirely, incompatible with order and good government that the Administrator, who is also Chief Magistrate, should be allowed to take part in the proceedings or preside at meetings of the Executive Council.}
\]

Nobbs may well have had a valid point, but Glynn was preoccupied with more urgent matters relating to German New Guinea and the Northern Territory. This meant that the problems of one disgruntled resident on Norfolk Island may have seemed less pressing. Nevertheless, he and Hunt considered the various Executive Council by-laws, and a lengthy report from Murphy, before replying that they could find no reason to change the system.
Quite dissatisfied, Nobbs kept up the attack, complaining that ‘we are deprived of almost every rights [sic] of British subjects’. The initialled notation on this letter ‘Who are “we”? Mr. Nobbs is the only complainant’ was endorsed by Hunt’s comment that the letter ‘appears to contain further evidence of Mr. Nobbs’ policy of obstruction’. Several further exchanges were handled in consultation between the Minister and his Secretary and all responses returned via the Administrator.

Perhaps the greatest test of patience, as far as Glynn and Hunt were concerned, was the need to respond to accusations made by Nobbs after a tragic boating accident in early November 1917. Four teenage boys, who had taken a boat without the owner’s permission, were deemed drowned. After an extensive search failed to locate them or the boat, an inter-denominational burial service was conducted. Murphy wrote extensively in his diary regarding this event and the distress it had caused the whole community. When Nobbs renewed his attack on Murphy, suggesting that his inaction had contributed to the deaths of the four boys, both Hunt and Glynn considered that he had gone too far. In their view, these were unfair and cruel accusations which required a firm response. On 6 February 1918, Hunt wrote:

I am directed to inform you that the Minister, after having gone into the various matters referred to on receipt of your communications and subsequently when reports for which he called were furnished, is of the opinion that the charges, reflections, or inferences contained in your letters are not justified, and that it would materially assist the Administration and save much official time, if you refrained from making charges which on a fair inference from the facts known have no substance. In future any communication to the Minister or the Government should be couched in respectful terms, and be forwarded through the Administrator.

Despite his readiness to defend Murphy, Hunt was occasionally irritated by the Administrator’s apparently calm acceptance of the different competing personalities he had to deal with as part of
Norfolk Island’s idiosyncratic way of life. In May 1915, he had written with some asperity that:\textsuperscript{26}

I note, too, what you say about the steamer remaining in Norfolk. If your people won’t work on Sunday we will have to alter the timetable to prevent the ship calling on that day as it would be out of the question letting her lie idle for 24 hours. I suppose we in Australia are as good Christians as you in Norfolk but when ships call at Queensland ports for example, en route to other places, on a Sunday, they are allowed to work, the only difference being that special rates have to be paid to the men.

It was not within Murphy’s power to alter these community attitudes, even if he had wished to do so. However, Hunt’s comments reflected the very different world in which the Secretary and his Minister lived. In December 1917, both the \textit{Warrigal} and the \textit{Indura} arrived to unload and load cargo. The Administrator’s Diary recorded that ‘the boatmen said that they would not work on Sunday although the Master of the \textit{Indura} was willing to remain if they would do so’. Presumably, Hunt had realised by then that it was useless to protest. In any event, there is no record that he did so. The war dragged on and shipping and other economic constraints contributed to a gradual decline in the Norfolk Island economy.

\textit{The Spanish Influenza Crisis}

Towards the end of 1918, a further problem arose as messages began to be received regarding the terrible ‘Spanish Influenza’ which was sweeping the United States. The dangers for this small enclosed community, if the infection reached Norfolk Island, were obvious. Murphy obtained advice from the Australian Quarantine Service and began to plan how to protect those in his charge. The need for decisive action soon arose. In late November 1918, the \textit{Southern Cross} arrived from New Zealand to deliver mail, disembark passengers for the Melanesian Mission, collect other passengers, and take on board supplies for the ongoing journey. However, it also had
a person on board with a high fever. Steps were immediately taken to quarantine the vessel. Alarming reports had already been received from New Zealand visitors that numerous deaths from influenza had taken place after the arrival in October of an unquarantined vessel from Vancouver. Although, as Rice records in his history of the 1918 epidemic in New Zealand, there were other factors to explain the rapid spread of the disease, Murphy was taking no chances. The only means of communication from ship to shore was by semaphore. The terse record of these signals, attached to the Administrator’s diary, captures the sense of high drama which unfolded after Murphy had been informed of the situation. 27

**Semaphore Record: 26 November 1918**

SHIP: Do you want the mail? SHORE: No.

Can we get fresh milk? No.

Can we get fresh meat? No.

SHIP: Why? SHORE: Your symptoms are Spanish Influenza. All intercourse with ship absolutely prohibited.

SHIP: Is the doctor coming off? SHORE: No. Not permitted

SHIP: We must have food, water SHORE: Will try to get supplies and medicine.

SHIP: We protest against treatment. SHORE: The Administrator will be informed. Anchor at Admiralty Anchorage

SHIP: Will you keep the leading Light going? SHORE: Yes.

SHIP: Thank you Good Night.

*The Southern Cross had been ordered to hoist the quarantine flag. The nurse on ship reported that the patient had pleurisy. However, the Administrator still feared influenza and the doctor was not permitted to go on board.*
29th November

SHORE A boat load of provisions will be sent to you about 11 o’clock tomorrow. Boat will be cast adrift. Pick her up and keep her on board.

SHIP: Is the Doctor off? SHORE: No.

30th November

SHORE: Recall your boat. Boat will be towed off & cast adrift. Do not approach her until we cast off [No new cases Patient had a temperature of 102]

1st December

SHIP: To the Administrator: The consequences of your actions in turning us away rest with you.

SHORE: Alright. Will inform Mission and Administrator:

[Permission was refused for passengers to land at the Mission. Three passengers for Auckland were taken out to ‘High Rock’ where they were to be collected by the boat from the Southern Cross].

SHORE: We are now going to place passengers on Rock. Do not approach until we leave. Ship’s boat shall keep wide of Shore boat.

SHIP: Alright.

SHORE: Do you want me anymore today?

SHIP: Thanks. Goodbye.

Murphy safely weathered any criticisms of his actions. Tighter regulations to check ships leaving harbour were put in place, both in Sydney and Auckland. However, he continued to be anxious regarding the possibility of Spanish Influenza being brought to the Island. Letters and diary entries recorded concerns over quarantine provisions, the possible need for mail to be fumigated, and the wisdom of ensuring that ship’s doctors were on board. In June 1919, he reported to Hunt:28

So far I am pleased to state that no infection has resulted from the Makambo. We are expecting the “Southern Cross” from Auckland.
tomorrow. I note your remarks concerning the health officials in New Zealand and I have instructed our Medical Officer to be strict and thorough in his inspection of the ship when she arrives. I informed the Southern Cross all hands would have to undergo a medical inspection before embarking and certified as free from infection and that before long she would be required to do four days strict quarantine in Auckland Harbour with daily inspection by the Quarantine Officials and obtain a clean bill of health similar to the conditions required by the Makambo. The conditions were cabled to the Health Officer at Auckland and I presume will be carried out.

Murphy’s careful reliance on all instructions from the Australian Quarantine Service, and his faith in the superiority of their guidelines, were well-placed. In his history of the progress of the epidemic, Crosby notes that the strict and immediate Australian approach provided a breathing space which protected all South Pacific Islands ‘exclusively connected to the world by ships from Australia’. On the other hand, he considered that New Zealand ‘took measures to protect its wards, the people of the Tongan and Samoan archipelagos only tardily. Its wards suffered fearfully as a result’.29 This may explain why the presence of the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island, served by the Southern Cross directly from New Zealand, resulted in even greater caution on the part of the Administrator and his mentors in Australia.

Once this new crisis had subsided, Murphy began to think about the possibility of taking early retirement. By March 1919, he had been sufficiently persuaded of the wisdom of this action to write officially to the Minister, indicating that he would like his leave entitlements and pension determined so that an early retirement could arranged. At the same time he wrote to Hunt explaining that:30

I feel that my health requires a change from the heavy sea air with which I am surrounded, and I am sure the Minister will have no difficulty in finding a competent Administrator to relieve me. I should like before I leave to have my pension satisfactorily determined and also any leave to which I may be entitled.
My son of course will vacate his position as Secretary when I retire and leave such position free for the new Administrator to appoint his own Secretary. In this respect I should like action to be taken as soon as practicable. I am sending along an official letter dealing with the matter.

Murphy’s friendship with his Departmental Secretary had remained a very positive feature throughout, with Hunt continuing to represent him in various negotiations with the Minister. A query regarding the incorrect removal of some of his entitlements had been resolved and Murphy commented in this letter that: ‘I am glad that the Minister approved of my emoluments being fully restored’. He was less happy that Glynn, in a departure from his usual official practice, had communicated directly with Nobbs and concluded with the comment.

I am sorry that the Minister went out of his way to write Nobbs that letter. I hear that he has been crowing about it up in his shop. I didn’t eject Nobbs from the Council Meeting — It was Randall the Acting President. I told you about it in one of my letters.

Nobbs was understandably delighted that, after so many rebuffs, he had been able to achieve this small success in his war against the Administrator. But a point he did not appreciate or perhaps rejected — the pressing problems of the war-years made it unlikely that a barrage of minor complaints, even if some were legitimate, would receive serious and sustained attention. In addition, Nobbs retained an enthusiasm for his campaign at a time when the pressures of a drawn out international conflict meant that Norfolk Island was often seen as an unnecessary financial burden by Federal politicians and public servants alike. A general trade depression, and intractable shipping problems, resulted in sharply reduced exports and tourism. A number of residents moved off the Island to settle in Australia or New Zealand. However, his loyalty to the Island meant that this was never an option for Nobbs, who remained a force to be reckoned with during successive administrations.
Murphy had been able to handle the situation by meticulous reliance on correct procedure. His momentary irritation at Glynn’s perceived lapse from a generally very supportive stance reflected the strains of living in a small, isolated, and intensely competitive community. Although his term would not officially end until 30 June 1920, he was entitled to take several months of accumulated leave. He wrote to Hunt in August that:\(^3\)

I am looking forward to my early retirement and hope all the details have been fixed up in regard to my pension and leave. I will fix up all details here as well as I can before I leave so that it will not be necessary for me to return — but all these will be gone into when I see you. We are anxiously awaiting to hear that the Makambo has sailed as we are getting short of food supplies and other necessities.

During the first half of 1920, Murphy was kept busy in Sydney, unravelling the complicated legal processes involved in the return of Melanesian Mission land to Commonwealth control. Federal elections were held in January 1920 and, although Prime Minister Hughes was re-elected, Glynn was defeated. After nineteen years in Federal politics, he returned to legal practice in Adelaide. During 1919, Hunt had been a member of the Royal Commission on German New Guinea but was still the Secretary when Murphy finally retired on 30 June 1920. However, at the beginning of 1921 Hunt left the Department to become the first public service arbitrator under the Public Service Arbitration Act 1920.

Murphy’s term as Administrator was undertaken during a period when Federal politicians and government departments were preoccupied with Australia’s role in World War I. Political debates over conscription, and the impact in every corner of Australia of the loss of so many young men, made problems in Norfolk Island appear less important. This meant that initial expectations that the Island economy would benefit from unfettered access to Australian markets, and that shipping and communication channels would be improved, were not fulfilled. It was therefore not surprising that some Islanders would blame the official representative of the Commonwealth Government for failures in the system.
These were tumultuous years for Australia and although Norfolk Island may have seemed quite remote and protected from these events, it was not immune from their consequences. At the same time, Murphy had to contend with the inherent problems of being the first resident Administrator, initially for New South Wales, and then for the Commonwealth of Australia.

Throughout his term, Murphy managed to maintain a matter-of-fact and accepting approach to the various problems he encountered. Clearly, there were times when his patience wore thin, particularly when responding to particularly savage personal attacks. Yet, despite the bitter hostility evinced by Nobbs, the Administrator’s departure was sincerely regretted by the vast majority of Islanders, and by the government officials and church and business leaders with whom he worked. It is an additional historical irony that, when Murphy sailed for Sydney on 21 November 1919, neither he nor Nobbs had any inkling that, in August 1926, he would be called back from retirement to once again restore stability and peace to the Island.

**Endnotes**

1. NLA: MS52/10/1169–1224, Hunt papers, letter from Murphy to Hunt, 15 November 1914.
2. NAA: A518/1, 624/1/12 Part 1, ‘Norfolk Island — Staff — Stephenson, E.’. Arthur died suddenly in December 1914, and was succeeded by Hugh Mahon as Minister for External Affairs.
3. NLA: MS52/10, Hunt papers, letter from Murphy to Hunt, 18 October 1914.
7. NLA: MS52/20, Hunt papers, letter from Murphy to Hunt, 5 February 1915.
Murphy’s term as Commonwealth Administrator

8 NAA: CP 697/23. Murphy’s Administrator’s Diaries for 1915-1918. Although many of the entries are legible, these diaries are very water-damaged and the paper has deteriorated.
9 NLA: MS52/20, Hunt papers, letter from Hunt to Murphy, 23 February 1915.
10 Ibid. Hunt to Murphy, 29 March 1915.
11 NAA: A1 1915/13748, Memorandum No. 15/114 for the Honorable Minister for External Affairs, from M.V. Murphy, Administrator, 17 August, 1915.
12 The exact date of publication is not included. The draft was proof-read in July, and copies were received by the Administrator in October. Norfolk Island Visit of Members of the Commonwealth Parliament: Their Views about the Island, Issued by the Honorable Hugh Mahon, M.P. Minister for External Affairs, Melbourne, Government Printer, c August 1915.
13 Ibid. p. 18.
14 NLA: MS52/20, Hunt papers, letter from Hunt to Murphy, 31 May 1915.
15 Ibid. Murphy to Hunt, 19 June 1915.
18 The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Norfolk Island, Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1915, ordered to be printed 28th October 1915, Melbourne, Government Printer
20 NLA: MS52/20/1169-1224, Hunt papers, letter from Murphy to Hunt, 31 May 1916.
22 NAA: CP697/41 1917/121, Complaint by C.C.R. Nobbs re decision against him in Magistrate’s Court, letter to the Prime Minister dated 22 November 1916.
23 NLA: MS52/20/1169, Hunt papers, letter from Hunt to Murphy, 13 December 1916.
25 NAA: A1 1918/7549, ‘C.C.R.Nobbs — File of complaints against the Administrator M.V. Murphy’. Some of the exchanges between Atlee Hunt and C.C.R. Nobbs were tendered to the 1926 Royal Commission on Norfolk Island Affairs, NAA: CP423/2 Exhibit 75.
26 NLA: MS52/20, Hunt papers. Letter from Hunt to Murphy, 31 May 1915.
27 NAA: CP 697, ‘Administrator’s Diary, 1918’. The record of semaphore messages to and from the Southern Cross, 26 November to 1 December was attached to this diary. Also see Geoffrey Rice, Black November: The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in New Zealand, Wellington, Allen and Unwin, 1988.
31 Ibid. Letter from Murphy to Hunt, August 1919.
1921 Executive Council (1921 Norfolk Island Annual Report)
Council President C.C.R. Nobbs front row, third from left