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From Wilkinson to Winston: Towards a Planning Degree at the University of Sydney 1919-1949

This paper explores the genesis of planning education in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Sydney, highlighting the key roles played by architects, architectural educators and other institutional actors in the process. Town planning was identified as a key curriculum element for the Bachelor of Architecture degree at the University of Sydney in 1920, when architecture broke away from the Faculty of Engineering. The new Faculty was constituted under the leadership of Leslie Wilkinson, the first Professor of Architecture, with R. Keith Harris appointed as lecturer with special responsibility for town planning. In parallel, in 1919 the University Extension Board inaugurated the Vernon Memorial Lectures on Town Planning, a more inclusive series which offered instruction on town planning to all comers. These lectures were devised and delivered by architect-planner, John Sulman. The two initiatives would eventually merge, driven by the NSW state government's reconstruction agenda and legislative reforms which demanded qualified planners to manage a new statutory planning system. By the late 1940s they had become the foundation for a formal planning qualification offered by the Faculty and led by Denis Winston, Australia's first Professor of Town Planning.



Planning education in Sydney emerged from a broad international and national drive for the introduction of town planning reforms that accelerated in earnest from just before the Great War. This movement culminated at the end of the Second World War with the passage in New South Wales of state-wide planning legislation, establishment of an influential Ministerial advisory committee, and instigation of a first metropolitan plan for Sydney. The goal of a university chair in planning was incorporated in the objectives of Australia's first town planning association formed in Sydney in late 1913 and was a touchstone of the planning movement for the following three decades but was not successfully realised until 1949. A succession of circumstances and events drove professional, governmental and community interest in planning - from a Royal Commission on the civic improvement of Sydney (1908) through the federal capital competition (1912), public and private sector garden suburb experiments from the 1910s, heightened interest in regional planning initiatives in the prosperous 1920s, slum housing problems in the 1930s, to a strong post-war reconstruction ethos in the mid-1940s. Although the New South Wales (NSW) Local Government Act was altered in 1919 to advance planning ideals, including proclamation of residential districts as an early form of land use zoning, more serious statutory reforms consistently failed to secure parliamentary consent. The eventual passage of the Local Government (Town and Country Planning) Amendment Act 1945 by the McKell Labor Government was thus a major milestone. While educational initiatives were evident before this, and indeed helped shape the post-war response, the realisation that the preparation of local government planning schemes would require a cadre of a new generation of trained professionals was the major stimulus to decisive action.

This paper aims to reconstruct the processes which led to establishment of a Chair in town planning at Sydney University, the first of its kind in Australia, which was both the culmination of a long-held dream of planning advocates and a crucial event in the post-war institutionalisation of planning. It highlights the key roles played by leading architects and architectural educators from the 1910s in advancing and ultimately securing a sustainable platform for planning education in 1949. The paper draws from a mix of secondary and primary sources, including records held at the University of Sydney, NSW State Government and National Library of Australia.1 The treatment is essentially chronological and presents the convergence of two major threads - commencement of formal planning courses in the architecture degree and commitment to a program of community instruction - with the state government emerging as the crucial actor.

Engineering, architecture and planning at Sydney University

Formal training in architecture was originally under the auspices of the technical college system and this continued in parallel with the introduction of training at Sydney University. Studies in architecture commenced in 1882 in the Department of Engineering which "rigorously controlled" instruction until 1918.2 The first postgraduate thesis on a planning issue at an Australian university was Romeo Lahey's project on an ideal model suburb in Brisbane, completed in 1921 for his Master of Engineering degree under Professor W. H. Warren.

The expatriate English architect John Sulman lectured in architecture from 1887 to 1912 and was a leading advocate of the town planning cause, particularly the desirability of university-standard instruction. In 1919, the Town Planning Association of which he was President unsuccessfully proposed that the generous McCaughey bequest made that year be applied to a Chair of Town Planning. Instead, the university's immediate involvement proceeded on two fronts.

The appointment of British expatriate Leslie Wilkinson to a foundation chair in architecture at the University of Sydney in 1918 marked a major step forward. Wilkinson was an aesthete and was primarily interested in civic design issues but was also involved in housing development and campus planning. Wilkinson was made Dean when Architecture became a faculty in its own right in the early 1920s. The new four-year degree course included philosophy, theory and practice of design, aesthetics, drawing, and architectural history. Never a member of the Town Planning Association, Wilkinson fell out with George and Florence Taylor, who were key players in Sydney planning circles in the 1920s, because of their unauthorised publication of notes taken at his lectures. A town planning subject was also introduced to the curriculum in 1921, when Sydney architect Keith Harris was appointed principal instructor. By 1927, the subject was being taught alternatively with History of Painting/Sculpture in the final years.

The Vernon Lectures

Meanwhile, the University had commenced a separate course of instruction in town planning known as the Vernon Memorial Lectures, funded in part by a public subscription instigated principally by George Taylor in 1914 and named in honour of the former New South Wales Government Architect, W. L. Vernon. Delayed by the war, the first course was offered in 1919 under the auspices of the University's Extension (adult education) Board. This biennial lecture series was open for a modest fee to all-comers, including school children, but attracted more vocationally-orientated professional people. Examination was an optional extra. John Sulman devised and delivered the inaugural lecture series which was later reproduced in his authoritative book *An Introduction to Town Planning in Australia* (1921). He presented his lectures again in 1921 and, reluctantly, in 1926 having placed on record his opinion "that the Vernon Course is basic, and any further development should be by an additional course or courses". Sulman was keen to see the transition to a formal degree and, in 1928, he gifted £2500 for the founding of a Chair. The Vernon series continued regardless, presented by town planner David Davidson (1929) and architect and town planner Alfred Brown (1931-9).

Davidson, a student in the inaugural 1919 series, employed Sulman's basic framework but introduced treatment of "philosophy and ethics" plus more emphasis on survey research at various geographic scales, in keeping with the North American turn to the "city functional".⁷ Midway through the 1929 series a revised program of two lectures per evening was instituted to enable him to take up a new post of Town Planning Commissioner in Perth. Brown was an able successor, having been an assistant to Louis de Soissons at Welwyn Garden City in the early 1920s. Several senior practitioners attended Brown's lectures and he later



collaborated with the Chief Engineer of the NSW Department of Main Roads to produce Town and Country Planning, the "successor to Sulman", published in 1951.8

Bringing together the Vernon and Faculty lectures

Only from 1937 was the Faculty of Architecture consulted on the choice of Vernon lecturer. In 1938 Wilkinson supervised a review of the Vernon program that took into account its increasing breadth, the need to consider specialist lectures, the "marked increase in interest in Town Planning in recent years", and the likelihood of planning legislation being introduced to New South Wales in the near future.9 Wilkinson and Harris recommended that the current course be discontinued and that the resources be redirected to establishing a new professional course thereby institutionalising the architecture-planning nexus. The content would be derived from an integration of the Vernon lectures with planning instruction in the architectural degree, and was also open to Sydney Technical College and qualifying 'outside' students. A combined annual series of 16 lectures covering "history, theory, practice, law, procedure, finance, engineering ... and surveying" was duly convened in 1939 and 1940.

The University Calendar was not published in full during and immediately after the Second World War and students were referred to the bi-annual Supplements and the 1939 edition for fuller information. The Calendar Supplements show that the curriculum of the town planning unit contained within the Architecture Course remained the same throughout the war, although the text detailing the history of the Vernon Memorial Lectureship was omitted from 1942 onwards.10 The removed section was replaced within the Architectural course outline by the following statement:

Town Planning. Great importance is attached to the study of the architectural aspect of Town Planning. This is not treated as a special subject, but as one which should form an essential part of every architect's training. Historical and modern examples will be discussed, and the principles which govern the layout and the collective grouping of buildings and the appropriate furnishing of their surroundings will be studied and illustrated.11

Architect Mervyn Smith's lecture notes indicate that Brown's course in 1939 was a broadranging account orientated to historical, survey and design details.¹² Interpretation of the role of planning within an architectural frame of reference, combined with the understanding that the re-designed lecture series was a 'professional' course, may partly explain the lack of any sense of urgency within the Faculty to establish a separate town planning qualification.

Towards post-war reconstruction

From the late 1930s the complexion of the planning movement in Sydney changed. The Town Planning Association remained active around pet interests but had been supplanted as the most authoritative voice by a new professional body concerned with broader strategic policy, housing issues and the introduction of accreditation standards. Alfred Brown's defection from the presidency of the Town Planning Association to head the Town and Country Planning Institute in 1934 was symptomatic of the shift in planning discourse from voluntarist causes to more technical concerns.¹³

Paradoxically, the momentum for planning built during the war years. Cutbacks in domestic construction as resources were diverted to the war effort had exacerbated housing shortages evident in the late 1930s, while lessons of military success predicated on organisation and foresight were adapted to a new ideology of planning for peacetime. The Commonwealth Government instituted a national Ministry for Post-war Reconstruction, headed by Herbert Coombs, which sought to work with state agencies and the private sector across a wide industrial, cultural and welfare agenda. Planning and design were central to this movement in order to provide the orderly physical and land use framework for growth and development. A number of books rallied support for new planning legislation and initiatives, typified by the architect Walter Bunning's *Homes in the Sun* (1945). Bunning, a former executive officer of the Commonwealth Housing Commission (CHC), was to play a key role in securing government support for tertiary-standard instruction and locating it at the University. The Commonwealth's aspirations to develop a national school for planning studies foundered on political opposition and, from August 1945, educational and other initiatives were left largely to state governments.

However a model outcome for the CHC was the passage by the NSW state government in July 1945 of new planning legislation which amongst other things established the institutional framework to support good housing development. An amendment to the Local Government Act instigated three new entities: a small planning bureaucracy to oversee preparation of local planning schemes, headed by Norman Weekes, an architecture graduate of the University of Liverpool; a new agency to prepare an outline plan for the Sydney metropolitan area led by the roads engineer Sidney Luker; and the Town and Country Planning Advisory Committee (TACPAC) headed by the influential Walter Bunning, to advise the minister responsible for planning. The new legislation included the requirement that councils employ only professional planning experts holding certificates of qualification prescribed under a new ordinance. Government advisors recognised immediately that expansion in the number of qualified town planners was essential for planning reforms to be implemented satisfactorily.

The short term fix

The new 'Ordinance 4' certificates were to be issued by the Town and Country Planning Examinations Committee under the umbrella of the TACPAC. To address this need in the short term, TACPAC resurrected the model of the Vernon Memorial Lectures given by Alfred Brown for three condensed training courses held in late 1946 and early 1947. The lectures were conducted over six weeks and were open to "qualified architects, engineers and surveyors and other persons specially invited to attend". The first series commenced on 9 January 1946 and was organised by the University Extension Board, "without reference to the Faculty of Architecture", and was attended by 129 metropolitan students at 4 guineas/head. Lectures were given on Wednesday and Friday evenings in the University Chambers



on Philip Street in the city while the studio work was completed over six successive Saturdays in the University Engineering School. Two subsequent lecture series ran in January and February 1947 and were organised by TACPAC directly. The January series was a residential two-week intensive course for 61 regional students held at the Newport Camp of the Workers Educational Association (8 guineas/head) while the February series was a repeat of the 1946 format and was again held in University Chambers for 59 metropolitan students at 5 guineas/head.21 Each series comprised 24 hours of lectures and 30 hours in the studio and was designed to be a basic, introductory course covering the 'principles and practice of town and country planning'.22 The 21 lecture topics were:

- 1. Explanation of the Local Government (Town and Country Planning) Amendment Act, 1945
- 2. History of Town Planning
- 3. Social Life and Purpose in Towns
- 4. National and Regional Planning
- 5. Location of Industry
- 6. Zoning
- 7. Garden Cities and Satellite Towns
- 8. Geographical Background
- 9. Surveys and Maps for Planning
- 10. Communications
- 11. Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage in relation to Town Planning
- 12. Parks and Open Spaces
- 13. Neighbourhood Planning
- 14. Residential Streets
- 15. Site Planning
- 16. Civic Design and Street Furniture
- 17. Landscape Architecture
- 18. Housing in relation to Town Planning
- 19. Administration of Town Planning
- 20. Overseas Examples of Planning
- 21. Remodelling Existing Towns

By March 1947, within 20 months of the passing of the new planning act, these three short courses had catered for 249 students and enabled them to begin applying the requirements of the legislation. Members of the Local Government Town and Country Planning Examination Committee appointed under the Local Government Act granted the final approval for eligible applicants to become qualified town planners.23

The University to host the planning diploma

Meanwhile, the process to develop a recognised diploma course of Town Planning continued. In December 1946, TACPAC formally recommended to the government that a post-graduate course in Town Planning be established.²⁴ A sub-committee began investigating educational requirements, chaired by architect William Laurie (one of the first crop of Wilkinson graduates from 1922). It canvassed several options including commencing new qualifications at either the University of Sydney, the proposed new University of Technology, or Sydney Technical College; instituting a correspondence course; or appointing an overseas expert to direct a special five-year training program. Establishment of a new Chair of Town Planning within the Faculty of Architecture at the University soon became the preferred option.²⁵

In February 1947 the Public Service Board hosted a meeting to determine the requirements of the proposed post-graduate course. It was attended by representatives of the Department of Local Government (Stan Haviland), the Department of Technical Education (Arthur Denning), the Chairman of the Cumberland County Council (John Tate, another architect), TACPAC (Bunning), and the University (Wilkinson). The Committee recommended the establishment of a course which would extend over two years, would be limited to post-graduate students or those with an equivalent attainment, be run at times suitable for students in employment, and would also accept students without qualification to certain sections of the course "to meet the needs of special groups".²⁶

As Dean of Architecture, Leslie Wilkinson was always supportive of planning education and the new professional body but during the war years financial and staffing constraints limited the Faculty's ability to introduce any initiatives. Deans were requested to reduce expenditure on non-essential courses, part-time workers, course supplies, research work, and "any other possible areas".²⁷ Additionally, the Faculty of Architecture was regarded as an "un-Reserved" Faculty which made it vulnerable to reductions in funding, limits on staff numbers, and the loss of staff and students to conscription.²⁸ Such constraints also meant that formal Faculty meetings were held less regularly, with gaps of six and twelve months between meetings.

However, come 1945, the educational environment changed dramatically. The University was attempting to cater for enormously increased enrolments as a result of deferred students returning from war-service, augmented by returned service personnel newly training for civilian careers, and recently-matriculated high school students. The Architecture Faculty specifically was preoccupied by the need to provide adequate accommodation, equipment and teaching resources in the face of swelling enrolments. By October 1947, the teaching staff was facing the need to find accommodation for 160 students in the new university year, approximately 25% more than previously expected, and had already notified the Professorial Board that "unless additional accommodation was made available ... it would be impossible to maintain the present system of training", and finally, Professor Wilkinson was due to retire at the end of the year.²⁹

The University and the Faculty now faced additional pressures as the preferred host for a new planning qualification. The University Senate had been lukewarm because of the enrolment pressures, other disciplinary demands for new Chairs, resource limitations, and the concern that external financial assistance, while desirable, might infringe intellectual freedom. Yet delays in establishing the new University of Technology, plus its singular focus on technical training, detracted from its appeal; by contrast, Sydney University could readily offer the



complementary instruction in sociology, economics and geography now incorporated in planning degrees overseas.³⁰ The external drivers were compelling and decisive.

On the recommendation of the Professorial Board, in May 1947 the University Senate approved provision for a new Chair of Town Planning for five years subject to extension, subject to a £3,000 grant from the Department of Local Government.31 The appointed Professor was to receive a salary of £1250 to conduct post-graduate courses at the university, and £750 for advisory duties to the Departments of Local Government and of Education, and to provide teaching and advice for Sydney Technical College. The successful applicant would also have the right to consultative practice.32 The remaining £1000 was allocated to staff and equipment.33 Advertisement of the position and selection of appointee to the Chair was made the responsibility of the Professorial Board in consultation with representatives of the Public Service. The curriculum and organisation of the new course was to be left to the successful applicant but it was anticipated that the course would include the study of regional planning, civic design and administration.³⁴ The architectural foundation would remain strong. Moreover, a 1949 national meeting of Heads of Architectural Schools resolved that professional study be postgraduate and affiliated with architecture schools. Wilkinson certainly regarded architects as the rightful leaders of the planning movement.35

Recruiting the first professor of town planning

The position of Professor of Town Planning was advertised in November 1947 in Australia, the UK, USA, Canada and South Africa with applications being referred to a Committee of Advice, convened at the Universities Bureau of the British Empire in London, which included three leading planning figures: Patrick Abercrombie, William Holford and George Pepler. Candidates were also assessed by a Joint Committee made up of representatives of the University and the Public Services Board, chaired by Vice Chancellor Stephen Roberts and including Bunning and Tate.36

Of the 22 applicants, who included some well-known names internationally, Denis Winston, Chief Town Planner and Borough Architect in Southampton, and another Liverpool graduate, was the only candidate common to the shortlists of both the Committee of Advice and the local joint committee.37 After lengthy investigation of his ability to fill the role, Winston received notice that he was appointed to the Chair on 4 May 1948, which appointment he accepted on 6 May, with a request sent on 5 June asking for one salaried month in England prior to his departure to enable him to visit planning schools and faculties to research new developments and experiments in planning education.38 Winston arrived in Sydney in late December 1949 and submitted his proposals for the two-year part-time diploma on 10 March. These were promptly approved by the Professorial Board on 21 March and classes commenced in the first week of April 1949.39

The first curriculum

Winston assembled his curriculum hastily, pragmatically adapting the standard British town and country planning educational template to local circumstances and precedents. "As you can imagine, no one in Sydney, least of all at the University, had any idea what a Town Planning Course would or should involve and I have had to start from scratch, as if it were Liverpool in 1914".⁴⁰ With both the academic reputation of the University and the limitations of students in full-time employment to consider, the course consisted of "two lectures on each of three evenings per week ... with additional time for discussion, criticism and field work".⁴¹ Nine topics were regarded as "essential" with each topic comprising 24 one-hour lectures supplemented by practical work, reports and field excursions. The chosen areas of study were:

- 1. Elementary Geography as related to Planning
- 2. Outlines of Social and Economic Organisation
- 3. Architecture as related to Planning
- 4. Civil Engineering as related to Planning
- 5. Surveying and Valuation as related to Planning
- 6. Landscape Architecture and Horticulture
- 7. Public Administration and Town Planning Law
- 8. History of Town and Country Planning
- 9. Theory and Practice of Town and Country Planning (I and II).

The courses addressed the University's concern "to relate the University and its teaching more closely to developments in modern society".⁴² Winston's inclusion of the study of social and economic factors in planning also reflected the research he undertook in England just before he sailed for Australia. English town planning courses were undergoing considerable change at the time and, influenced by the ideas of Frederick Adams at MIT, new curricula included an increased emphasis on the social sciences of geography, economics and sociology.⁴³ These reforms were being initiated at the leading planning schools of Liverpool and University College London with which Winston was familiar.⁴⁴ In keeping with Adams' emphasis on forming tutorial groups which brought together students with a wide variety of experience⁴⁵, most courses were available to more than just diploma students and included practising professionals.⁴⁶ By the second week of classes, 70 students had enrolled – "more than Abercrombie ever had".⁴⁷ The course had particular appeal to both municipal engineers, moreso than practising architects, and senior public servants, among them Nigel Ashton who succeeded Weekes as Head of the Town Planning Branch of the Department of Local Government in 1954.

The texts recommended for courses relied heavily on British publications and were supplemented by reports and books relevant to the differing Australian administrative, legal, geographic and climatic situations. For example, in 1949 the texts for first year Theory and Practice were Abercrombie's *Town and Country Planning* (1943), Abercrombie and Forshaw's *County of London Plan* (1944), and Thomas Sharp's *Town Planning* (1942), and *Oxford Replanned* (1948). Books suggested as useful reference texts were Bunning's *Homes in the Sun*, the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing's journal, *Australian Housing*, and Rowland Nicholas' *City of Manchester Plan* (1945). Students of public administration and town planning law were directed to W. Eric Jackson, *Local Government in England and*



Wales (1949) and the UK Ministry of Town and Country Planning, Explanatory Memorandum on the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, G. D. H. Cole's Britain's Town and Country Pattern (1943), supplemented by the N.S.W. Government, Local Government Act, 1919, and Ordinances 101-107.

Winston was largely on his own until the appointment of Peter Harrison as a senior lecturer immediately on completing the diploma requirements himself in late 1951.48 The curriculum was delivered by an assortment of full-time academics from cognate fields and enthusiastic part-time professionals. The initial allocation of £1000 per annum for staff and expenses meant that funds to pay specialist visiting lecturers were very limited and one of Winston's "ways and means of managing" was to ask suitable people to lecture for nothing.49 Winston also secured Faculty and University agreement that the remaining funds available for the Vernon Memorial Lecture series could be applied to support the "Architecture as related to Planning" course.50 This allowed Winston to appoint Tony Towndrow, from the School of Architecture at Sydney Technical College, and imminently foundation Dean of Architecture at the new University of Technology, as a visiting lecturer for some years. The endowment was directed to this series of lectures until 1964 when the remaining funds were finally consolidated into the general salary account.51 Offers from professors within the University were also accepted "with gratitude" and extra University funds were made available by the Dean of Architecture to finance practical classes when required.⁵² Winston also drew on advisors and lecturers from the TACPAC short-courses, as well as specialists from government bodies and professional practice, Walter Bunning among them.53

Later developments

By July 1951, Winston was concerned that the amount of time allowed for practical work within the two-year diploma course was inadequate.54 He proposed extending the course to become a three-year program with "the standard ... raised to compare with other Universities overseas".55 Winston proposed extending the "Theory and Practice of Town and Country Planning" lectures to three sets of 24 lectures spread across three years, transferring three other courses to the third year and using the extra time made available to increase the studio work expected in each year. Once these amendments were introduced in the 1953 academic year, the Department of Town Planning had ensured that Sydney graduates had not only satisfied the requirements for the Ordinance 4 requirements but would be eligible for professional accreditation by the new national Australian Planning Institute (formed in 1951 with Winston as foundation president) and the Royal Town Planning Institute, London.⁵⁶

In February 1953, Winston convinced the Department of Local Government to grant an additional £500 to cover the salary of Wally Abraham as a third member of staff to teach the three-year program.⁵⁷ In 1955 Winston moved to introduce a new Master of Town Planning. This required only addition of an individual research component.58 That year, the by-laws were amended to delete the third year of study from the Diploma course, establish it as the coursework required for the Master's award, and determine the rules for the thesis component. After approval by the Professorial Board and the Senate, the new Master of Town and Country Planning commenced at the start of the 1956 academic year.⁵⁹ These changes ensured that graduates of the University of Sydney program continued to qualify for membership of the peak professional organisations in Australia and Britain. A Master of Urban and Regional Planning remains in place today (still offered within a Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning).

Conclusion

The commencement of planning education at the University of Sydney from the late 1940s was a major milestone in the institutionalisation of planning in Sydney, NSW and Australia. The blending of mainly British and Australian influences helped set the scene for the dominance of the architect-planner as the epitome of the planning professional in the 1940s and 1950s. The introduction and development of the town planning course was the result of a unique combination of factors with individuals assuming leading roles. The pioneering roles in establishing and trialling courses were assumed by George Taylor and John Sulman. The trace of the Vernon Memorial Lectures with which they were associated endured into the 1960s. Alfred Brown emerged as the most credible planning advocate in Sydney in the 1930s, and his profile and attachment to the University was a crucial bridge to the post-war era. Leslie Wilkinson and Keith Harris in Sydney University's Faculty of Architecture understood the importance of planning and worked toward establishment of a Chair. Walter Bunning and the TACPAC recognised the need for trained planners to implement state government-driven goals and he worked within the system to secure financial commitment to make it happen. And finally Denis Winston proved an enlightened appointment in his enthusiasm and determination for the new course to reflect international best practice in planning education and to continually adapt to stay relevant in a rapidlychanging educational scene.

¹ This research forms part of a wider project with Christine Garnaut and David Nichols on early planning education. This paper draws in part from a joint paper presented at the International Planning History Society Conference in St Augustine, Florida, in July 2014. We thank John Toon for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper and the two anonymous referees.

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⁵ John Sulman to W. A. Selle, Registrar, April 27, 1923. Vernon Memorial Lectureship, G3/13, File 2161, University of Sydney Archives [hereafter UoS Archives].

⁶ Brisbane Courier, September 18, 1928, 19.

⁷ Stephen V. Ward, *Planning the Twentieth Century City: The Advanced Capitalist World* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons. 2002).

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- 37 Minutes of the Meeting of the University Senate, May 3, 1948, 170.
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