

The Terrace Houses of Sydney

Patrick McCabe, March 20th, 2025



National Archives of Australia

NWA: A1500, K26343

Terrace Houses in Paddington Area, 1971 (National Archives of Australia).

As one wanders throughout Sydney's neighborhoods, they'll repeatedly encounter a familiar style of urban dwellings; terrace houses, as seen in the National Archives of Australia's photograph. Utilitarian in character, the three storied home is adorned by an ornate filigree cast-iron balcony. Accompanied by a front facing veranda, which looks over an enclosed courtyard that is speckled with potted ferns and laid brick (Rolfe, 1962). The National Archives image showcases the resurgence of the terrace homes for young, middle-class families, such as the one shown.

It's imperative to juxtapose the image with the historical context of the earliest inhabitants of terrace houses. Terraces were built in a conjoined manner with the objective of maximizing profits for developers (Thompson, 2010). Small lot sizes meant more homes on less land. The affordability and practicality of the properties enabled upwardly economic mobile blue-collared workers in the 19th century to attain homeownership. As the new century unfolded, terrace homes became synonymous with 'slums' due to high density and unlivable conditions in the imagination of Australians. A 1907 *Evening News* first hand account scornfully detailed a homeowner terrorized by 'raucous roosters' and stench from a neighbor's poultry ensuing chronic illness upon them. A beacon of upward mobility, lost its glamour as terraces became insanitary and overpopulated. Mass exodus towards outer ring suburbia followed. Yet, around the 1960s and 1970s, the once abominated home came back into fashion. Sydney's terraces saw the rise of gentrification such swaths of renovations, with the toilet being brought indoors and kitchens to support families. As the image displays, terraces appealed to younger skilled labor, seeking to start families and commute by foot, bike, or public transit (Spearritt, 1973). This represents the end of the days of utilitarianism and the transcendence towards egalitarianism.

Index:

The Evening News

"Poultry in Terrace Houses." *The Evening News*, February 7, 1907, 8.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page12201375>.



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Housing - Homes and Homesteads - Terrace Houses in Paddington Area. Photograph.

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