ABSTRACT
The Department of Urban Studies and Planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) awards an annual prize for the best paper written by a master's student in planning. Named the ‘Flora Crockett Stephenson Writing Prize’, it honours one of the institution's first female Master of City Planning graduates. Despite the accolade of a prize in her name, an account of Flora Stephenson’s (nee Crockett) life is yet to be written. However, academic focus on the career of her husband, liverpool (UK) born and educated architect-planner Gordon Stephenson, whom she married in 1938, has cast light on aspects of her life and on her involvements with his work. Due to the emphasis on his achievements, the nature, scope and detail of her contributions, as well as broad appraisal of them, have been overlooked or masked. This paper seeks to redress that imbalance, drawing on a range of sources including private papers, Gordon’s autobiography and substantial oral history, family papers and recollections, and published sources. The paper surveys Flora’s background, upbringing and education, particularly at MIT where she was one of the few women enrolled in the 1930s. It investigates her planning-related war-time involvements with Gordon and others, including an exhibition on camp schools; a survey of the origins, facilities and future of community centres in Britain, published as community centres (1942); a brief period of employment in London with British planner Thomas Adams; and co-authorship of the book, A Plan for Town and Country (1944), with British artist Phoebe Pool. The paper’s larger emphasis is on illuminating and exploring Flora’s diverse contributions to Gordon’s long professional life in England, Canada and Australia. These included as author, editor, adviser, research assistant and project administrator. In his obituary of Gordon Stephenson (Town Planning Review, 68(3), 1997), long-time friend Gerald Dix described Flora as Gordon’s ‘professional collaborator ... over forty years’. The paper elucidates that relationship and confirms Dix’s observation.

INTRODUCTION
Posited against the general backdrop of women’s history, Eugenie Birch’s study of women in planning in America examines the various phases of their involvement and their particular contributions from the late 19th century to about 1980 (Birch, 1983). Birch identifies women’s non-professional and professional spheres of influence, including through participation in citizen-
Cities, nations and regions in planning history

based, voluntary organisations, their work in professions aligned with planning, and their contributions, in various capacities, and largely from the late 1930s, as professionally-trained planners. Additionally, she draws attention to the effect of changes in societal norms and expectations which gradually opened up opportunities in planning (and other fields) for married women and for women with children. Drawing on her observations from a series of case studies, one of Birch’s key conclusions is that the first generation of women in planning were single or childless career women but that the next

“sought to blend marriages and children with their work. Although they often collaborated or worked in fields related to their husband’s, in the interests of family solidarity they took secondary positions and compromised their employment opportunities. Their professional achievements, though notable, were accordingly less dramatic than they might otherwise have been” (Birch, 1983, p.414).

This paper focuses on Flora Stephenson, a second generation woman introduced briefly in Birch’s study. One of the first two female graduates of the Master’s in City Planning (MCP) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Flora had an unusually “long career” (Birch, 1983, p.422) given her times. She worked collaboratively, primarily with her husband, Gordon, for over forty years, carrying out a range of professional activities. She also raised a family. His story has been told in his own words (Stephenson, 1992; Interview, 1991-92) and has commanded academic attention; hers has not yet been recorded.

The paper provides a preliminary biographical exposition of Flora’s life and work. Arranged chronologically, it draws on sources including private papers, Gordon Stephenson’s autobiography and substantial oral history, family recollections, and published materials.

HOME, FAMILY, EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE

Flora Bartlett Crockett was born in 1914 in New Jersey, the second child and only daughter of Harriet Bartlett Crockett (b.1874) and Melville Martin Crockett (1871-1929) (“Crockett”). She grew up in the leafy suburb of Westwood with her older sibling, a brother, Robinson Bartlett Crockett, who was born in 1907 (and died in 1963). Her mother attended art school in New York as a young woman and at that time became interested in architecture (Stephenson to Holford, 1937, p.2). Flora’s father was a sea captain. He travelled widely but contracted malaria after spending time in central and South America and retired early. Subsequently he obtained work on Wall Street. To ease the pressure of commuting daily between the family home in Prospect Avenue, Westwood, and New York, he took an apartment at 5 Wall Street where he stayed during the week. The family owned a summer house in Maine, New England, the state where the Crocketts established themselves originally (‘Re: Flora Bartlett Crockett’).

After her father’s death in 1929, Flora lived with her mother. Her brother had followed their father to sea and he spent much of his time away. Her mother kept the family, mostly through financial investments, but “they ... had a

1 Information on Flora’s family and early life is from Ann Peluso (her daughter) unless referenced otherwise.
Flora attended Westwood High School and then Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Founded in 1837 by chemist Mary Lyon as an endowed seminary college, Mount Holyoke was a leading educational institution for women and a champion of higher learning for women of all means. Lyons’ words, “Go where no one else will go, do what no one else will do”, underpinned the institution’s ethos and its intent to offer women a liberal arts education “conspicuously free of instruction of domestic pursuits” (“Mount Holyoke”).

After Mount Holyoke, Flora enrolled in the newly formed School of Architecture at MIT in Boston. However,

“she never wanted to be an architect ... Her mother wanted her to be an architect. Her mother had studied art ... and dreamed of her daughter being an architect” (Interview, 1991-92, p.260).

At the time, MIT students had the option of transferring from Architecture to Planning after their third year. Like Architecture, Planning was a new course, introduced in 1933 and located until 1947 within the Architecture school. The curriculum, drafted by eminent British town planner Thomas Adams, was distinguished from existing offerings by the fact that it approached planning “from the architectural standpoint” and that the curriculum was studio-dominated (Vale, 2008, pp.14-15). “Part-way through [her Architecture] course Flora decided that she was more interested in City Planning” and so she transferred after her third year, completing her Bachelor of Architecture in City Planning in May 1937 (Stephenson to Holford, 1937, p.3; Vale to Garnaut). In partial fulfilment of the degree she submitted a thesis titled ‘A Low-Rent Housing Project for Brighton’ [Boston] (Crockett, 1937).

Flora took a break from study to travel with her mother and one of her (Flora’s) friends to Europe for several months from June 1937. After that sojourn, which led them to England among other countries, she returned to MIT in 1938 when she began her MCP. The one other female student in her cohort was Jane Rodman. They share the distinction of being the first women to graduate – in June 1940 - from the MCP degree at MIT, with Flora being the first to complete the course by submitting her thesis in September 1939, eight months ahead of Rodman (Bever, 1976; Vale to Garnaut).²

Flora’s education at Mount Holyoke and that institution’s ethos of encouraging women to enter new worlds, even if there were barriers, was important preparation for MIT. At the time when she was a student there, “there were

hardly any women at all. It was in the age when all engineers were men, and nearly all architects were men ... ” (Interview, 1991-92, p.66). Flora was very popular and was invited frequently by her male peers to join them at the main “meeting place for students of different years and different disciplines”, the central staircase in the building which housed the School of Architecture (Interview, 1991-92, p.66).

One of the men whom she met during her undergraduate studies was British trained architect, Gordon Stephenson. His mother had grown up in Shropshire, England and his father, a policeman, was raised near Liverpool, the city where Gordon was born in 1908 (Stephenson, 1992, p.16). Flora and Gordon’s paths crossed when she was enrolled in the B.Arch. and he in the MCP. Gordon remembered her as being “a very friendly person” (Interview, 1991-92, p.66) and

“a cheery soul who worked with gusto and seemed to enjoy herself when off the job in the same cheerful and wholehearted way. She ... [was] such a good comrade ... [who] commanded real respect and admiration in the studio” (Stephenson to Holford, 1937, p.5).

They courted for a little over twelve months and were married in mid-1938 on the day after they graduated from their B.Arch.(CP) and MCP degrees. The wedding was an intimate affair. Only Flora’s mother and three student friends attended. Flora and Gordon enjoyed a three-month honeymoon in North America and Mexico and then in October left the US for his home city, Liverpool (Interview, 1991-92, p.73). It was the first of many times they would move house in their life together.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE, STUDY AND WORK

The Stephensons stayed in Liverpool until the beginning of 1939 living on the fourth floor of an old house overlooking the Anglican Cathedral (Stephenson, 1992, p.51; Interview, 1991-92, p.73). It was a challenging time. War was imminent, rationing was in place, there was no work and Flora and Gordon were “stony-broke” having spent their savings on their honeymoon. Eventually he was offered a teaching position at the Architectural Association and they shifted to London.

Flora was variously occupied during 1939. She completed research for her thesis and submitted it in September. At the same time she worked for the planner Thomas Adams. Adams’ office was in Bloomsbury close to the Stephensons’ lodgings. “The room she was in was in the basement. She got thoroughly cold every day, despite the woollies she put on” (Interview, 1991-92, p.74). Although the precise nature of her work with Adams is unknown, given the focus of her Master’s research, it is likely that she was involved with his “last known plan, made during 1939-40” for a holiday village at Whitelands, not far from Hastings in East Sussex, England (Simpson, 1985, p.178).

Flora’s records at MIT indicate that she submitted from London.
Flora’s Master’s thesis examined the camping movement internationally and focused on holiday, school and evacuation camps in particular (Stephenson, 1940). She investigated the origins of camping and studied the need for, and benefits of, each of her three case study categories. The thesis included a survey of the camping phenomenon in the US, Europe and Continental countries from Denmark to the USSR; photographs, maps and diagrams enriched the text. Clearly, Flora took advantage of being based in the UK since she paid considerable attention to circumstances there. In the final section of the thesis, ‘A National Plan for Camps’ in Great Britain, she recommended, among other proposals, a program through which camps could be developed to address the growing problem of providing affordable family holiday accommodation. Additionally, she addressed the need to protect the amenity of the countryside by proposing camping zones. She considered, too, the physical layout of camp sites and the design of accommodation and associated buildings like dining and recreation halls.

The thesis presented an opportunity for Flora and Gordon to work in their first professional collaboration - the staging of a six-week exhibition held during April and May 1939 which showcased school, family holiday and evacuation camps. The project drew substantially on Flora’s Master’s research and brought her (and Gordon) into contact with several women influential in social housing reform in Britain.

Commissioned by the Housing Centre, London, the exhibition was held on its premises. Architectural Association trained architect Judith Ledeboer and architect, town planner and landscape architect Jocelyn Adburgham co-founded the Housing Centre to promote socially focused housing based on progressive architectural ideas (Walker, n.d., p.25). They were assisted in their endeavour by leading housing consultant Elizabeth Denby (Darling, 2005). Both Ledeboer and Denby were keen promoters of exhibitions as tools of engagement with the community, the professions and government. Flora referred to the exhibition in her thesis, citing its opening by Sir John Anderson, Minister for Civil Defense, and the high community and professional attendance, as a sign of the contemporary national importance of camps (Stephenson, 1940, pp.26-27).

Presumably through their contacts at the Housing Centre, the Stephensons were commissioned in 1939 to carry out a survey of community centres in England, Scotland and Wales. They shared the early research and field work but Flora took the lead in completing it and compiling the accompanying report. She continued the work from Liverpool as, in the midst of the research phase, Gordon was invited to join a design team for an Ordnance filling factory north-east of Liverpool and they moved there to live. Their co-authored 117-page publication, *Community Centres: a survey*, was published in 1942 and became a “standard work” (Stephenson, 1942; Interview, 1991-92, p.74).

The Housing Centre was one of the three commissioning organisations for the survey along with the National Council of Social Service and the Royal Institute of British Architects; they formed the Community Centres Joint Research Committee which was chaired by Housing Centre chairman Ledeboer. Her

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4 The postal address of the Housing Centre was 13 Suffolk Street, London.
interests were broader than housing and extended to residential environments more generally. She was keen that the latter provided “a centre for activities of a voluntary kind” (Interview, 1991-92, p.74).

The community centre movement began in the UK in the early 1930s. Its impetus included the absence of facilities where residents of housing estates could meet informally and thereby foster an active community life. While special interest groups such as sports clubs may have been catered for, their buildings had been planned “often ... without regard to the location of other similar facilities, or to a possible overlapping of facilities” (Stephenson, 1942, p.3). In other words, there was “little attempt to plan for the needs of a community as a whole.”

Near the end of the decade, the situation was changing but the Joint Committee foreshadowed the need to be informed, for the post-war reconstruction effort, of the social and physical needs of community centre buildings. It briefed the Stephensons to identify and scope out existing examples. They reported on eight centres using a standard set of headings: membership, administration, activities, site planning, planning of the building, the building and the furniture.5 Site and building plans were included in the report.

Reflecting later on the commission, Gordon recalled that, aside from fulfilling the major aim of the survey, to provide information on the existing buildings, one of its key lessons was the importance of the local community in initiating centres:

“We learned that the most successful were those that were started by people, a small group, somebody bringing together various groups concerned with different activities. You could have a successful Community Centre in the worst kind of building. You could have one provided by local government that wouldn't be as successful” (Interview, 1991-92, p.74).

WORLD WAR, WRITING, EDITING, AND RAISING A YOUNG FAMILY

World War 2 broke out in September 1939 while the Stephensons were working in London. Against the advice of the American Embassy, Flora elected not to return to the US and effectively opened up the opportunity for Gordon to “put his stamp on many aspects of planning in Britain” during the 1940s (Dix, 1997, p.v). In January 1940 they returned to Liverpool for him to work on the Ordnance factory project. After two years, at the beginning of 1942, they moved back to London where he took up employment in the reconstruction division of the Ministry of Planning (Ward, 2010). Liverpool beckoned again, near the end of the 1940s, when Gordon accepted an appointment from 1 January 1948 as the Lever Professor of Civic Design at the University of

5 The centres were: Filwood Social Centre, Bristol; Frecheville Community Centre, Sheffield; Slough Social Centre, Slough, Bucks; North Kensington Community Centre, London; Craigentinny-Lochend Social Centre, Edinburgh; Impington Village College, Cambridgeshire; Townhill Community Centre, Swansea; Werrington and District Village Hall, Staffs.
Liverpool. He held the position until 1953 after which, as revealed later, his work took the family into other and more distant parts of the world.

During their five years in London (1942 to 1947) their three children, all daughters, were born: Gail (1942), Sarah (1944) and Ann (1947). Gordon recalled later that as the girls were growing up, Flora was the primary caregiver and had little time for her own career (Interview, 1991-92, p.99). In their early years, the professional moments that she did have were devoted mainly to working as an author and editor. She “excelled in writing”, had a strong command of grammar and a distinctive capacity as “a writer, describer and explainer” of planning (Interview, 1991-92, p.99, 260). Indeed, Gordon revealed, “I ... learned the good parts of my English from her.” As time went on, increasingly, he would seek her assistance as an editor and writer.

After Community Centres, Flora worked on two writing projects, one with Gordon, one separately. Both evolved through the agency of Julian Huxley, renowned biologist, internationalist, author, and brother of the well-known writer Aldous Huxley. Julian Huxley was a founder of the Society for Cultural Relations (SCR) between the British Commonwealth and the USSR (1924) of which Gordon was a member in the 1940s (Ward, 2010; Stephenson, 1992, p.155); their acquaintance through the SCR is the likely reason for Huxley approaching the Stephensons. With Gordon, Flora wrote extended captions for Huxley’s book TVA: Adventure in Planning, an exposé of the regional planning initiatives of the Tennessee Valley Authority founded in 1933 as one of Theodore Roosevelt’s early New Deal initiatives (Huxley, 1943). Gordon had researched the TVA during his Master’s study and Flora “favoured the Roosevelt view of things” (Stephenson, 1938; Interview, 1991-92, p.66) so aside from its interest from a planning perspective, and Gordon’s link to Huxley, the project was likely to have been attractive to them for other and different reasons.

Flora’s other invitation from Huxley involved co-authoring the book A Plan for Town and Country (1944) with British artist Phoebe Pool. The publication was Number 11 in the ‘Target for Tomorrow’ series published by The Pilot Press, London. The series focused on issues of the time (e.g. housing, industry after the war, the welfare of the elderly and of children) and Huxley was a member of the editorial board. Pool was a scholar of 19th century French painting who also taught and wrote art reviews and poetry (Sorensen, n.d.). Initially Huxley invited her to be the book’s sole author. She commenced the research but ran into difficulties because she was unfamiliar with planning. Consequently Huxley asked Flora to write “the final version” because she “knew ... how to explain all the ideas and facts that go into planning” (Interview, 1991-92, p.260).

A Plan for Town and Country was intended as an educative publication premised on the view that “an informed public demand will then stimulate the experts to plan more humanly” (Stephenson and Pool, 1944, p.56). Although written for a popular audience, it was underpinned by a strong call to both community and government action. The lavishly illustrated book set out the planning problems of the day, from various perspectives, and emphasised the unique opportunity that post-war reconstruction presented to address them. It outlined pre-war planning legislation and recent developments in planning not only in the UK but also elsewhere in Europe, in the USSR and in North America.
Key findings of the government-commissioned Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt committees, and press and government responses to them, were summarised. A particular focus of the publication was the authors’ six-point “practical target for the planned use of land to the national advantage” (Huxley in Stephenson and Pool, 1944, p.8).

In preparing the overview of planning initiatives elsewhere Flora could draw on her knowledge of the US as well as on information gleaned from professional discussions with Gordon since “an interesting aspect of ... [his] work [at the Ministry for Planning] ... was the acquisition or exchange of information about planning in other countries” (Ward, 2010, p.x). *A Plan for Town and Country* has been noted as one of a number of texts published to promote the planning opportunities open to the British government in the reconstruction era (e.g. Larkham, 2003).

When Gordon was appointed Lever Professor of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool he revitalised the journal *Town Planning Review* (TPR). First published in 1910 as the “research journal” of the School of Civic Design (Stephenson, 1002, p.129), TPR had languished in the years prior to Gordon’s arrival. He set himself the task of shifting it from a locally-focused to an international publication which appeared quarterly. His goal was to achieve ““a balanced series of articles ... contributed by people working in the fields of history, planning in Great Britain, planning abroad and the allied sciences”” (Stephenson in Batey and Massey, 2010, p.21). He continued the tradition of publishing book reviews and introduced the practice of illustrating articles with illustrations.

Gordon established a team to support him in meeting his bold objectives. He revamped the journal’s editorial structure to involve his colleagues William (Bill) Holford from the UK and Frederick Adams from the US as co-editors and recruited a team of international collaborators as editorial advisers. For the “day-to-day operations” he enlisted Flora’s help as well as that of several academic staff in the Department of Civic Design (Batey and Massey, 2010, p.19). An editorial office was set aside for them in the Civic Design building and Flora and others were assigned the title of assistant editors. In his autobiography Gordon acknowledged their support - a “labour of love” - and noted Flora’s particular contributions: “Perhaps most important was the editorial help of R E M McCaughan and ... my wife, Flora. ... Flora ... diligently read proofs and offered suggestions” (Stephenson, 1991-92, pp.130-131).

In the six years of Gordon’s editorship of TPR (1948 to 1954), Batey and Massey (2010, p.24) indicate that 104 articles were published and 143 items were reviewed. The journal “reached subscribers, libraries, and organisations in thirty-five countries on the five continents” (Stephenson, 1991-92, pp.130-131). Through her involvements as Assistant Editor, Flora made a substantial contribution to the production, quality and rigour of the journal. She also wrote one short piece, a review of Olga Adams’ book *Children and the City* (Stephenson, 1953, p.318). The book outlined the ways in which the author, a kindergarten teacher, engaged her classes in “developing a civic consciousness” and an appreciation of planning by considering the essential elements of their everyday environments and their effective organisation. Through their
classroom activities, the children realised “the need for some kind of plan, and of sorting out their buildings into residential, business, and industrial areas”.

In Volume XX, one of the early TPR issues under his editorship, Gordon published two articles by American architect-planner Clarence Stein. Stein had been a visiting lecturer at MIT and Stephenson held him in high regard. After he heard Stein speak at the American Society of Planning Officials Conference in New York in 1948, he approached him about publishing “some of ... [his] experiences in connection with the creation of new communities” like Radburn, New Jersey (Stein, 1957, p.7). Stein agreed and during 1949 Gordon worked with him in the preparation of the articles. But

“as ... [they] developed we could see a book. ... [Stein] started writing primarily about Radburn. He had a network of friends in America ... he’d send them notes and drafts, get their comments back ... Gradually as the pieces came together, my wife and I worked closely with ... [him] and eventually shaped the book. ... Stein wrote very well, but sometimes in such a way that probably only Americans would understand it. So Flora performed the relatively easy job of changing some sentences, so it was a sort of mid-Atlantic English, although the spelling was American” (Interview, 1991-92, p.70).

The book was published under the title Toward New Towns for America. In his Foreword, Stein expressed his “affectionate thanks to Gordon Stephenson - and ... his American wife” and explained specifically Flora’s editing role (Stein, 1957, p.8).

“FROM AN OLD COUNTRY TO A VERY NEW COUNTRY TO A NEW COUNTRY”

Despite the distances involved and the young ages of their daughters, in the 1950s the Stephensons moved several times to different parts of the globe. Flora played a major role in supporting Gordon personally and professionally while he took up various opportunities in academia and as a consultant. Each time they shifted, there were not only possessions to pack and ship but also their children’s welfare and education to consider. New schools had to be found and the girls needed to be nurtured through changing living and learning environments and friendships. Gordon remarked in a letter to Stein in 1953 that at that stage of his life he was comfortable with the thought of feeling “almost stateless” because “in the way of practical work I should like it to be my lot to work in newer or underdeveloped countries” (Stephenson to Stein 1953). However, in other correspondence with his friend, he acknowledged several times that Flora was keen to settle in one place; but it would be another decade before her ambition was realised.

In 1952, while still employed as Lever Professor, Gordon accepted an offer of a consultancy in Perth, “the frontier of the western world”, and the capital of Western Australia (Stephenson, 1992, p.135). He was to be employed by the state government to prepare a plan for the metropolitan region of Perth and Fremantle. Gordon arrived in Perth on New Year’s Day 1953. He made the journey alone but kept Flora well-informed by letter of his reception, the work required and his favourable views of Perth (Gregory, forthcoming). In July 1953 he revealed to Stein that “rightly or wrongly Flora and I have quite made up our minds that we shall travel to Western Australia at the end of December, and
stay there for seven months. ... Living in a very new and vast country amongst delightful people will be a great experience for all of us and especially for the girls” (Stephenson to Stein, 1953).

Gordon resigned from the University of Liverpool in 1953. The Stephensons left the UK with the expectation that after he had completed his commitments in Australia, they would make a permanent move to the US where he would take up an appointment as Professor of City and Regional Planning at MIT. “When we finally get there we shall have moved from an old country to a very new country and then onto a new country and then New England, which is Flora’s home” (Stephenson to Stein, 1953).

The plan had strong appeal to both Flora and Gordon but for different reasons: “After living through World War II in England ... [she] was to return home, and ... [he] was to be head of the most important planning school in the English-speaking world” (Stephenson, 1992, p.154). In the upshot, however, their plan was thwarted. It was the era of McCarthyism and Gordon was refused his application for permanent residency in the US based apparently on his earlier professional associations with communists, involvement with the SCR and visits to the USSR (Stephenson, 1992, pp.154-55). Flora endeavoured unsuccessfully to use her status as an American citizen, giving evidence in support of Gordon before a specially-convened Committee in Washington. It was “a bad time for her ... an ordeal ... [and the whole] situation was fairly tense for us” (Interview, 1991-92, pp.166-167).

The family stayed in Perth until mid-1955. Then they uprooted again and returned to London for a short while before moving to Canada for five years while Gordon was employed at the University of Toronto as the Chair of Town and Regional Planning. Flora enjoyed life in Toronto, appreciating the region’s similarities with Maine and New Hampshire where she had grown up (Interview, 1991-92, p.176). However, a permanent home in Perth beckoned when, in 1960, Gordon was appointed to the roles of consultant architect and professor of architecture at the University of Western Australia (UWA). In conjunction with these roles he was permitted to undertake private work. Perth appealed to Flora and their daughters (Stephenson, 1992, p.183). Indeed it became the place where she could “experience the ‘joys’ of ... the stable and permanent existence” for which she craved (Stephenson to Stein 1954, p.3).

FLORA’S PROFESSIONAL ENDEAVOURS IN CANADA AND AUSTRALIA

During the Stephensons’ stay in Canada, in the long summer vacations Flora was involved in different capacities with Gordon’s work: “she would get mixed up with whatever was being done between terms” (Interview, 1991-92, p.176). He had commissions in Halifax, Nova Scotia and in Kingston and London, Ontario. Flora worked with him for two months in 1956 on an urban renewal study for Halifax. She could do so because their daughters attended a holiday camp (Camp Gay Venture) in Ontario.

Halifax was a major port and had played an important role in Canadian military history. Its population swelled and declined in times of war and peace creating areas of abandoned and substandard housing. Gordon was contracted by the
Halifax City Council to undertake a survey of city housing and to advise on sectors for redevelopment and zoning (Grant and Paterson, 2010). He assembled a small team of four people to work with him; Flora was one of them. Her job did not have an official title but it involved a comprehensive “house-to-house survey of the [downtown] slum areas”. She conducted it with a female high school teacher and they “saw all kinds of horrible ways in which people were forced to live”, mostly in aged, insanitary, and run-down timber houses that Gordon described as winter fire-traps (Interview, 1991-92, p.170).

The evidence collected for the study’s final report has been described as “exhaustive” (Grant and Paterson, 2010, p.13, 26-29), revealing the commitment to task of Flora and her colleagues and the extent of detailed data that they gathered. To Gordon’s enormous satisfaction the City Council acted on all of the report’s recommendations which extended beyond strategies for housing renewal; he considered that all involved in the study should share his pride in the result (Stephenson, 1992, pp.159-160; Interview, 1991-92, p.169; Gordon and Nicholson, 2010).

As part of the terms of his appointment to UWA, Gordon secured a part-time position for Flora as assistant to the consultant-architect. By then the girls were teenagers and perhaps becoming more self-sufficient. Flora’s annual salary was £1250 and she received no entitlements (superannuation, study or long service leave) (UWA Staff File No.763). She worked in Gordon’s office for seven years along with four others, all men. Then, in late 1967, after she and Gordon returned from his ten-month overseas sabbatical (December 1966 to October 1967), she decided to reduce her paid work commitments.

Although he was appointed to a professorial position at UWA, the School of Architecture had not yet opened. Flora systematically prepared teaching materials, principally a slide collection. She recorded full details about the subject of each slide. “We wanted to make sure that while the slides were filed in slide cabinets, the information would be filed with them” so she did that work too (Stephenson, 1991-92, p.134). Then, once the School of Architecture was operating, she was responsible for maintaining the slide collection. In this period she also co-authored with Gordon an article titled ‘Planning for the University of Western Australia’ (Stephenson and Stephenson, 1966). It was published in Town Planning Review and chronicled the campus development from the early 20th century through Gordon’s significant contributions from the early 1950s to the mid 1960s (Garnaut, 2010).

Flora worked with Gordon on a number of his private commissions in Perth and in other parts of Australia. One, in Canberra in 1969-1971, involved “directing the interdisciplinary Tuggeranong Residential Environment” (Freestone, 2010, p.53). For six months in 1971 they lived in Canberra at University House in the grounds of the Australian National University (Interview, 1991-92, p.234). The project involved collaborations with social scientists from a range of backgrounds, the National Capital Planning Committee, the local government

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6 Gordon later used it as the basis of the booklet, Stephenson, G. Planning for the University of Western Australia: 1914-70, Perth: Langham Press, 1996. He dedicated the publication to Flora.
authority for the Australian Capital Territory and a wide range of departments from roads to fire-brigade. Flora’s role was to “keep up with the paperwork” and to keep the various parties informed of project progress (Stephenson, Interview 1991-92, pp.228-229).

The following year, in January 1972, Flora and Gordon spent three weeks in Hobart, Tasmania, carrying out research and site investigations for a revised master plan for the University of Tasmania (UTas). They examined the developed and undeveloped parts of the campus, consulted a broad range of parties and attended numerous meetings. The resultant report bore his name only. However, in a covering letter to the Vice-Chancellor, he acknowledged “with thanks” Flora, and others, by name (Stephenson, 1972, p.2). The following month Gordon travelled without Flora to carry out a university campus redevelopment project for Nanyang University in Singapore. He wrote to her explaining that the problems were similar to the ones they had encountered at UTas. He missed her research skills: “we’re not only short of reliable maps but also all kinds of information. Wish you were here. You would not only enjoy it but also be most helpful” (Gordon Stephenson to Flora Stephenson, 1972).

One of the last projects on which Flora worked with Gordon was a study of central Perth which he undertook in 1973. His brief was to devise “an overall design policy” relevant to the regional and local city plan. Flora was not engaged officially but, as he acknowledged, she assisted with the research: “as she has often done before, my wife succeeded in the hard task of eliciting opinions and important facts from many reports and documents” (Stephenson, 1975, p.xi). She also helped by editing the report (Interview, 1991-92, p.223).

CONCLUSION

Flora and Gordon Stephenson were equally well qualified but their career paths were markedly different. He developed a high profile in planning and design circles internationally; she gave him the “immense support” (Dix, 1997, p.v) that allowed him to establish, build and enlarge his reputation. In the early years of their partnership Flora utilised and extended the knowledge gained from her studies and demonstrated and honed her skills as a researcher, author and editor. She published, and she played a substantial role as an assistant editor for Town Planning Review and in editing Clarence Stein’s seminal Toward New Towns for America. The responsibility for caring for her family fell largely on her shoulders. That fact, in combination with the reality and impact of the growth and diversification of Gordon’s career, and of their lifestyle becoming more peripatetic, seemingly led to her professional interests growing secondary to his. Gordon commented in the early 1990s that Flora was “very easy to work with, because she … was always thinking of herself as the assistant rather than the equal” (Interview, 1991-92, p.260). Although that “was not as it should have been,” it appears to have become a hallmark of their professional collaborations as the years wore on.

On the one hand this preliminary foray into the life and work of Flora Stephenson confirms Birch’s observations about the path trodden by women of Flora’s generation who chose to combine marriage and children with a career.
On the other hand it has revealed much about Flora’s professional interests, strengths and achievements, about what was important to her personally and professionally, and about the nature and scope of the professional collaborative relationship which she and Gordon developed, fostered and maintained for a little over forty years.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the assistance of Flora Stephenson’s daughter Ann Peluso and grandson Jonathon Rose, Lawrence Vale and Colleen McHugh, MIT, staff of the MIT archives, and colleagues in the international team involved in the Gordon Stephenson project 2009-11.

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