Title: 'the analysis of the small, individual moment': The company town of Mary Kathleen as a Cold War urban form

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i. present in person (with a written paper)

During the Cold War there was a rush to locate, mine, and process uranium. This led to the creation of uranium towns in Czechoslovakia, Canada, the Soviet Union, USA and Australia. Mary Kathleen was one such Australian town; a planned company town 800 kilometres from the coastal city of Townsville, and 40 kilometres from the mining town of Mount Isa which evinced the latest design philosophies and materials.

Mary Kathleen was a place where ideas, people and policies converged; a small place, heavy with the symbolism of the wider newly-atomic world. The ‘atomic age’ was bracingly modern, scientific and confident yet plagued by fears of contamination, and nuclear destruction. Mary Kathleen’s corporate origins, idealized suburbanism, and role in the atomic world was a reassuring picture in the Cold War. But at times the town reflected the darker side of the atomic age as when two kilograms of uranium oxide was stolen from the mine in 1976. By this decade, peace and environmental activists...
were increasingly successful in presenting Mary Kathleen as a dangerous cog in the Australian nuclear fuel and weapons cycle. Residents experienced its rational organisation and its boom-bust cycles of production and closure, and now are confronted with the reality of its destruction as it was progressively dismantled from 1982.

This paper analyses the town as a palimpsest for postwar Australia. It will follow the town as a tangible expression of postwar modernity and new planning and architectural approaches. It will then consider the town’s removal and destruction, and its current status as a lost site with a (mostly) intangible heritage.

**Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Professor Erik Eklund is a Professor of History at Federation University Australia where he is a member of the Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History and Director of the Centre for Gippsland Studies. From 2015 to 2016 he was the Keith Cameron Visiting Professor in Australian History at University College Dublin, Ireland. He was a Professor and Head of School at Monash University from 2008 before joining Federation University in 2014. He has held visiting appointments at Georgetown University in Washington DC, and the Australian National University in Canberra. His research interests cover labour history, comparative regional histories, deindustrialisation, oral history and memory, and industrial heritage. His major monographs include *Steel Town: the making and breaking of Port Kembla* (2002), and *Mining Towns: making a living, making a life* (2012). *Steel Town* won the New South Wales Premiers’ Prize for regional and community history in 2003, while his article co-authored with Paul Adams (‘Representing militancy: photographs of the Broken Hill industrial disputes, 1908-20’) was named the joint winner of the best article published in the journal *Labour History* over the period 2011 to 2012.