



# HISTORY WEST

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

August 2018

## GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 15 August at 6pm when Denise Cook and Lynnette Coomer will present a paper on 'That Was My Home': Voices from the Shenton Park and Swanbourne Noongar Camps'. Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.



Camp at Herdsman's Lake, early 1900s. Daisy Bates collection, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide MSS 572.994 B32t

*We really enjoyed life in the bush, you know, we were bred and born to live in the bush, because things were just sort of free and easy, we could do what we wanted to do.*

Corrie Bodney, January 2007

Perth's western suburbs have a hidden history of Noongar camps that is as recent as the 1950s. These camps were on the fringes of suburbs, such as at Lake Claremont, and near Lemnos Street in Shenton Park. This story of cross-cultural relationships and tensions is an important aspect of our past, but one that is relatively unknown in the wider community.

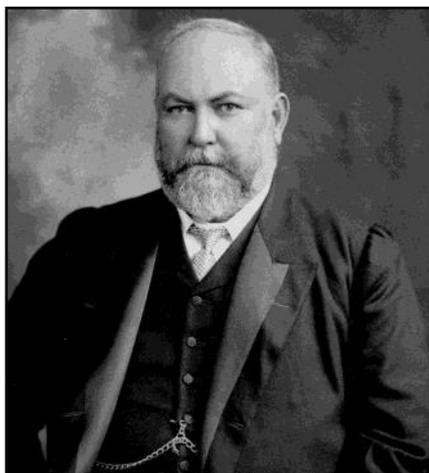
Join Lynnette Coomer, as she shares her memories of the Shenton Park camps, and Dr Denise Cook who discusses her PhD research and forthcoming book about the Shenton Park and Swanbourne camps.

**Dr Denise Cook** is an historian and oral historian specialising in Western Australian history, particularly local and Noongar history, as well as protocols for non-Aboriginal people working in the Noongar community. Denise's work includes the Kaartdijin Noongar website for the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, and oral histories for organisations such as Freshwater Bay Museum, Rail Heritage WA and the former Roelands Mission. She is particularly interested in researching, recording and telling stories that might not otherwise be heard.

**Lynnette Coomer** lived in the Shenton Park camps in the 1950s with her parents, grandmother Melba Bodney, and siblings. She went to Jolimont Primary School until she was seven when she, and the next youngest children, were taken away to Roelands Mission. Lynnette worked for many years as an Aboriginal Education Assistant, and in 2015 won the Reg Henry Snr Aboriginal Person of the Year Award in Kwinana. She has recently recorded her story for the Nedlands Library and Freshwater Bay Museum.



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### Remembering John Forrest

on the centenary of his death

We hope you enjoy the series of articles on Western Australia's first Premier which begins in this month's *History West*.

*He was without any doubt "a born leader". A man with a remarkable degree of self-confidence, who...had been able to take advantage of situations best suited to his temperament and his natural talents. He had an appetite for leadership and power, and a temperament well suited to decision making.*

F K Crowley

## Council News

At its meeting held on 12 July business included the following where Council

- welcomed new members – John Burgess (Archival Products Volunteer Officer), Dr Megan Ewing, Christian Grill, Mark Hutchinson, Grania Key, and Janet Matthews;
- resolved to hold a special general meeting on Thurs 23 August to report to members on the developing plans for the History West Community Centre to replace Stirling House as headquarters of the Society;
- confirmed that a short exhibition of John Forrest’s 1869, 1870 and 1874 expedition scrapbook will be held in the first week of September as part of the commemoration of the centenary of his death;
- welcomed a report on the success of the Local History Practitioners’ visit to the Society;
- received a report on the government’s plans for Landgate and potential changes to access to Landgate records that could follow, and resolved to continue monitoring the issue;
- resolved to write to government on the Society’s concerns at recent decisions with regard to redacting information contained in the Births, Deaths and Marriages records;
- noted that interest in and planning for the Katanning trip is strong and well-advanced;
- welcomed the total of 1013 volunteer hours worked in the Society’s interests in July, and thanked all the many volunteers;
- welcomed Nick Drew’s success in gaining a three-year grant from Lotterywest for assistance with travel to State History Conferences;
- noted the submission of a grant application under GLAM-PEAK Digital Access grant program for technical support with photography;
- thanked Helen Henderson for her continuing work to resolve problems with the website’s Collective Access program;
- expressed its sadness at the death of Lee Fernie, past Councillor and active volunteer over many years.

Lorraine Clarke Vice Chairperson

## Diary Dates

- Tue 21 Aug:** Auxiliary Morning Tea Fundraiser at Stirling House
- Thu 23 Aug:** HWCC members’ meeting
- Wed 29 Aug:** Life at ‘The Bungalow’ in early 20th Century, Richard Offen
- Fri 7 - Sun 9 Sep:** RWAHS 54<sup>th</sup> Annual State History Conference of Affiliated Societies hosted by Cervantes HS

## History in the City

Our July talk was given by Philippa Rogers on Memories of the Trans-Australian Railway. We learnt what an achievement it was to build the link. Before the railway, the only transport link between the west and east of Australia was by boat and the only communication by telegraph. It was interesting to hear from Philippa that consultation on where the railway line should be constructed was carried out among Aboriginal people as well as white settlers. It was a huge project, and planning and preparation time did not move quickly.

In 1912 the Commonwealth Railways was established and the first soil was turned at the eastern end. There were celebrations in Kalgoorlie, too, with the turning of the first soil there. However the project was beset with problems. The land was inhospitable, steam locomotives needed water and a large labour force (about 3,500) was required. The work was hard and, during constructions, deaths occurred. And too much alcohol was consumed. Sometimes only four kilometres of track was laid in a day.

World War I broke out but the railway was viewed as a priority and work continued. It was in October 1917 that the rail line linked west and east, and an opening ceremony was held at Perth Railway Station to celebrate the occasion. The first train from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie took 53 hours 48 minutes to complete the journey. Extensions in 1969 completed the standard-gauge east-west railway from Perth to Sydney. Philippa closed her talk by telling us that the long straight line has been viewed from space.

History in the City is held on the first Wednesday of each month. Join us at 2pm at the Citiplace Community Centre on Perth Railway Concourse. Donation \$5 with afternoon tea, all welcome. Our talk on 5 September will be given by Annie Medley on The Sisters of Mercy in Colonial Perth 1846.

Lorraine Tholet

Everyone who visits our General Meeting Room is struck by the wonderful new blue carpet. It gives the room a much needed face-lift! Our thanks to **CARPETS AND FLOORS AT YOURS** for supplying the carpet tiles and to Jamie and Trevor from installing them.



And many thanks also to Michelle and John Urban who generously donated an unused vacuum cleaner. The old one we were using had given up working and we were in need of a replacement for spot clean-ups between our regular cleaners’ visits. Much appreciated!

## One member's passion for history - Patrick Cornish

It was camels that turned me on – on to appreciating the heritage of Australia, that is. These wonderful creatures were cantering along in the bush somewhere between Balladonia and Cocklebiddy, my first time Nullarbor land crossing. I was 18, having grown up outside Australia but now letting this astonishing country grow on me.

Camels? So far from Arabic and Sahara lands? Indeed. I had to investigate. I discovered that they and their Afghan carers/drivers had proved essential in transporting goods and enabling telegraphy decades ago. Thanks to beasts of burden that could travel vast distances, the dots of the 'wide brown land' could be joined. Camels had helped human exploration in many countries but the land that would become Australia was a special challenge. Never had so many newcomers and settlers depended on a few people journeying so far.

Back in Perth I shared this discovery with anyone who would listen. So, yes, the past did matter enormously, as my English schoolteachers had tried unsuccessfully to make clear. As a recent convert to respect for life's rear vision mirrors, I enrolled in a History unit at UWA, a couple of hundred metres from Stirling House, as part of my Arts degree. By the time I joined the 'Royals' in adulthood, I realised that the key word in all this discussion is 'shared'. History belongs not just to historians and curators, but to everyone. History – it's care and share.

We RWAHS members already share much with the larger community, in welcoming public use of our library and visits to exhibitions, to give just two examples, but there is a long haul ahead to establish a new era of exchange. Specifically, the building of a community centre to breathe new life into, and give more space for, our task of presenting and promoting Western Australia's history.

The volunteer spirit at Stirling House is a wonder to behold. Members greet, encourage and make sandwiches and cakes for our morning teas which are themselves an 'in house' opportunity to share knowledge and discuss both what has happened and what is anticipated down the track.

We cherish the past, respect the present and prepare for the future.

Our Society is often powered by emotion but has to be business-like to create a new future. For me personally, the motivation for supporting the Society is largely a wish to share Western Australia's wonders with my grandchildren and their contemporaries. I want them to appreciate a time before mobile phones and television. They deserve the chance to be shown maps, tools, costumes and paintings of the colonial years. Once upon a time... men mounted camels, steered them towards dusty duty in order to transform thousands of lives, and eventually set them free.

Patrick Cornish

### History West Community Centre: A new home for a new future

Come to hear more on our future plans over a glass of wine from 5.30pm - 6.30pm on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> August at Stirling House: our headquarters at 49 Broadway, Nedlands.

An occasion to be inspired and add your thoughts

#### Are you busy researching some aspect of Western Australian history?

– perhaps your family or your house or your neighbourhood or...

*History West* is interested to hear about the multitude of research topics members are currently undertaking.

Please drop me a line ([layman@westnet.com.au](mailto:layman@westnet.com.au)) or phone the Office (9386 3841) to let us know what your research is about – just the title with a little explanation; we are not asking you to write anything lengthy.

We would love to hear from you – and so will the members when we assemble a **Members' Research** list.

Please do be in touch.

**Lenore Layman, editor**

### Mystery Photo



#### Panorama of farm with truck and dog

Rimmed by low trees, this paddock, with its vast expanse of crop, includes a man leaning against a truck (from 1930s) with large tyres and a dog running about in front. The number '22' is written in red biro on right hand corner.

If you have any information about this photograph please contact the library on 9386 3841 or email [library@histwest.org.au](mailto:library@histwest.org.au)

# Anthony Hill's talk on writing historical fiction

Anthony Hill, author of an impressive eighteen books, including stories from the World Wars, soldier settlement, prisoners of war, and the Aboriginal Stolen Generation, spoke at the Society on 13 June. On a chilly Wednesday evening the arriving audience was glad to escape into the foyer at Stirling House. They quickly devoured the selection of snacks and enjoyed a warming glass of wine along with some lively conversation. However, once everyone sat down they fell silent, ready to listen to the man who stepped to the front of the room.

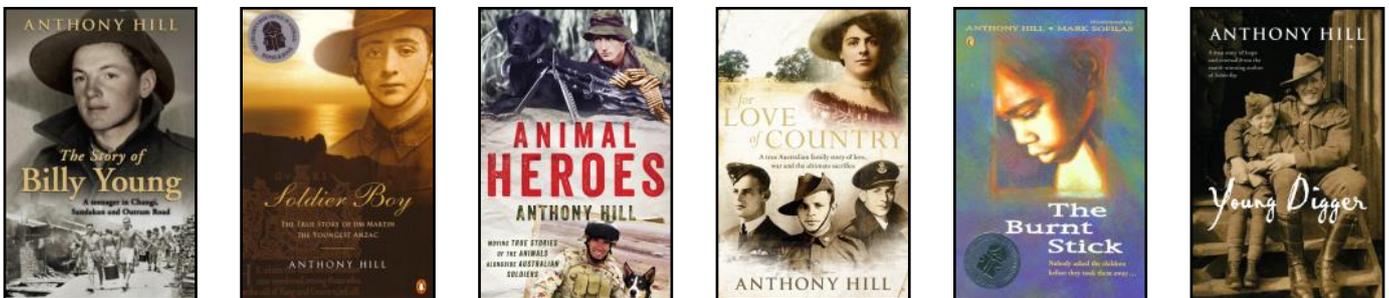
Tony began with a short introduction about himself, describing his past as a journalist and later as an antique shop owner. Surprisingly, he became a full-time writer only in 1999, a few years after his first success, *The Burnt Stick*, was published. This book has since been used in high schools to demonstrate how history can be used to comment on society. He then spoke about his first historical novel, *Soldier Boy*. When describing the main character of that novel he drew a laugh from the audience, saying 'he was about 5'2, my height, a very good height'. He explained some of his writing methods, such as drawing on his own experiences to get inside the mind of a historical character. He clarified this by saying that he 'never alters a known fact'.

His main topic was his latest novel-in-progress. This book will explore the story of Samuel Speed, the last convict to die in Western Australia. At present the author is still in the research process, and he admitted he doesn't really know who his main character is yet. Samuel is quite a mystery, as most of the evidence about his life is contradictory. He gave an example by quoting from a newspaper article published in 1938. Samuel had said, 'I didn't ever get married, I didn't need to, the girls were hanging off me'. Tony Hill laughed and explained that it is hard to decipher what is the truth in Samuel's story because mostly it sounds like a typical, old man romanticising his life.

The audience was intrigued by the questions about Samuel's life and the way Hill has been searching for answers. He led a discussion at the end of the talk about historical mysteries, encouraging the audience to tell stories of their own. Sally-Anne Hasluck recounted one about the residents of Sunset, the Old Men's Home in Dalkeith where Samuel Speed ended his days. Apparently it was a common occurrence that, after a night at the pub, the elderly men used to walk back home past the Claremont police station and the policemen would end up helping them on their way.

Tony finished his talk with some comments about why he writes historical fiction. He said he 'likes telling stories' and that's why he writes novels and not history books. 'Most people want to know what people thought and felt', Hill said, and so he communicates the past on a more personal level, through storytelling. His audience on the evening found him an interesting speaker and lively storyteller.

Caitlin Scott



## A night of bling and bubbles



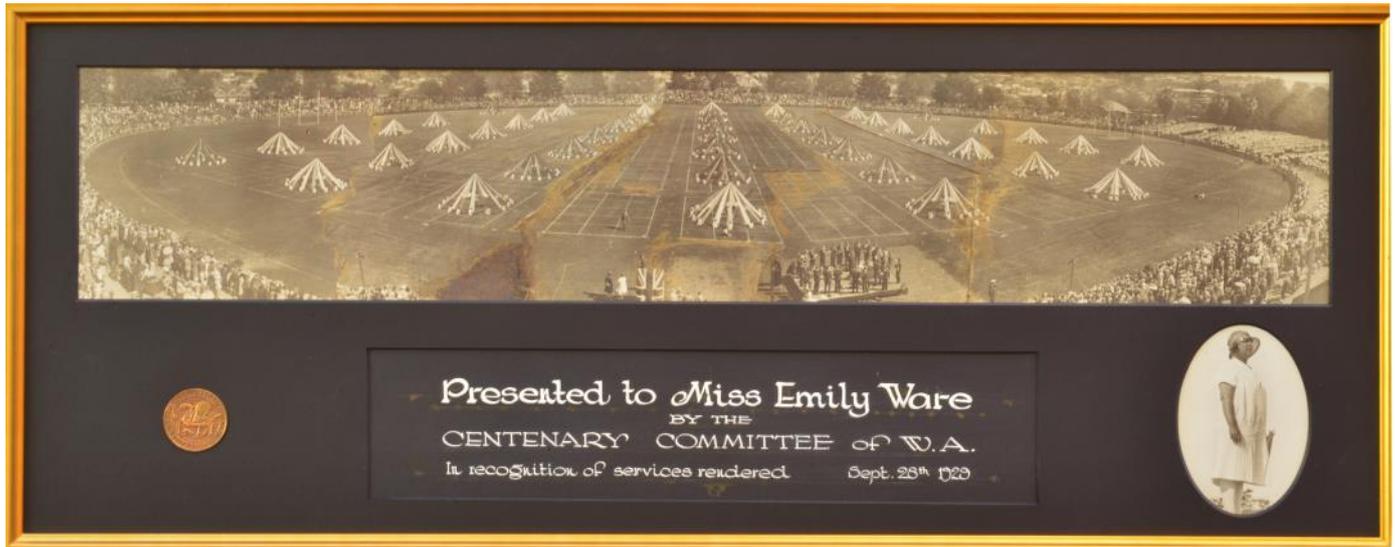
This joint event of the National Trust WA and the Royal WA Historical Society was held on Saturday 7 July. A mannequin dressed in a stunning sequined dress from the Society's costume collection greeted guests, and members of both organisations were welcomed with a glass of bubbles. The display in the meeting room – fan, furs, crystals and jewels – also set the mood for a night of glamour! Conversation soon flowed as people admired one another's bling or early colonial jewellery.

Trevor Hancock from Trinity Antiques was on hand to talk to people about their treasures and, after introductions by both Steve Errington, Vice President of the RWAHS, and Julian Donaldson, National Trust CEO, Trevor presented some of his colonial collection with pieces dating from around 1788 to 1900. Sally Anne Hasluck asked Trevor to draw the raffle which included prizes donated from the National Trust and two of our local florists – Poppy's Florist in Hampden Road, Nedlands, and Lizzy Bee Flowers in Waratah Village, Dalkeith. We thank them for their support.

Drinks and light finger food followed the presentation and, from the chatter and laughter which filled the room, it seemed that everyone enjoyed themselves – voted by all a most successful and happy evening!



## Museum News – The framed photographs restoration project Maypole Dancers at the Centennial Celebrations at Perth Oval



*Do look at this photograph when you next walk through the passageway at Stirling House. This is the second report in our series about these interesting images.*

The year 1929: one hundred years after Captain Charles Fremantle placed a British flag at the mouth of the Swan River and took formal possession of the land in the name of King George IV; one hundred years after Captain James Stirling, arriving on the *Parmelia*, proclaimed the foundation of the colony known as the Swan River settlement.

1929 was a year of celebration for Perth, Fremantle and regional towns such as York and Geraldton, Bunbury and Northam. Many committees were formed and a vast amount of detailed planning and organisation were undertaken by hundreds of people. Trees were planted and medals struck. Memorial gates were erected in Guildford. Balls and other social gatherings were held. There were firework displays, historical exhibitions, processions through the streets of Perth, and performances by thousands of school children.

One major event in the celebrations is shown in this framed photograph. It pictures a giant maypole dance performed by children on Perth Oval. Seven thousand school children took part in the exhibition of maypole dancing, marching, rhythmic exercises and folk dances. According to the *Western Mail's* enthusiastic reporting:

The dance chosen was the old-fashioned Sir Roger de Coverley, and it was danced with charming abandon. Next came a spectacle which must have constricted many throats and dimmed many eyes, so inspiring it was and so pregnant with glimpsed implications. The new generation of West Australians marched on to the ground in their thousands, heads up and eyes shining, carrying themselves with conscious pride.

The framed picture includes the medallion that was presented to Miss Emily Ware, whose photograph is shown in the right-hand corner. Little information about Emily remains. However, what is available, in newspaper snippets, is quite revealing; a young girl from Claremont, who made the most of her opportunities and talents. She was not by any means famous, but was highly respected in her specialist area of girls' physical education.

Emily Ware attended Claremont School and later Claremont Teachers College, qualifying in 1900 for appointment as a fourth-class pupil teacher. She was a member of the Claremont Tennis Club and the Royal Life Saving Club. She was a contralto and pupil of Miss Ada Baker, and entertained at many venues from an early age, including at a concert given for Eileen Joyce in Kalgoorlie in 1926.

Emily travelled overseas on several occasions and became an enthusiastic proponent of the Dalcroze method known as eurythmics which was defined as a 'process for awakening, developing and refining innate musicality through rhythmic movement, ear-training and improvisation'. In the Education Department she was a 'physical culture expert' and eventually Supervisor of Physical Training for Girls in the State Schools. Miss Ware arranged and trained the girls from the Princess May School when they danced to entertain TRH The Duke and Duchess of York during the royal visit in May 1927, and in 1929 she was given responsibility for the training of the girls who performed in the centennial celebrations at Perth Oval. This effort was recognised by the Centenary Committee in the award of a bronze medallion. Emily Ware died in Perth in 1970.

**Heather Mernick**

## An important donation to the Society's private archives The John Forrest collection

The John Forrest collection of personal papers has been donated to the Society by Nicholas Hasluck from the estate of his father, the late Sir Paul Hasluck.

Sir John Forrest's death on 3 September 1918 was followed in 1920 by the sale of The Bungalow, home of John and Margaret Forrest (née Hamersley). Forrest was a thoroughgoing keeper of his own records and left a large quantity of private papers to complement the official government records that cover his state and federal political careers. Unfortunately, after his death these private records were scattered.

Local historian, journalist on the *West Australian* and a founder of the WA Historical Society, Paul Hasluck was working on a biography of Sir John Forrest in the 1930s when he acquired various papers and research materials for that purpose. Having been transferred to Canberra in 1940 as part of the war effort, Hasluck was unable to proceed further with the project. Two completed chapters were presented to the Society many years later and published in the silver jubilee edition of *Early Days*, vol. 8 pt 1, 1977. This collection of Forrest papers, which Paul Hasluck had saved from possible destruction, remained in the family's possession until now when the Society is the fortunate beneficiary.

The Forrests had no children but were close to the children of Margaret's sister Flora who had married Forrest's friend and colleague Frederick North, secretary to the Premier and Clerk of the Executive Council. For most of the time from her husband's death until her own in June 1929, Margaret lived with or near Flora. The Forrest papers include letters to nephews and nieces and within the North family. These are quintessentially private papers, made up of a great variety of personal archival items.

The Society has been fortunate to attract two new volunteers to work on the collection. Carol Leigh, a retired archivist previously working for the City of



Margaret and John Forrest

Wanneroo, has started the huge task of cataloguing over 1,000 items. Ulli Broeze, former paper conservator at the WA Museum, is advising and helping with appropriate storage of the collection. The collection will be on the database in due course and available for research.

It is an opportune time to return our attention to one of Western Australia's most influential political leaders – the colony's first Premier (1890-1901) and first native-born knight – because

2018 is the centenary of his death. Aged 71 and ill, Forrest was on his way to Britain for medical treatment when he died at sea. He left a major political legacy and was undoubtedly one of Western Australia's most successful leaders, then or since. As a practical politician, Forrest's achievements were many – ensuring the orderly development of the colony's many rich goldfields, building Fremantle harbour and the Goldfields Water Scheme to Coolgardie/ Kalgoorlie, as well as putting in place the legislative, rail and financial structures to support the development of the wheat belt. Laying the groundwork for the Transcontinental Railway was another achievement. Forrest was a great state developer who rode the gold boom to ensure that Western Australia was left more securely placed in the new century than it had been in the previous one.

The collection contains records from Sir John Forrest's time as surveyor and explorer in the 1860s-1880s, as Premier in the 1890s, as a founding member of the federal parliament, and eventually as a federal cabinet minister. Items relate to his public life (albums, press cuttings, speech notes, invitations, travel plans) and his personal life in its final years when he mainly lived in Melbourne. The papers also reflect Forrest's family life, embracing the intermarried and intermeshed Forrest, Hamersley and North families. Various items point to another aspect of the family story – records relating to brother Alexander's estate, property ownership papers, mining and other investments (all evidence of a web of family financial arrangements), personal and household invoices, photographs, letters, and a range of Hamersley documents. This collection is bound to enrich our understanding of Forrest's life and times as a significant figure in colonial, state and national history.

In the centenary year of John Forrest's death the Society plans to contribute to a re-telling of his story, and in issues of *History West* over the next months we will explore some of the items contained in this collection. We hope that you enjoy the reports in the series and find them informative and thought provoking.



**Volunteer archivist-librarian Carol Leigh**  
*accessioning the Forrest papers, ordering and listing each item so that others can access them for research and exhibition. If you think that Carol is tucked away in a tight corner you are quite right. Stirling House is too small for all the activities that go on there. Everything we do points up our need for a new building!*

## Spotlight on Members' Research

Many thanks to member Sue Clarke for sharing with us part of her ongoing family history research. Sue has incorporated some of this goldfields story in our current exhibition. Do have a look when you are next in the meeting room.

### Imagine this!

It is 1892 and Bob Buscombe finds himself on board ship with an entire circus! How did that happen? This young man was brought up in a family wealthy enough for eleven children to have private education and live with servants at their beck and call, in 1880s 'Marvellous Melbourne'. Then the colonial banks crashed, the father of the family died of a heart attack, and the family was left penniless. This is the story of third son Robert (Bob) Kestell Buscombe and his siblings Amy, Lillian and Alicia.

With the grand house gone, mother Mary Ann tried to run a boarding house but most of the young single men in Melbourne were moving out, fast. Gold in quantity had been discovered in Coolgardie and the rush was on.

Bob, then 25, with banking and railway building experience (management, not dirty hands) joined the rush. We see him next in the SS *Bularra's* log as a goldseeker with 29 other men bound for the golden west. The stop-off in Port Adelaide proved surprising – the entire cast and crew of Wirth's Circus boarded the ship. So, rather like Noah's Ark, they sailed around the Leeuwin to Fremantle.

In Fremantle there was more excitement. Paddy Hannan's extraordinary find at Kalgoorlie had just been announced! Now, as a swamper, a man who threw his swag on the transport cart and walked or rode his horse with the others to the goldfields, Bob tried his luck in the rushes to Hannans and White Feather. But, as with so many others, it was 'a few specks today and none tomorrow'. He was better at football and captained one of the earliest teams. Bob began his new life as a saw miller, running timber to the mines. Later he bought pubs, including the General Gordon Hotel in Coolgardie and the Boulder Block Hotel, now lost to the Super Pit. At one time he became a mine manager.

Even in the harsh early days, however, he saw opportunity for his mother Mary Ann and his siblings, who were still struggling to keep their heads above water with the Melbourne boarding house. In the next few years Mary Ann, Ernest, Henry, Amy, Lillian and Alicia all joined Bob in the frontier town famous to 'othersiders as a place of 'sin, sand, sorrow, sore eyes and Sir John Forrest!'

Alicia recalled of her early life there:

'...after passing miles of desolate country we reached Coolgardie, I saw the very last thing I had expected, a hansom cab. Men's camps were dumped everywhere cheek by jowl with their 'sentry boxes'. Most people lived in hessian and iron camps with two roofs; far cooler than iron. My heart sank when I first beheld the house (so called) that was to be my home in Western Australia. Made of galvanised iron it was exactly like a child's first effort on a slate. We were supposed to be lucky to get it. How we cooked in it with the temperature sometimes 120 degrees I don't know! For miles around the trees had been cut causing severe dust storms, the dust obliterating everything, including the patterns on the tablecloths and bed covers and it was very hard to remove. It came like a great red cloud you could not see through, and which suffocated you.'

Despite the conditions, Amy opened a teashop, a hairdressing service and, in the office she shared with Lillian who ran a secretarial service, she set up an employment bureau. To raise money for charity the girls joined the Kalgoorlie 'Tea Babies' who put on amateur performances via horse and cart all along the Golden Mile. Later Amy would become the *Kalgoorlie Miner's* first lady journalist. She was allotted the 'Social Notes', and wrote under the pseudonym of 'Carrie of the Miner'.

During World War I Alicia ran popular girl and beautiful baby competitions for the Red Cross. Then she ran one for the ugliest man. The crowds went wild backing their favourites – it might have been the races!

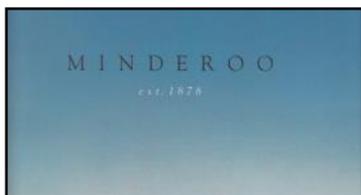
The three sisters – Alicia, Amy and Lillian – each gave twenty years of their lives to Kalgoorlie and the much-loved town rewarded them with opportunities far exceeding those to be had in the genteel Edwardian world of metropolitan 'civilization'.

### Susan Clarke, great-granddaughter of Amy



Alisha and Amy pose with cameler and camel

## Tania Hudson, *Minderoo Est. 1878*, privately published, Perth, 2016. In Library.



This donation to the Library collection is a lavish publication, rich in photographs, which celebrates the pastoral station itself and the generations of the Forrest family who established and ran it for more than a century. Founded in 1878 by three Forrest brothers – John, Alexander and David – together with Septimus Burt, it was eventually sold in 1998

but bought back by Andrew and Nicola Forrest. The station follows the Ashburton River and colourful photographs featuring the beautiful and stark land capture some of the delights of the place. It is a beautiful book and provides a great deal of information about Western Australia's Forrest family.



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## John Forrest's expedition scrapbook on exhibition

On view at Stirling House from Mon 3 Sept to Thu 6 Sept, 10am-4pm

Take a moment to visit the Society to see the scrapbook which John Forrest put together himself in pride at the success of the three expeditions he led – in 1869, 1870 and 1874.



**Community Officer:**  
**Editor *History West*:**

Lesley Burnett  
Dr Lenore Layman

If you're a member who receives this newsletter in hard copy by post, and you're happy to receive it by email, please contact us (9386 3841 or [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au) with your email address, and save money and trees by receiving it online!

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