



Founded 1926

HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

December 2025

Annual State History Conference

Hosted by History West/RWAHS

1926 - 2026

A Century of Change: Where to next?

11-13 September:
Theatrette State Library of WA

Programs of regular events in the annual calendar will also feature in our centennial activities —

- Research papers presented at monthly meetings
- Community Talks (special price for members \$10)
- Day tours & events (also special price for members)
- History in the City
- Writers' Group

A Century of Art Collection - exhibition

featuring rarely displayed items from the Society's art collection

Bookshop meet the author - events

Growing the membership

Our Centenary Year is an ideal opportunity for all of us to recruit new members. Please invite as many of your friends as possible to join.

Centenary Celebrations 1926-2026

Members are invited to enjoy a centennial year of celebration in 2026.

As a Society we look back proudly on a century of preserving, researching and presenting Western Australian history and we look forward to our next century of exploring Western Australia's past together.

We hope that all members will enjoy the busy year's activities we have planned.

Watch this space for more details & events in the new year; here is a taster.

100 YEARS of TREASURES of the Society

A new book presenting 100 of the collection's treasures

Memento

An exhibition in
Perth Town Hall

History West Centenary Lecture

1926: A Year to Remember

6 May : UWA Club
Auditorium



Holiday Closure

from Thursday 18 December at 4pm to Monday 19 January 2026 at 10 am

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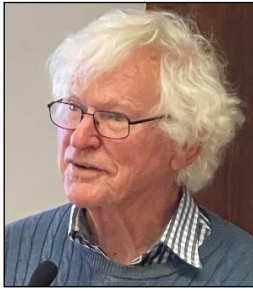
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LIBRARY EMAIL: library@histwest.org.au | MUSEUM EMAIL: museum@histwest.org.au

Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book online!

Or ring the office 9386 3841 admin@histwest.org.au

HISTORY IN THE CITY



**Citiplace Community Centre,
Perth Railway Station concourse
Conference Room**

Wednesday 3 December, 2pm

Alex George: Swanning around Perth

From the 17th century when Dutch seamen became the first Europeans to see black swans on the river and called it the 'Swane Rivier', the bird has been synonymous with the area now known as Perth.

Adopted soon after settlement in 1829 as a symbol for the colony, black swans have appeared in many forms in coats of arms, crests, sporting and business logos, sculptures, and other forms of artistic expression.

In this talk, Alex George will illustrate and discuss many examples of the black swan that can be seen around central Perth.

Alex George is a retired botanist who co-authored the book, *Swanning around Perth: An Exploration of the Black Swan in our City* (2014).

A Time for Gift Giving

What about a special gift for family member or friend to mark the Society's centennial year?



Are you searching for ideal presents for family, friends and colleagues?

Here is a suggestion of year-long enjoyment for anyone who is interested in or curious about Western Australia's past.

A centennial year's membership subscription to the Society

If you contact Lesley in the Office (08 9386 3841 or admin@westnet.org.au) she will make all the arrangements and even provide the gift wrapping.

CHRISTMAS PARTY



Members and their partners are invited to be part of History West's first Christmas party at

**109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands
Wednesday 10 December, 6-8 pm**

Cost: \$40 per person

RSVP: Monday 1 December

Canapés & drinks included

As always there will be a fantastic Christmas raffle, tickets \$5 each

Click on link or scan QR code
<https://square.link/u/wUPEmMYs>

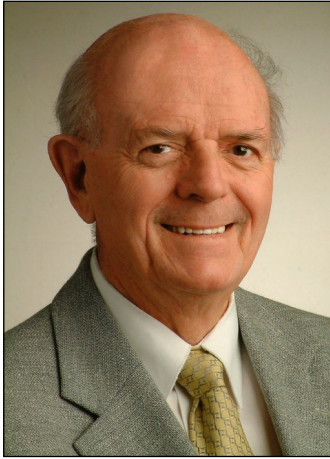


**Happy Christmas,
Happy New Year, Happy Holidays
and a joyful summertime!**



Many thanks indeed to all *History West* contributors without whom this year's regular issues would not have been possible, and particular thanks to our Community Officer, Lesley Burnett, and newsletter designer, Barry Sullivan, whose work and skills are essential every month.

A tribute to Emeritus Professor Reg Appleyard (1927-2025)



Eminent economic historian and demographer Reg Appleyard served as President of the Society from 2004 to 2006. At this time of reflection on a long and successful life now past, we remember with gratitude his willingness to undertake this leadership role in the Society after retirement from university work. Our sympathies to his family at this time.

Reg began his academic career at UWA with a successful Arts degree majoring in economics which led to a Masters and then PhD at Duke University in the USA. He returned to Australia to the Department of Demography at ANU before returning to UWA in 1966. This decade marked the beginning of major expansion in tertiary education in Australia and, as Professor of Economic History, Reg became a member of UWA's professorial leadership for nearly three decades before retiring in 1992.

We remember with admiration his fine demographic research on Australia's post-World War II migration, beginning with the program to attract British migrants, known colloquially as '£10 poms'. His 1964 publication *British Emigration to Australia* was based in part on 900 interviews with British immigrants. His work on postwar migration was path-breaking, exploring the beginnings of the transformation of Australia's settler population from overwhelmingly British in ethnicity to its current multicultural mix. As early as 1955 he published a long research article on displaced persons in WA: their industrial location and geographical distribution. These early postwar immigrants were mostly refugees (from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, indeed everywhere in eastern Europe). People whose lives had been thrown into turmoil by war could not or did not wish to return home after the war and wanted 'a new life in a new country'. This research published in *University Studies in History and Economics* (1955) was innovative in its contemporary focus, an early recognition that Australia was changing and that historical research should recognise the shift. Reg then turned his research interest to a study of Greek migrants which eventually resulted in two collaborative books – *Greek Pioneers in WA* (2002) and *Black Night, White Day: Greece-Born Women in Australia: a longitudinal study, 1964-2007* (2015).

Over the years his publications in WA history (often in joint authorship) roamed widely in subject; for instance – *The beginning: European discovery and early settlement of Swan River, Western Australia* (1979) and *A history of Trayning: the shire's contribution to the development of Western Australia's eastern wheatbelt* (2002). In addition, he contributed three interesting articles to *Early Days*.

We greatly appreciate the support Reg provided the Society through his long professional life and pay tribute to the significant contribution he made during his years as President. He lives on in his publications and in our memories.

Port Augusta to Perth in the 1920s

Jeanette Longwood, Librarian

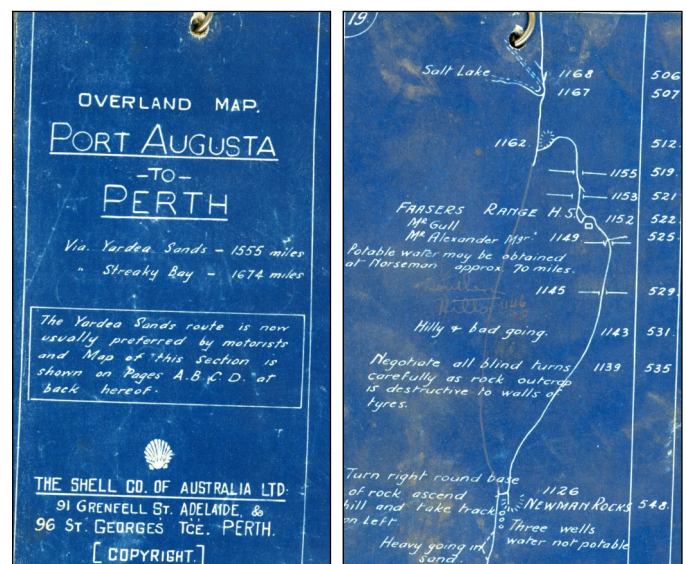
One of the projects undertaken by library volunteers as part of move to 109 Stirling Hwy involved re-housing the map collection. Everything was removed from the map drawers, including around 1,400 maps, large photographs and other items. The maps were then individually hung in our new map cabinets.

One small road map from the 1920s shows the route to be taken between Port Augusta and Perth. With distances given in miles, it provides details of creek crossings, water tanks, fences, gates and homesteads. Advice is made to 'Take Madura Pass as Medina Pass has been badly washed out'. Near Frasers Range 'Potable water may be obtained at Norseman approx 70 miles'. Advice further to 'Negotiate all blind turns carefully as rock outcrop is destructive to walls of tyres'. At Newman Rocks 'Turn right around base of rock ascend hill and take track on left. Heavy going with sand. Three wells water not potable'.

The map was published by the Shell Co. of Australia with title: *Overland map Port Augusta to Perth: via Yardea Sands - 1555 miles, via Streaky Bay - 1674 miles*. At that time, Shell supplies along the track were available at Penong, Fowlers Bay, Eucla, Balladonia, Norseman, Southern Cross, Coolgardie and Perth, but only pumps at Port Augusta, Wirrulla, Ceduna and Merredin. These long stretches between fuel opportunities required vehicles to carry their own fuel, repair equipment and provisions.

Compare these rough tracks with today's Nullarbor journey along wide bitumen roads with regular fuel, power and facilities available – and the occasional wildlife venturing to cross the road.

This map was donated to the Society's collection by Jenny Marshall from an unknown estate in 1995. Jenny was the Society's Librarian for many years.

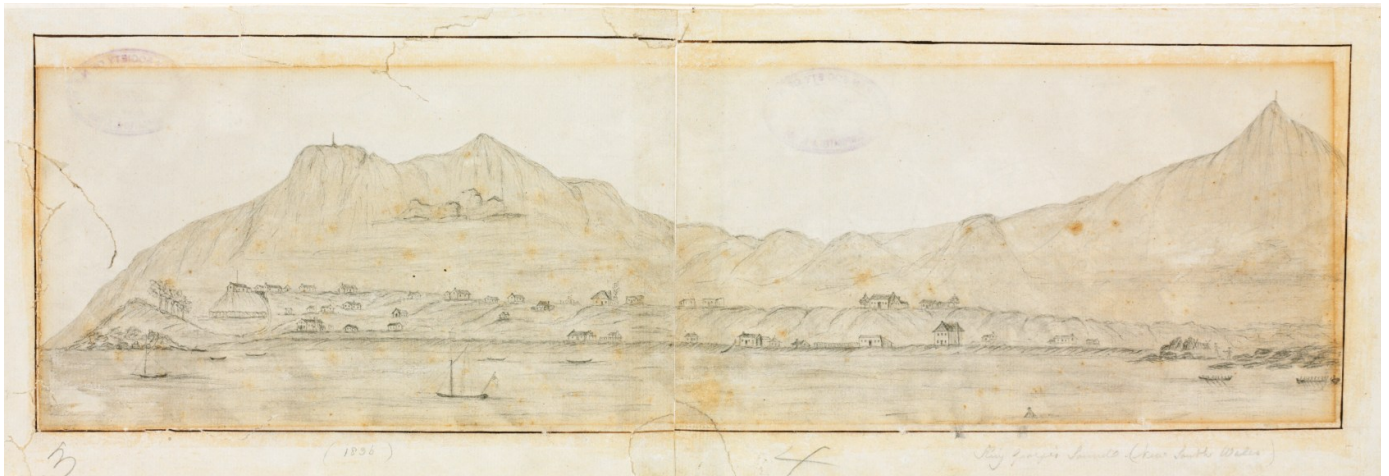


Overland Map Port Augusta to Perth 1920s.
Map Cabinet 41, M14

Syms Covington – an eyewitness to history

Darren Foster

As we approach the bicentenary of the colonial settlement at Albany in 1826, it is worth reflecting on a key event in the early history of the colony – the arrival of Charles Darwin and the crew of the HMS Beagle, including Darwin's servant, Syms Covington.



Syms Covington sketch, King Georges Sound. SLNSW_FL4385934

Naturalist Charles Darwin circumnavigated the globe on the HMS *Beagle*, passing through the Cape Verde Islands, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, the Falkland Islands, Peru, the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, the Cocos-Keeling Islands, Mauritius and southern Africa. The voyage from 1831-1836 informed his most important work, *On the Origin of the Species Through the Means of Natural Selection*, which was published twenty years later. The Australian leg of the voyage included New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and King George's Sound (Albany). While much has been written of Darwin's observations of the voyage, less well known is the journal and sketches of his servant, Syms Covington, the author's great, great, great grandfather.

Simon (Syms) Covington was born in the central English town of Bedford in 1809. A shoemaker by trade, he was in the southern English coastal town of Devonport in 1831 when he joined the HMS *Beagle* as a 'Boy 2nd Class' and was subsequently designated 'Fiddler and boy to the poop cabin'. (Darwin journal, 24 July 1832)

The Captain of the *Beagle*, Robert FitzRoy, recruited naturalist Charles Darwin to join the expedition and assigned Covington to assist Darwin during shore expeditions. Covington collected, preserved, labelled and packed birds, small mammals, invertebrates, rocks and fossils but remains largely invisible in Darwin's journal, reflecting the traditional master-servant relationship.

My servant having arrived from Montevideo, I despatched him to an English Estancia to shoot and skin birds. (Darwin journal, 21-26 Sept 1833)

By May 1833, Darwin sought to formalise the arrangement with Covington and wrote a financial plea to his father. Having a servant of my own would be a really great addition to my comfort ... when at sea I am rather badly off for anyone to wait on me. The man is willing to be my servant, and all the expenses would be under 60 pounds per annum. I have taught him to shoot and skin birds, so that in my main object he is very useful. (Note to father in letter to Catherine Darwin, 22 May 1833, Maldonado, Rio Plata)

Several weeks later, Darwin sought and received Captain FitzRoy's permission to engage Covington as his full-time servant. Darwin wrote to a colleague that this would result in 'a larger proportion of showy specimens'. (Letter to Revd Prof. J Henslow, Rio de la Plata, 18 July 1833) This decision significantly expanded Covington's duties and reduced his spare time to record and sketch in his own journal.

Covington also acted as an amanuensis – a sort of human photocopier – transcribing Darwin's research notes. It is interesting to reflect on whether this role, and exposure to Darwin's superior education and insights, influenced Covington's own thinking and journal entries. Darwin's entries are more frequent, generally more expansive, sometimes dramatic and often reflect the preconceptions of his culture and class. Covington's entries are brief, descriptive and concerned with daily affairs, but at times he describes with wonder and awe the strange animals and unusual landscapes he encounters. In an 1834 letter to his sister, Darwin noted

My servant is an odd sort of person. I do not very much like him, but he is, perhaps from his very oddity, very well adapted to all my purposes. (Letter to Catherine Darwin, 20 July 1834, Chile)

Syms Covington's role emerged from the shadows in the award-winning fictionalised biography *Mr Darwin's Shooter* by Roger McDonald, published in 1998. However, Covington's journal entry and sketch of King George's Sound, presumably from the deck of the HMS *Beagle*, are not widely known.

On 7 February 1836 the HMS *Beagle* sailed from Hobart. Covington noted the extreme cold as the ship rounded the southwest cape of Van Diemen's Land for the voyage to the west of Australia. On 6 March 1836 the ship anchored in King George's Sound. Covington wrote:

Three islands within mouth of entrance, with flat on each side which makes it narrow. The settlement is small and very scattered. The country at large sterile and very sandy, yet a few potatoes, pumpkins, etc, are

grown. Salt provisions are used here, except when the Kangaroo can be caught, and Woolwar. The latter very small. Great number of Indians [Aboriginal people] here, and the most miserable and meagre set of beings I have yet seen. This colony belongs to New South Wales. Kangaroo flesh sold at 8 pence per pound. Sir Richard Spencer, the present Governor. No tattooing among natives, but gashes with sharp stones, knives, etc, which they inflict on themselves on their breasts, said to be done out of bravado, to see which can stand the most pain without crying out. (V Weitzel, 23 Aug 1995. The journal of Syms Covington)

The *Perth Gazette*, newspaper of the Swan River Colony, referred to the presence of the visitors.

On Wednesday, the 9th March, Lady and Miss Spencer laid the first stone in the foundation of each of the new government buildings to be erected at Albany, under which were deposited medallions bearing the likenesses of their present majesties King William and Queen Adelaide. On the completion of the ceremony, three hearty cheers were given by the spectators, amongst whom were several of the officers of the HMS *Beagle*. (*Perth Gazette*, 26 Mar 1836)

Darwin wrote more than 1,300 words on the eight-day visit to King George’s Sound, while Covington’s brief journal entry was around 130 words. Darwin’s assessment of the arid landscape and fledgling colony is best summed up by this remark:

Since leaving England I do not think we have visited any one place so very dull & uninteresting as K. George’s Sound. (Darwin journal 14 Mar 1836)

A legacy of the HMS *Beagle* visit is Covington’s 1836 sketch, ‘King George’s Sound – New South Wales’ (State Library of NSW image SLNSW_FL438934) which is held in the State Library of NSW. It is one of the earliest drawings of the colony, perhaps hidden from Western Australian scholars due to its labelling as ‘New South Wales’.

Both Darwin and Covington’s journal entries in 1836 indicate a misunderstanding that King George’s Sound remained a New South Wales outpost. In fact, the administration had transferred to the new Swan River Colony in 1831, five years before the HMS *Beagle* arrived.

Covington’s pencil sketch shows present day Mount Melville and Mount Clarence, boats on the harbour and many dwellings, including two-storey buildings and those associated with the former New South Wales garrison (see picture).

Syms Covington remained in Darwin’s employ after returning to England, and migrated to New South Wales around 1840, with a reference and letter of introduction from Darwin. He continued to correspond with Darwin for many years and collected specimens (barnacles) for him near his home in Pambula, New South Wales, where he was a post-master and innkeeper. Covington died in 1861.

References

John van Wyhe (ed.), Darwin journal, 2002. *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online*. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

R D Keynes (ed.), *The Beagle Record*, CUP, 1980

V Weitzel (23 Aug 1995) The journal of Syms Covington, Australian Science Archives Project, www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/bsparcs/covingto/contents.htm

Welcome to new volunteers



John Norman has joined the Maintenance/Building Committee and has also volunteered to assist with proof-reading *Early Days*



Marti Rinsma has joined the Bookshop, volunteering on Tuesday mornings



Jim Barns is assisting on Wednesdays with ‘Meet and Greet’ in the foyer, tours of our new premises and tabulating the monthly volunteer hours

Welcome to new members

Alex & Jean Duff, Adrian Egan, Stuart Everett, Leonie (Lee) Ann Ford, Janet Kavanagh, Rottnest Voluntary Guides Assn

Community Talk

A theatrical life: Ivan King

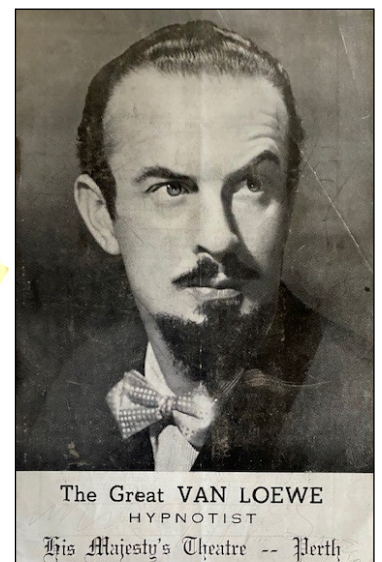
Actor and founder of the Museum of Performing Arts at His Majesty's Theatre, Ivan King, delighted his audience at September's Community Talk with a theatrical *tour de force* – the story of his life in the theatre performed in anecdotes and ditties. Born in Midland Junction Ivan recalled the pleasure of being with his grandfather who was cleaner/caretaker at the Renown Theatre. The splendid theatre curtain was especially wonderful to the child.

Growing up, he joined Patch Theatre and then off to Melbourne which at the time was 'wallowing in wowsers'. He gained small acting parts at Princes Theatre, working both on-stage and back-stage, a pattern which recurred throughout his working life. He recalled his fleeting encounters with famous people – Judy Garland, Dame Nellie Melba, Maggie Smith, Cate Blanchett – and places – King's Cross in its theatrical heyday. A year's tour in children's theatre took him 'through the backblocks of New South Wales'. Then a return to WA before London called. He started at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as an usher where he saw more of the rich and famous, including Royal parties. A varied career in the provinces followed – working at a Butlins Holiday Camp in Yorkshire and performing as a wicked witch in pantomime in Cambridge.

Growing homesick he returned to WA to link up with Frank Baden Powell who recruited him for vaudeville at the Old Civic Theatre on Beaufort St for a two-year run, which ended with the Civic Theatre's closure in 1972. Joan Sydney and Diamond Lil was a highlight; performing as Tarzan was another. 'Working blue but not too blue' was the rule. Working backstage at the opening of the Sydney Opera House is another vivid memory. Returning home once again, Ivan was busy at the Hole in the Wall, Playhouse, Regal and His Maj.

As his career lengthened, so did his interest in theatre history and his collection of theatrical ephemera. In 1978 he rescued a stack of historical vaudeville posters and programs and began to develop installations/exhibitions of the material. In all, more than fifty exhibitions have resulted.

Ivan finally retired at the age of 80 but he continues to entertain and inform. A life of performance abides, if on a smaller scale! All of us who attended Ivan's morning talk were well-and-truly delighted and entertained.



Community Talk

Rock Art at Murujuga



Our Community Talks program for 2025 ended in November with **Professor Jo McDonald**, archaeologist and rock art specialist, taking us on a fascinating virtual visit to Murujuga Cultural Landscape which was registered in July this year as a World Heritage Cultural Landscape site. Murujuga encompasses the Burrup Peninsula, the Dampier Archipelago's 42 islands (including Rosemary, Enderby, West Lewis, Dolphin and Gidley), and nearby marine areas. The Ngarda-Ngarli are the traditional custodians of the site. The site contains one to two million petroglyphs and reflects over 50,000 years of history and care for country. The site has been described as one of our greatest outdoor museums, the rock art connecting us to the people, animals and beliefs of the distant past.

Professor Jo McDonald is the Director of the Centre for Rock Art Research + Management at UWA. She is a Chief Investigator of the *Murujuga - Dynamics of the Dreaming* project and was active in the push towards World Heritage listing for Murujuga. All the research the team has undertaken has been in collaboration with the Aboriginal custodians and has enabled a return to more effective care for country with the training of rangers and guides. While no native title claims for the country have been successful (because of dispossession and dispersal of local Aboriginal people during the decades of colonial settlement in the second half of the 19th century) nevertheless significant funding has been forthcoming for Conservation Agreements because the region is also an important resource development hub (for oil and gas, salt and iron ore).

Professor McDonald's talk ranged through time from the end of the last ice age through the present as sea levels rose, islands formed and inland areas became coastal. In total 3,269 rock sites have been recorded across the archipelago, including the islands.

If you are interested in learning more, please go to the project's publication at —

<https://www.crarm.uwa.edu.au/m2>

Jo McDonald, Ken Mulvaney (eds), *Murujuga: Dynamics of the Dreaming*, UWAP 2023

The book provides a detailed coverage of the research project which has taken more than a decade to complete (although there is always more research to be done). This is one of Australia's most significant heritage research projects.

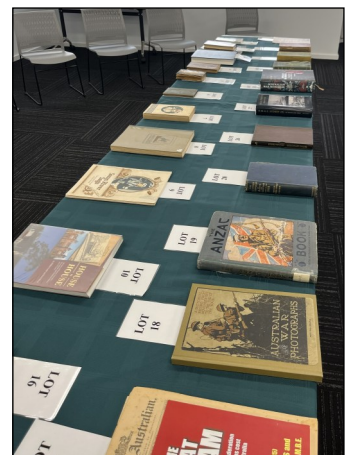
Book Sale & Textile Sale Success!

Over the weekend of 7-9 November it was all hands to the deck at our new premises to help with a jumbo sale – a second hand book sale in the car park, an auction of Western Australian books in the Wright Family Meeting Room and a textile sale in the Margaret Medcalf meeting room.

Our thanks to all volunteers for their work as well as to members who either donated or purchased sale items.

A total of \$17,391 was raised over the weekend – a great fundraising success!

And very special thanks to Book Sale Convenors Pamelas & Nick for their commitment to running the sales over many years. The task has demanded continuous hard work over the whole year culminating in an annual high-pressure weekend each year. This was Pamela & Nick's last book sale as co-convenors and we thank them both for all they have done!



An October afternoon of entertainment

Louisa Clifton's story

Georgina Wigley



The nostalgic sound of violins greeted the capacity audience as the spotlight focused on Louisa, the lead character in the historical presentation, 'Louisa Clifton: The First Lady'. Louisa was born in London in 1814 to Marshall Waller Clifton and his wife Elinor, the third of their fifteen children. As was typical of well-educated people in the 19th century she kept a diary which offers today's readers insights into her feelings and experiences. Keen Bunbury historian, Norm Flynn used extracts from the diary, written between 1840 and 1841, to craft the presentation's script.

Through Louisa's voice the audience is transported to 1840s London as the 'season of delightful soirées' ended and she nervously contemplated her family's imminent departure to establish the colony of Australind. 'I have found it impossible to face the future with calmness and grieve to think how utterly I am unable to fulfil these words "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver."' As the sailing date creeps closer she lamented, 'This day week we are due to sail! I have felt worn and miserable and began to dismantle my room with a heavy heart. The air is plagued by uncertainty'.

After a three-month voyage on the *Parkville* Louisa was excited that the family's new home was in sight. Her initial trepidation slipped into the background as she wrote: 'I cannot easily cease to remember the first Australian sunset, nor the feelings with which I viewed its promising coasts'. With great determination she embraced the 'discomfort' of tent living, the 'truly ludicrous' situation of entertaining in a tent, the family's first rudimentary home in the colony. Against this backdrop she met Bunbury's Government Resident George Eliot, a relative of Captain James Stirling, whom she initially described as 'droll'. Later Louisa commented that '[he] is truly and thoroughly amiable in the best and highest sense, and gentlemanly in every feeling'. Amid great colonial fanfare Louisa married George in June 1842 and settled into life at Bury Hill. In 1870 they moved to Geraldton where George became the Registered Magistrate. Louisa died there in 1880.

The fascinating story of Louisa Clifton was performed by Bunbury locals. The role of Louisa was delightfully played by ardent thespian Tayla Lawrence and Louisa's younger sister, Lucy Clifton, was acted by Olivia Griffin who is still at school. Olivia together with her grandmother Sabine Pfuhl offered insight into colonial entertainment with their violin playing. The narration linking the tale together was undertaken by the versatile

Barbara Rea. Norm Flynn, as well as being the architect of the presentation, prop-maker and director, performed the role of George Eliot.

The Society would like to thank these actors for bringing us a wonderful historical experience. Many descendants of the Clifton family were in the audience.

Reference

<http://www.australindfhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Louisa-Clifton-Diaries.pdf>

Community Officer: Lesley Burnett
Editor *History West*: 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 9386 3841 or admin@histwest.org.au with your email address, and save money and trees by receiving it online!

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