



# KNOW YOUR SUBURB SPEARWOOD

By Bill Thomas JP, MLA Member for Cockburn  
ISSUE No. 2

## PERSONAL NOTE

As Member for Cockburn I had great pleasure in initiating the Cockburn local history project last year. This leaflet, which deals with Spearwood, follows an earlier one that covered Hamilton Hill.

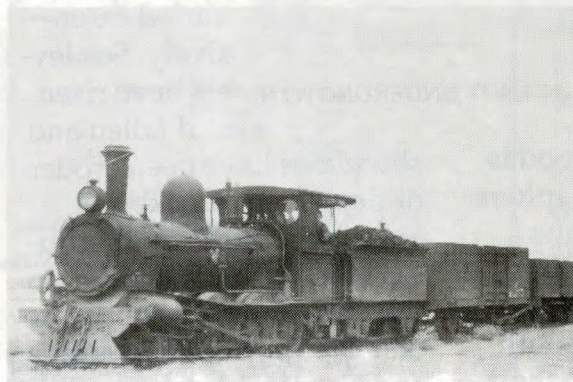
The people of Spearwood and surrounding districts can be proud of the contribution they have made to the State. Unfortunately many residents, particularly those who have recently moved into the district, are unaware of the history of our region.

The suburb of Spearwood is divided between the state electorates of Peel and Cockburn and this leaflet is co-sponsored with my colleague, Peel MLA Norm Marlborough.

*Bill Thomas*

**BILL THOMAS, MLA**

## HISTORY MAY REPEAT ITSELF



*AGE OF COAL* The A Class coal fired steam locomotives were built in Britain before the turn of the century. They served in WA including the Spearwood district, until the mid fifties

The old locomotive and modern rail car pictured, symbolise the past and what could well be the future for Spearwood. Around the turn of the century Spearwood was a growing agricultural district. Residents petitioned the Government for a rail service and eventually one was built linking Fremantle with Armadale via Robbs Jetty, Spearwood and Jandakot.

For a time passenger services were operated but they were ancillary to the provision of a freight service to agriculture in the region.

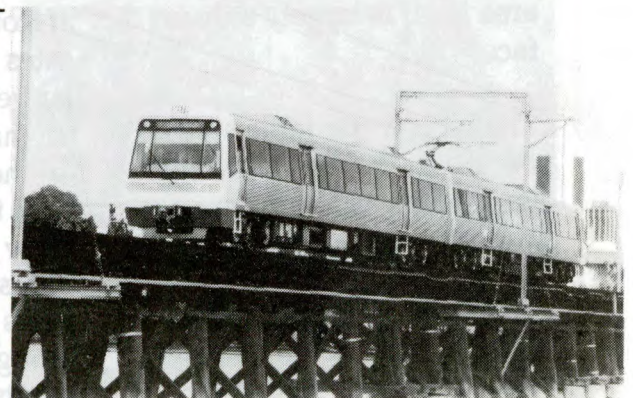
*AGE OF ELECTRICITY* The new electric rail cars of the Perth Metropolitan system. They can travel over 100 kph and will also serve on the new northern suburbs route to Wanneroo by the end of 1992. They may be passing through Spearwood to Rockingham and Mandurah soon.

Spearwood is now an established residential area.

Over the past two years thousands of people have signed petitions calling for the passenger rail service to be extended to the south west corridor. In a major economic statement earlier this year Premier Dr Carmen Lawrence

announced that a rail service to Rockingham and beyond to Mandurah would be established. A committee, which includes local Members of Parliament Bill Thomas and Norm Marlborough, is drawing up recommendations to Transport Minister Pam Beggs on the type of train and route that will best serve the district.

The committee is expected to report within the next few months.





## SPEARWOOD: THE LAND

Thompsons Lake occur on the eastern boundary of the Spearwood system.



STAND OF TUART TREES WITH BLACKBOY UNDERGROWTH

The suburb of Spearwood is located on what geographers call the Spearwood Dune System. They are the limestone ridges that stretch from Busselton in the south past the Moore river in the north. The ridges which run parallel to the coast are formed by consolidation of dunes originally deposited by wind along old shorelines.

The System varies in width between two and ten kilometres from east to west. The soils and underlying rocks are porous and as a result there is little surface drainage. Rivers such as the Swan pass through it, often dramatically as at Blackwall Reach, but drainage of the area itself is largely subsurface.

The high water table is reflected in the interdunal wetlands such as Manning Lake and the market garden swamps to the west of Rockingham Road, one of which is being used for cable water skiing. Larger wetlands such as Bibra Lake and

In considering the present day wetlands of the Spearwood system it is interesting to note that the location of the coastline has varied extensively. Sea levels have risen and fallen and shorelines have been eroded or deposited. Cockburn Sound was once an interdunal lake, with yet another to the west of what is now Garden Island. Both Rottnest and Garden Island were part of mainland dune lines 10,000 years ago when the coast was thirty kilometres west of its current location.

As recently as 7,000 years ago, well within the period that Aboriginal people roamed the district, Rottnest was still connected to the coast. The plains that now lie beneath the sea would have been very similar to the Spearwood Dune System as we have known it. Fossil pollen found in lake sediments at Rottnest indicates that similar vegetation to that found on the mainland today grew there thousands of years ago although such plants have not

been there in historical times.

Botanists recognise the vegetation of the Spearwood system as distinctive. The most notable feature is the tuart trees. The tuart grow in a "tall open forest" formation from well north of Perth down to Busselton. In our area the trees would have just qualified as "tall" ie. higher than thirty metres, and the vegetation would have often been more accurately described as "open forest".

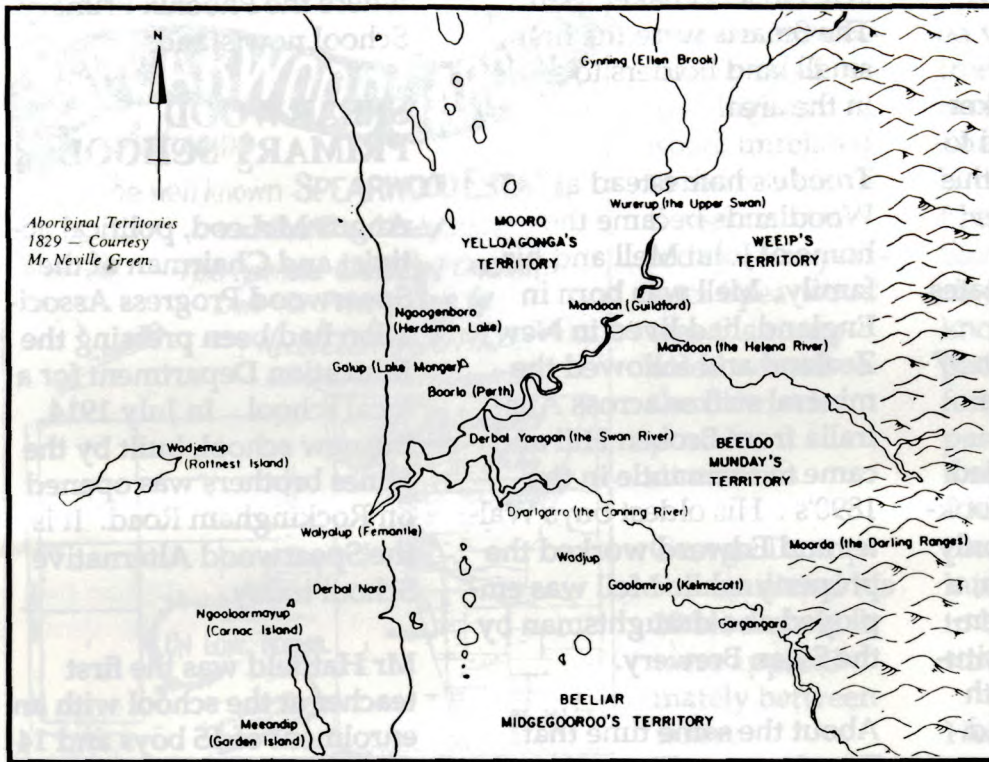
The soils, known appropriately as Spearwood sands, tend to be deeper to the east and there the tuart forest intergrades quickly with an open forest of jarrah and marri. This can still be seen in good form near the intersections of North Lake, Forest and Phoenix Roads on the eastern boundary of the Spearwood system.

Although the Spearwood sands are not particularly fertile soils, ease of access to ground water and proximity to the markets of Perth and Fremantle have made intensive agriculture viable with the use of fertilisers.



MANNING LAKE, now part of the Beeliar Regional Park





He was a well set man with snowy white hair and was often seen riding his horse alongside the dairy farm of Fred Powell. Albert Powell recalls taking him to Coogee Beach to wash his hair.

The stockmen spent their Saturdays at the Princess Theatre in Fremantle and would also enjoy competitive boxing matches amongst themselves at "Ugly Land", a side-show area near Fremantle Railway station.

Wandi died at Anchorage Butchers where he had his hut and was later buried at Mogumber, an Aboriginal burial ground in Moora.

The suburb of Wandi near Kwinana is named after him.

## BEELIAR TERRITORY

Spearwood lies in the Aboriginal tribal district of Beeliar. The acknowledged leader of the Beeliar people was Midgegooroo. Conflict between the original inhabitants and the new settlers was common-place as natural game on which they depended became depleted. In 1831 Midgegooroo along with Yagan and Munday became outlaws. He was eventually captured and executed for his alleged part in the death of some settlers along the Canning river.

By the time of settlement in Spearwood many of the tribe had dispersed or died of diseases such as typhoid influenza or tuberculosis. In 1936 the Protector of Aborigines (A.O. Neville) in a speech to the Western Australian Historical Society estimated that between the

period 1829 and 1901, the Aboriginal population in the South West of Western Australia was reduced from thirteen thousand to one thousand four hundred and nineteen. Nearly half were of mixed descent.

## WANDI

In the 1920's a number of Aborigines were brought from the North West to work as stockmen at Anchorage Butchers at Robbs Jetty.

The most popular was Wandi "Dixon". It is said that he took the name of the Dixon family of Hamilton Hill who brought him down from the North West.



WANDI "DIXON"



## THE EARLY YEARS

Settlement began in the 1850's when Alfred Hooker took up Cockburn Sound location No. 97. Much of this land had been held under large pastoral leases and then as large freehold estates by a handful of families. Blocks adjoining Location 97 were taken up during the same period by Charles Manning. A survey carried out in 1859 shows that Hooker's block contained the only improvements in the area, a small house and a fence enclosure. The house was situated about 75 metres north of the present day Mell Rd.

In 1860 Hooker sold his property to Edward Troode, Chief Clerk in the Customs office in Fremantle. Troode, a native of Plymouth, came to the colony in 1853. He worked firstly with the Convict Establishment in Fremantle, then transferred to the Customs Department as a junior clerk working his way up to the position of Chief Clerk.

During his 37 years with the Department he invested in land in the central Cockburn district owning Woodlands Estate which comprised 500 acres. His estate was bounded by Hotspur Street, Rockingham Road, Yangebup Road and Hamilton Road bounded by orchards and gardens.

Prior to his retirement to Albany, Troode sold 200 acres to James Morrison, 100 acres to George Thompson, 10 acres to George Smart and the homestead block of 40

acres to John Baker Mell. The Smarts were the first small land holders to settle in the area.

Troode's homestead at Woodlands became the home of John Mell and his family. Mell was born in England, had lived in New Zealand and followed the mineral strikes across Australia from Broken Hill and came to Fremantle in the 1890's. His oldest boys Walter and Edward worked the property while Mell was employed as a draughtsman by the Swan Brewery.

About the same time that Troode was selling off his land, land values were improving, and pearlers from the North-west began investing in land in the area. They had been deterred by a bad pearling season and the future of the pearling industry looked bleak.

The site of the Phoenix Shopping Centre was part of 50 acres of land held as an immigrant grant by Ellen Scott. She had held this land from 1885, and in the 1890's it was bought by Jarvis Hault, a wealthy pearler who also had business interests in Fremantle.

Around the same time, Thomas O'Beirne, owner of the Club Hotel in Fremantle invested in a 100 acre block

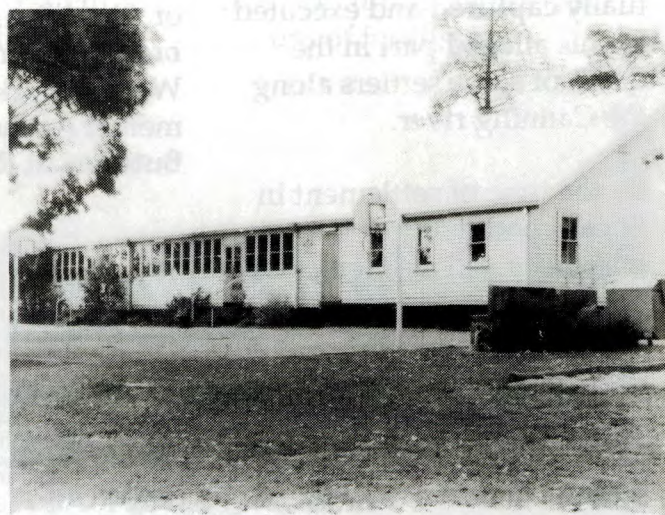
where the Phoenix Primary School now stands.

## SPEARWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Angus McLeod, political activist and Chairman of the Spearwood Progress Association had been pressing the Education Department for a local school. In July 1914, the new school, built by the Hines brothers was opened on Rockingham Road. It is the Spearwood Alternative School today.

Mr Hatfield was the first teacher at the school with an enrolment of 15 boys and 14 girls. In a letter to the Education Department on 30 June 1930 the Headmaster, Arthur Malone, wrote "...the new school now consists of 3 classrooms and an office. Attached to the school is a very fine flower garden. The standard of education is that prescribed by the Education Department's curriculum for a large school."

"When children pass out of Class VI (now Year 7) they go to one of the Fremantle schools."



*THE ORIGINAL SPEARWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL  
built in 1914, now Spearwood Alternative School.*



**SPEARWOOD GARDENS**  
 Adjoining  
 The well known SPEARWOOD ESTATE.

3 1/2 MILES FROM FREMANTLE

This splendid GARDEN & ORCHARD LAND for Private Sale by  
*Houlcah & Bros.*  
 National Hotel, FREMANTLE.

ON LONG TERMS.

Crossland & Hardy, Surveyors.

## A DEVELOPING AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT

As freehold land had become available it was taken up, but the purchasers tended to be investors rather than settlers. By the turn of the century this changed. Fremantle had a new harbour, and the gold boom was at its peak. Quite a few of the new arrivals earned money on the goldfields to buy land.

James Morrison and George Thompson who had bought the largest parcels of land on Edward Troode's estate subdivided them into 5 acre agricultural blocks and put them on the market in 1897.

Morrison called his estate of 36 blocks "Spearwood Gardens" and named the new roads Spearwood Avenue, Troode Road, and Garden Road. The Spearwood Ave-

nue of this subdivision later became part of Rockingham Road, unrelated to the road with the same name today. Ten years later Spearwood was the recognised named of the district in postal directories.

George Thompson marketed his 20 blocks which were approximately between where Rockingham

Road, Phoenix Road and Hamilton Road are today using Troode's old label of "Woodlands Estate". He put Sussex Street and Kent Street in to service the lots. In 1900 Hamilton Road was put through to provide access to Fremantle from both estates. Although they both sold well, "Spearwood Gardens" blocks were preferred because the swamp lands there provided better soil and easier access to water. By 1905 there was a need for more land and a new subdivision named the "Spearwood Extension" between Mell Road, Hamilton Road and Garden Road was placed on the market.

The demand for land continued. By 1911 all of the

Spearwood basin was planted with regular rows of fruit trees and vegetables but more settlers were arriving. The higher, more rocky land between Rockingham Road, Phoenix Road, and where Stock Road is now, was one single lot of 1,000 acres known as Healy's Bullock paddock. It had been leased for cattle fattening by the pastoral company Forrest Emanuel and Co. in which Alexander Forrest, the explorer and politician, had an interest but in 1911 it began to be subdivided for agricultural blocks.

Healy's bullock paddock covered a large proportion of Spearwood. At first Doolittle Street was put through with fifty blocks being sold along both sides and two years later, in 1913, another sixty 5-10 acre blocks were sold along Gerald and Newton Streets. The railway to Fremantle was established by then so 70 quarter acre urban blocks near it were marketed as "Spearwood Townsite Estate".

By the 1920's all the agricultural land in Spearwood was subdivided and taken



OLD GENERAL STORE IN MELL ROAD - opened in the 1920s by Mrs Blazenska Radinch, affectionately known as "Mum" Senka.



up. Many blocks had changed hands several times. Fruit, vegetables and grapes were the main crops but poultry and quarries were also common.

Many settlers needed to work for wages to supplement their income and provide capital to develop their blocks. The railway made it possible to work at Robbs Jetty, on the wharves in Fremantle, or as far afield as Midland and still work on the block at night and on weekends.

A community spirit developed around the school, sporting groups and organisations such as the Fruit Growers Association. By 1921 electricity and street lighting was introduced and later that decade motor vehicles became common. Spearwood had become an established agricultural district in 30 years.

## **SOUTHERN EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT**

From 1894 onwards many miners from the central Dalmatinac Coast of Croatia arrived on the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia. Some had been to earlier goldstrikes in California, Alaska and Victoria. Times were tough in Dalmatia and as letters from families and friends abroad told of opportunities in Australia emigration from Croatia increased.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 the Dalmatian



*MRS PERENA ROCCHI*

settlers were seen as aliens as they were Austrian subjects, and some experienced hostility and distress in their newfound homeland. Many families decided to look for land where they could live undisturbed and relocated from the Goldfields to Perth.

Mrs Perena Rocchi was one of the first to leave the Goldfields and decided to settle in Spearwood with the likelihood of work in Fremantle for her sons. With very few exceptions the established settlers welcomed the new Slav families as people just like themselves - independent, self-sufficient and prepared to work hard for that privilege.

Italian immigrants tended to settle in Fremantle initially and many moved to Spearwood later with the subdivision of the larger market gardens.

## **MODERN SPEARWOOD**

The period following World

War II saw the beginning of the transformation of Spearwood from a rural district, and outlier of Fremantle, to a residential suburb of the Perth metropolitan area.

There had been quarter acre blocks at the "Spearwood Townsite" along the railway line since the break up of Healy's bullock paddock thirty years before. Part of what is now Angus Avenue was called Railway Parade and on the other side of the line part of Goldsmith Road was Railway Crescent until quite recently.

With the introduction of tractors and other mechanisation it became possible to work large blocks more profitably than the smaller lots on which they had often grown "a bit of everything". Some market gardeners looked to newer land further south which freed up their Spearwood blocks for potential residential subdivision. This was cheaper than acquiring additional land in Spearwood which was often not available and, when it was, tended to be more expensive because of obvious residential potential.

Industrial development in the early 50's at Kwinana created a new source of employment for Spearwood residents. There was clearly a market for people who worked in the new industries, and the construction work associated with them, but wished to live closer to Fremantle and Perth than the suburbs of Kwinana.





### SUBURBAN SPEARWOOD

The Stephenson report published in 1957 recommended that Spearwood be retained as agricultural land and residential subdivision of the market gardens was opposed by the Town Planning Board. This was resented by many market gardeners who, apart from finding the obvious capital gain of subdivision attractive, wanted to provide homesites for their children. It also meant that the area missed out on new children for the schools as young people moved out and established their families elsewhere.

The Shire of Cockburn which replaced the Road Board in 1961 represented their ratepayers' interest and pressed for subdivision to be approved.

Orderly transformation of the district to a modern residential suburb began in the sixties with a series of Town Planning Schemes by which blocks were amalgamated, new roads put through and

the old market garden lands cut into blocks of about quarter of an acre.

In 1975 the Cockburn Council, which had been a Town since 1971, hosted a tour of the developing Spearwood area for Town Planners. The largest redevelopment Scheme, "Phoenix Park" in northern Spearwood had established over 550 blocks since it was approved in 1969 and there were just under 200 lots left. The Scheme redeveloped 321 acres.

The Newton Street (North) Scheme had created 100 lots out of a total of 250 planned for the 86 acres it covered. The Newton Street (South) Scheme, then yet to start was to place 400 lots on the market from 160 acres of hitherto rural land. Within ten years by the mid eighties almost all blocks were built on and the area well established.

A steady improvement in the metropolitan road system has made Spearwood less

isolated than it seemed as a rural area. As recently as the late 60's Stock Road did not come to South Street. The connection to Rockingham Road was a major step forward. The extension of the Kwinana Freeway to South Street in the early eighties made a big difference. Current work to take it to Kwinana, particularly with a good east-west link along Beeliar Drive through Yankegubup will improve access.

The early clearing for agriculture and subsequent residential development have left little of the original vegetation in Spearwood itself. The areas left for public open space are most often used as sports fields. However the Beeliar Regional Park will ensure that the Cockburn wetlands and areas of surrounding bush will be protected to conserve natural areas. Attractive recreation sites are also provided as at Manning Lake and Bibra Lake.



## THE SUMICH FAMILY



Lovre (Lorrie) Sumich arrived in Australia in 1929 at the age of 15 from Podgora on the Dalmatian coast.

He obtained work as a cook for his fellow countrymen at a boarding house in Boulder and later worked at the Woodline in Kalgoorlie chopping fire wood for the mines boilers. In 1938 he married Zlatica Salecich and later headed for Perth where he worked in the old Midland Railways workshop as

a wood machinist. With the advent of World War II, Lovre joined the Australian army and was employed as a cook but was discharged after twelve months because a fall down a mine shaft two years earlier had aggravated a back injury.

After he was discharged from the army the family moved to Railway Parade in Spearwood where they were offered cheap rent by Paul Prizmic, a local electrician.

In these hard times Lovre recalls fishing for food and collecting scraps of wheat from the wheat wagons that passed the Spearwood sidings to feed his chooks.

Lovre began growing vegetables whilst working as a casual hoist driver at Fremantle wharf. With some of his army earnings, and a loan from the bank, he bought 19 acres of land for 100 pounds an acre. This property bordered Edeline Road and Rockingham Road (adjoining the Cockburn Bowling Club) and was the original home of the McLeod family- one of the first families to settle in the area. (Mr McLeod was a political activist who wrote a column for the Fremantle Gazette.)

In 1947 Lovre sold the 19 acres and bought 4 acres of bushland on Hamilton and Mell Roads which is where he presently lives. The Sumich's original home was a weatherboard/asbestos shed. Lovre developed market gardens supplying the Australian navy who in turn supplied the English naval fleet in Singapore.

He built a general store on his property and one at Coogee. Supplies also went to the Army barracks at Karrakatta and Pearce. Fremantle Providoring was also a major customer.

Today the company Lorrie started is a flourishing business supplying both local and export markets.



## LOCAL HEROES

The Sumich family is as well known in Perth for Peter's exploits with the Eagles as for their business. In this they are following a family and Spearwood tradition.

Spearwood has been part of the catchment area of the South Fremantle Football Club since its formation. Support for the club has always been strong throughout the district.

Many Spearwood families

have contributed players to the club, often over successive generations as with the Sumich's. Peter's uncle, Jack, was a star with South Fremantle in the sixties.

Among the other Spearwood names that crop up in the South Fremantle roll of honour are Ciccotosto, Gerovich, Grljusich and Jackovich.

John Gerovich thrilled football crowds of the fifties and sixties with his marking and goal kicking much as Peter Sumich is now.

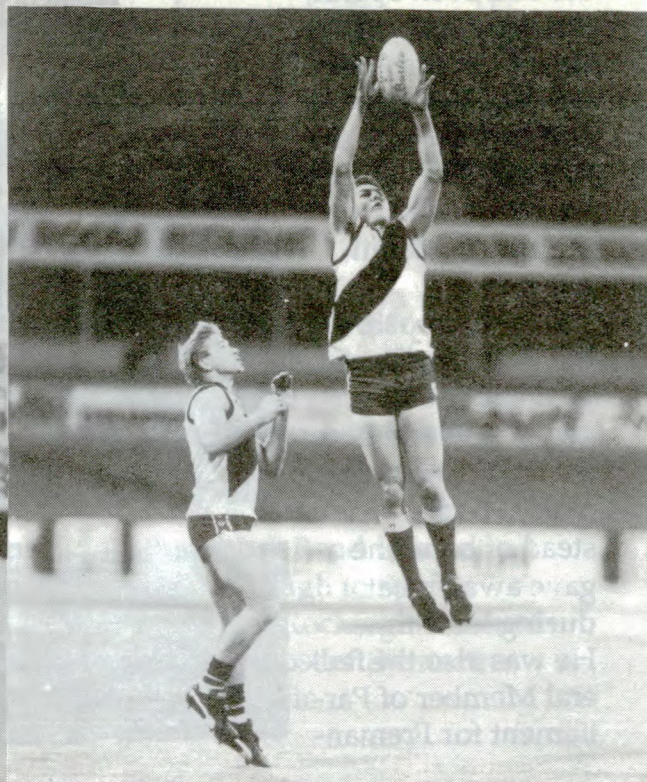
The photograph of him taking a mark over Ray French of East Fremantle at the 1956 Preliminary Final has been reprinted around the world. Sadly, Ray French was later killed in an industrial accident while still a young man.

Brian Ciccotosto, now General Manager of the Club won the Simpson Medal for his role in South Fremantle's premiership in 1970.

Peter Sumich and Glen Jackovich, together with Scott Watters from neighbouring Hamilton Hill have ensured that the district is now as important to the Eagles as it traditionally has been to South Fremantle.

**LEFT: JOHN GEROVICH TAKING A MARK OVER EAST FREMANTLE'S RAY FRENCH IN THE 1956 PRELIMINARY FINAL**

**BELOW: PETER SUMICH AT TRAINING**





## WATSONIA

In 1908 William Watson bought the original Woodlands estate homestead block from John Mell.



*BILL WATSON*

On the 40 acre block he built an abattoir to supply his small goods business. Watson, who had come from Victoria, had established a chain of twenty retail outlets from his small goods business and opened the first Watson's lunch bar in Fremantle in 1895.

He had been operating a piggery on the site of the present Davilak Reserve and in 1909 with the advent of new technology moved to the site on Hamilton Road.

Bill Watson was well known for his generosity and people said that unlike many butchers instead of bones he gave away meat during hard times. He was also the federal Member of Parliament for Fremantle

from 1922 until 1928. Watson's unsuccessful opponent in the election of 1925 was John Curtin who won the seat in 1928.

In 1931 Watson contested the seat and for the second time beat John Curtin. On defeating Curtin, he is said to have commented, "I feel a guilty man, I feel I have been used to keep a great man out of public life. I'm finished with politics." He retired from politics finally in 1934. Curtin won back the seat of Fremantle that year and went on to become war time Prime Minister of Australia.

Watson's business supplied food for the armed forces in World War II and was later purchased by George Weston Foods. Today it is a well established growing, processing, wholesale and retail business employing 397 people including 317 at Spearwood.



**John Curtin represented Spearwood in the outer part of the Fremantle electorate from 1928 to 1931 and from 1934 to 1945.**

**His local opponent, Bill Watson, was not the only person to recognise his exceptional qualities. In 1935 he became Leader of the Labor Party and was Prime Minister from 1941 until his death in 1945.**

**During World War II Curtin showed courageous leadership. He incurred the wrath of Churchill and earned the admiration of U.S. President Franklin D Roosevelt when he brought Australian troops from the Middle East to defend Australia against the Japanese.**



*WATSONIA TODAY*





## SPEARWOOD 25 YEARS AGO

This map, adapted from the 1964 12th edition of the U.B.D. road directory for Perth shows that 25 years ago Spearwood was vastly different to the suburb we know today. It is interesting to note that Sussex and Kent Streets which were

built by George Thompson in 1898 were still the main roads west of Rockingham Road. Sussex Street then crossed the railway line at a level crossing and there was also a level crossing rather than a subway at Hamilton Road.

East of Rockingham Road, Gerald and Doolette Streets

dominated the district to the north of the railway and Newton Street and Barrington Road provided access to properties south of it. The most notable difference is that Stock Road was not yet built through to Spearwood, so Rockingham Road carried most of the north-south traffic.



## EARLY CHURCHES

Methodist church at Spearwood. Angus McLeod offered land on Rockingham Road for the church and by June 1914 the Church was opened for its first service.



*THE METHODIST CHURCH, built by the Hines brothers*

Anglican services were held in the parish hall and the Roman Catholic Church held their services in the Fruit Growers Hall which was situated on Rockingham Road, where the Council offices are now located.

With closer settlement in Spearwood wives were keen to establish social facilities for themselves and

their children. In 1913 after several meetings at her home, Sarah Staughair set about establishing a

## WAR MEMORIAL



Spearwood originally had its own war memorial in Sussex Street. This was erected in 1922 to commemorate casualties from among the many Spearwood residents who went to Gallipoli and the Western front during World War 1 (1914-1918).

It is particularly noteworthy that the dead commemorated included Sister Follington. Other well known

pioneering Spearwood families who lost sons include the Ellement and Watson families.

The memorial was relocated to the Memorial Hall at the intersection of Carrington Street, Rockingham Road and Hamilton Road during the late sixties when the railway line was rebuilt to include standard gauge, and Sussex Street was bisected.

## Acknowledgements

NEVILLE GREEN: BROKEN SPEARS

MICHAEL BERSON: COCKBURN THE MAKING OF A COMMUNITY

GEORGE SEDDEN: A SENSE OF PLACE

BATTYE LIBRARY  
CITY OF COCKBURN  
W.A. HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
COCKBURN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
RAILWAY HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
WESTRAIL  
LANDS DEPARTMENT  
LOVRE SUMICH

SPIRO NOVAK  
ALBERT POWELL  
GEORGE VUKOVICH  
JACK BAVICH  
UNITING CHURCH  
WATSONIA  
UBD PTY LTD