
Our Western Land

Foundation Day 1 June 1829 to
Proclamation Day 21 October 1890

*This is the first of four historical facts sheets prepared for Celebrate WA by
Ruth Marchant James. The purpose of these documents is to present a brief and accurate timeline
of the important dates and events in the history of Western Australia.*

Pre-European Settlement

The Aboriginal people have inhabited the continent of Australia for over 40,000 years. Among the many tribes representing various districts in Western Australia are:

- Nyungar (South-West)
- Yamatji (Murchison)
- Bardi (Broome)
- Ngaamyatjarra (Warburton Ranges)
- Walmadjeri (Fitzroy district)
- Indjibandji (Pilbara)

Exploration,

Pre-European

Settlement

- 1616** Dirk Hartog in *Eendracht* discovered Dirk Hartog Island while visiting the Shark Bay area.
- 1618** Van Hillcom, on board *Zeewulfe* sighted the same section of the northern coast
- 1619** Frederick de Houtman in command of the *Dordrecht* discovered and named Houtman Abrolhos.
- 1622** Voyage of the *Leeuwin* to the south-west corner of WA.
- 1627** Frans Thyssen in the *Gulden Zeepaerdt* sailed past the future site of Albany and into the Great Australian Bight as far as South Australia. Nuytsland was named after an official on board.
- 1629** *Batavia* wrecked on the Abrolhos Islands.
- 1656** *Vergulde Draeke (Gilt Dragon)* wrecked near Ledge Point.
- 1688** William Dampier in the *Cygnets*, arrived in Kings Sound on 15 January and named it Cygnets Bay.

1696/

1697 A Dutch expedition led by Willem de Vlamingh in command of the *Geelvinck*, accompanied by the *Nijptangh* and *Weseltje* reached and named Rottneest on 29 December 1696. On 5 January 1697, before sailing north, a party explored the mainland from Cottesloe to the Swan River which De Vlamingh named after the black swans he discovered.

1699 In command of the *Roebuck*, Dampier made a second visit. He landed at Shark's Bay and Dampier Archipelago.

1712 Wreck of the *Zuyrdorp* on the north of the Murchison River.

1791 Capt George Vancouver in *Discovery* named King George Sound (Albany).

1792 A French survey of the south coast involved two vessels, *Recherche* under the command of Captain D'Entrecasteaux, and *Esperance* under Captain de Kermadec

1801 Capt Matthew Flinders, in command of *Investigator*, visited King George Sound. 1801 – 1803, two French scientific expeditions involving three ships *Geographe*, *Naturaliste* and *Casuarina*, commanded respectively by Cmdr Nicolas Baudin, Capt. Hamelin and Lieut Louis de Freycinet, visited the south-west region, the Swan River and the north-west coast.

European Settlement

1826 December 25, Major Edmund Lockyer, in charge of a detachment of soldiers from 39th Regiment and a group of convicts, arrived in King George Sound (then part of NSW) aboard the brig *Amity* to establish a military outpost to forestall French interest.

1827 March 7, Capt. James Stirling, in command of *HMS Success*, anchored in Cockburn Sound. He explored the Swan River, surveyed the islands offshore and with Charles Fraser, colonial botanist (NSW), presented a favourable report about the Swan River area. These impressions partly influenced the British Government's decision to found a colony.

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1829 April 25, Capt Charles Howe Fremantle, in command of *HMS Challenger*, arrived off Rottnest Island.

April 28, *Challenger* anchored in Cockburn Sound in the lee of Garden Island,

May 2, Capt. Fremantle took formal possession of the whole of the western coast of New Holland in the name of King George IV. He explored part of the Swan River, and then proceeded two miles up the Canning River in search of a fresh water spring.

May 4, to prepare for the arrival of Capt. James Stirling and the first settlers, Capt. Fremantle selected a mainland camp on the south side of the river at Bathers Bay.

June 1, officers from the *Challenger* reported sighting the *Parmelia* off Rottnest. Although they never stepped ashore, the colonists had their first view of the mainland, and Foundation Day has since been recognised on that date.

June 2 Fremantle sent a message to warn the *Parmelia's* master that the passage into Cockburn Sound was not safe. An over confident Capt. Stirling, however, ignored the advice and attempted to make an entry. For 18 hours the *Parmelia* floundered and was in danger of being wrecked. To lighten the vessel 28 men, women and children were taken to Carnac Island. Left in the care of J. Morgan colonial storekeeper, they remained there for 5 days in wintry conditions, with only 1 mug, 1 knife, salted beef and a limited supply of water.

June 3, in the early hours of the morning Mrs Stirling and the officials' wives are transferred from the *Parmelia* to the *Challenger* in Cockburn sound.

June 8, the *HMS Sulphur* arrived with Capt. Dance in command to form a temporary settlement on Garden Island. On board were Capt. Frederick Irwin and a detachment of the 63rd Regiment. Fremantle's crew and Irwin's soldiers cleared land, erected huts and tents, and cut a road to the top of the hill near Cliff Head. Settlers and livestock were taken ashore, rough fences were built and gardens formed. Known as Buache, the island was renamed Garden Island.

June 17, the weather had improved. Capt. Irwin and soldiers on board *HMS Sulphur* relieved Fremantle's sailors at the mainland. On arrival at the Bathers Bay camp, Irwin read a proxy proclamation.

June 18, the official Proclamation was read on Garden Island to officials and colonists.

August 5, the merchant ship *Calista* arrived safely in the Sound. *St Leonard* followed the next day, then on August 23, the *Marquis of Anglesea* dropped anchor.

August 12, the Foundation of Perth took place. As Mrs Stirling was unable to make the journey with her infant, Mrs Helen Dance, wife of Capt Dance, performed the Foundation ceremony.

August 28, after repairing the *Parmelia* and assisting Stirling and the colonists, the *Challenger* departed for India.

September 5, sale of the first Perth and Fremantle town lots took place.

December 15, the *Gilmore*, with Thomas Peel's first group of settlers reached the colony. The ship's late arrival resulted in significant changes to the settlement plans.

August – December, 18 immigrant ships arrived at the Swan River. For many years the river was used as the main means of transport between Perth and Fremantle. Alternatively travellers rode from Fremantle to Preston Point then crossed the river by horse-ferry to Minim Cove and then followed a sandy bush track to Perth.

1830 February 3, Lieut Preston and Dr Collie returned after exploring the mouth of the Murray River, Point Leschenault and Port Vasse.

In Feb 1830 Thomas Peel's second ship *Hooghly*, arrived followed in May by *Rockingham* which was wrecked on arrival. Colonists established a temporary school in the old Rush Church completed in December 1829 on the corner of Howick (Hay) and Irwin Streets, Perth. By the end of the year the population was 1500, excluding soldiers and visitors.

Ensign Robert Dale, a member of the 63rd Regiment, reported fine pasture lands in the Avon Valley around York and Beverley.

George Fletcher Moore described Fremantle as:

"... a bare, barren-looking district of sandy coast; the shrubs cut down for firewood, the herbage trodden bare, a few wooden houses, many ragged looking tents..."

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- 1831** The Round House in Fremantle was the first public building to be erected in the colony. Designed by Colonial Engineer, Henry Reveley, it served as a gaol until 1850.
- The collapse of Perth's first newspaper in 1831 led to the establishment of the *Perth Gazette* (the forerunner of *The West Australian*) on January 5, 1833.
- September 3 the colony's first ball was given by Capt, James Stirling.
- 1832** Small settlements had already been formed outside of Perth and Fremantle, at Guildford, Kelmscott, York, Toodyay, Pinjarra, Bunbury, on the Vasse and at Augusta.
- Capt. Stirling who been appointed Governor and also Commander-in-Chief in 1831, met with members of the Legislative Council for the first time on 6 February.
- Following several earlier attacks and counterattacks between settlers and Aborigines, the fatal spearing of a settler named Gaze, precipitated a number of reprisals on both sides.
- August, Capt. Stirling and his family departed for England and Capt. Frederick Chidley Irwin was left in charge. Whilst away the Governor pressed for further financial assistance to overcome the colony's immediate problems. Before leaving England, he was awarded a knighthood.
- September 5, Capt. Fremantle returned for a brief visit. Although he was not impressed with the slow development of Perth, he felt that Fremantle would one day be "a place of consequence".
- 1832 marked the end of the original land grant system. Initially land had been granted to applicants in proportion to the value of the stock, implements and servants they had brought with them.
- 1833** April, a reward was offered for the capture of Yagan. This resulted in his tragic death in July 1833 when two young boys deliberately trapped and shot him.
- 1834** April, Shelton's original four mill, built at the Narrows, was attacked by a group of Murray River Aborigines.
- The foundation stone of the original Government House was laid by Lady Stirling.
- Colonial schoolmasters were appointed at Fremantle, Perth, King George Sound, Guildford and Augusta.
- October 27, the historic Battle of Pinjarra took place.
- 1836** The Fremantle Whaling Company commenced operations. A rock tunnel beneath the Round House was cut through the following year.
- Surveyor-General J. S. Roe, accompanied to G. Fletcher Moore, explored beyond York and as far as the Wongan Hills area before returning via the Moore River.
- 1837** Surveyor Alfred Hillman and his party set out from King George Sound (Albany) to establish a route through Kojonup and York to the Swan River.
- October 2, Sir James Stirling forwarded his resignation, although he continued to administer the colony until December 1838. Progress was slow due to fewer settlers, lack of financial assistance and labourers.
- Lieut George Grey and a party of 11 set out to explore the Kimberleys. Although they reached Hanover Bay the trip had to be aborted after Grey was speared.
- 1839** January 5, Sir James Stirling finally returned to England.
- John Hutt was appointed second Governor of Western Australia. He later increased the number of members in the legislative Council to 8.
- Lieut Grey's second expedition set out to explore the north. The party successfully disembarked at Dorre Island north of Shark Bay. The loss of boats at Gantheaume Bay however, necessitated a long overland trek south to the Swan River. During the walk he discovered, and named, the Gascoyne and Murchison Rivers as well as several smaller rivers. His report later stimulated interest in the Murchison area and the Victoria District.
- October 31, the foundation stone was laid for All Saints Church at Upper Swan; the oldest surviving church in the State.
- 1840** Led by Marshall Waller Clifton, an unsuccessful attempt was made to establish a new settlement at Australind.
- 1841** February 25, John Eyre became the first white man to travel overland from east to west. He set out from Spencer Gulf, SA, with Baxter and Wylie, an aboriginal. Baxter was mortally wounded, but Eyre and Wylie arrived at Albany on July 7, 1841.

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- 1846** The Sisters of Mercy arrived and established a school for females in Perth. Open to all denominations, the school's first enrolment was 63 girls. The sisters also established an Aboriginal mission.
- The Gregory brothers, Augustus and Francis, explored the Irwin River and Champion Bay areas.
- The party discovered the colony's first mineral deposit, two seams of coal, north-east of Mingenew.
- Benedictines, Dom Rosendo Salvado and Dom Joseph Serra arrived to establish a mission on the Victoria Plains. First establishing themselves in Subiaco, they then moved to found New Norcia. Today this is the only surviving monastery town in Australia.
- 1847** A Board of Education was established to review the colony's schools. As a result the sexes were separated and two schools, Perth Boy's School and Perth Girl's School were recommended. A new school was built for boys in the Terrace in 1854.
- 1848** Capt. Charles Fitzgerald RN, was appointed Governor.
- The Gregory brothers explored the area north of the Irwin River. Not only did they discover fertile land, but rich lodes of lead on the lower Murchison River.
- December 1, Governor Fitzgerald, accompanied by one of the Gregory brothers and three soldiers, boarded the colonial schooner *Champion Bay* to travel north to inspect the mineral find.
- Within three months a syndicate was formed to establish and operate a new lead mine. As a result, the Geraldine Mine at Northampton was opened and Port Gregory and Gerald's Town (Geraldton) were founded.
- Census listed the population in the colony at 4622 persons, Mostly landowners, professional men, indentured servants and merchants, there was a noticeable shortage of both capital and labour.
- 1849** Although many colonists were against the idea, an agreement was reached with the British Government to provide convict labour.
- 1850** June 1, on the 21st anniversary of its Foundation, Western Australia lost its status as a free colony with the arrival of the first convict ship, the *Scindian*. On arrival Capt. Henderson the Comptroller-General found no suitable gaol. Prisoners were sent to various depots to work under guard on public works.
- 1850 – 1868, a total of 9,669 convicts arrived. Their presence in the colony provided the labour to erect public buildings such as the present Government House, the Barracks, the Court House, the Town Hall, the Perth and Fremantle gaols, etc. The colony had less than 6000 people in 1850. By the end of the convict era there were some 23,000 persons, and 1,100 miles of road, 47 major bridges and 79 minor bridges had been constructed.
- 1854** Austin led an expedition party north-east of Geraldton (Mt Magnet area). He correctly predicted that it was gold-bearing country.
- 1855** Governor Arthur Kennedy (later Sir Arthur) was appointed.
- 1856** Perth was proclaimed a City by Queen Victoria.
- 1857** Bishop Mather Hale was appointed the first Anglican Bishop. Shortly afterwards he founded the Church of England Collegiate School in the Cloisters. It was the first secondary school in the colony, and the forerunner of the present Hale School.
- 1861** An expedition, led by F. Kennedy, explored the country near the Ashburton, Fortescue, De Grey and Oakover rivers and reported good pastoral land.
- 1862** Governor John Hampton was appointed,
- 1864** Emma Withnell, the first white woman to settle in the Pilbara, left Beverley with her husband to found a sheep station near Roebourne.
- 1866** November 14, a bridge spanning the Swan River at Fremantle to link with the Perth-Fremantle Road (now Stirling Highway) was officially opened.
- 1868** The Legislative Council (est. 1832) was altered to consist of 6 government officials and 6 colonists appointed by the Governor.
- January 10, the arrival of the *Hougoumont*, the last convict ship, heralded the end of Western Australia as a penal colony.

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1869 Frederick Weld, a leader who introduced several new industries during his term of office, was appointed Governor.

1870 The end of the convict era introduced new problems. The loss of a large sum of money, paid by the British Government for the prisoners; upkeep, warders, etc., had a marked effect on the economy, as did slow population growth, poor seasons, infected crops and a slump in beef prices and in the Indian hose market. Fortunately, the pastoral industry prospered and a growing timber industry began to contribute to the colony's export income.

A modified term of representative government was introduced. Presided over by a speaker (the first being Sir Luke Leake), instead of the Governor. The representative Legislative Council had 18 members, 12 of whom were elected by property owners to represent the colonists. This system remained almost unchanged until it was replaced by Parliament in 1891.

John Forrest made his west-east expedition across the Nullabor to survey a telegraph route from Albany to Adelaide.

1871 The Education Act introduced compulsory primary school education for all children between the ages of 6 – 14 years. A Central Board of Education was established to supervise subsidies for private schools and the construction of government schools.

1872 The Perth-Fremantle Road (Stirling Highway) was declared a public highway.

Mid 1870's, the colony's 8 major towns – Perth, Fremantle, Guildford, Albany, Bunbury, York and Geraldton were declared municipalities.

1873 Col. Peter Egerton Warburton explored the interior from Alice Springs to the northern WA coastline.

1874 An explorations party, led by John and Alexander Forrest, travelled 2100 miles from Geraldton to reach the inland telegraph route before turning south to Adelaide.

1875 Governor Sir William Robinson KCMG was appointed.

An epic journey from SA was made by Ernest Giles. He explored in both directions proving that much of the eastern half of the colony was waterless.

1876 Fenians escaped on the *Catalpa*.

1877 A telegraph line was completed between Perth and Adelaide.

1879 The first government railway line in the colony (Geraldton to Northampton) was opened.

Alexander Forrest explored the Kimberley. His favourable report soon created interest in pastoral leases around the Fitzroy and Ord Rivers,

1881 A single track railway line opened between Fremantle and Guildford.

1885 The discovery of gold at Hall's Creek by Charles Hall and Jack Slattery resulted in the Kimberley gold rush.

1888 Yilgarn and Pilbara goldfields were proclaimed.

1890 Ashburton goldfields proclaimed. The discovery of gold gave Western Australia the stimulus it needed. By the turn of the century nearly one third of the population lived in the Eastern Goldfields.

August 15, the new constitution for responsible government received royal assent. It was intended that this system would provide Western Australia with the same sort of government given to other Australian colonies 30 years earlier. A State Premier and Ministers of the Crown would be introduced. A Cabinet, consisting of Members of Parliament, would henceforth be responsible for carrying out the law. A task previously assigned to the Governor.

October 21 1890 – Proclamation Day

the day, Western Australia's Constitution Act was proclaimed, and one of the most significant dates in the State's history.

On that day *The West Australian* wrote:

Today, before noon is over the old order of things political will be of the past, and a new order will have begun. We are all in a joyful mood... and in a quiver of excitement ... it is a time for gladness and thanksgiving when Western Australia after her long eclipse... is going to begin governing herself entirely at her pleasure.

The inaugural Proclamation Day in Perth was a gala occasion.

Colourful banners fluttered from masts and some half-dozen triumphal arches, decorated with palms, flowers and leafy branches were placed in such strategic locations as the Town Hall, the Perth Railway Station, the corner of Hay and William Streets and in front of the city's two rowing clubs on the river foreshore.

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Buildings along St George's Terrace and other main streets were decorated with an assortment of bunting, black swans, flowers and greenery as were the balconies, roofs and facades of most banking premises.

"God Bless Our Western Land" and "Progress and Prosperity" were just two samples of the many slogans displayed around the city. Churches provided special services, and in the morning a grand procession attracted a large crowd. At night residents had the choice of attending a torchlight procession, a people's ball in the Mechanics Institute, or a formal ball at the Town Hall.

Proclamation Day was originally given the status of a public holiday, and for some time Western Australians continued to celebrate the event that had been a turning point in the State's history. The original Proclamation Day holiday, however, was gradually overshadowed by the Eight Hours Day celebrations held on the same day. By 1919, Proclamation Day was replaced by Labour Day.

1891 January, Responsible Government and the formal opening of both Houses of Parliament having been achieved, Sir John Forrest (later Lord Forrest), Western Australia's first premier, sought to use the prosperity of the Goldfields to open up the State. For a decade Western Australia experienced stable government.

Recommended Reading:

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