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# Our Western Land

1890 - 1939

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*This is the second 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.*

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## 1890s

The South-Western, Great Southern and Eastern railways were completed. The extension of the railway system resulted in many new townsites being declared in previously undeveloped areas.

**1890** June – the first cattle shipment from the Kimberley district arrived at Fremantle from Derby. By 1893 almost 2000 head of cattle were dispatched south annually.

November – Fraser's Mine, the largest in Southern Cross (registered as a company on 8 October), paid shareholders the first dividend from gold in the colony.

11 December – Ashburton goldfields proclaimed.

29 December – John Forrest, member for the Legislative Assembly electorate of Bunbury in the new Government, sworn in by Governor Robinson as Colonial Treasurer. He assumed the courtesy title "Premier" and held that office for more than ten years.

Perth's first piped water service was privately built and owned. In 1896 the government took over and expanded the system.

The area of cleared, arable land was only a quarter of a million acres.

**1891** 20 January – Governor Sir William Robinson officially opened the new Parliament of two Houses.

26 May – Irish Engineer Charles Yelverton O'Connor left New Zealand with his family to take up an appointment in WA.

Murchison goldfields proclaimed

Population 53, 285 people (21,057 females and 32,228 males).

Councillors put forward an unsuccessful recommendation to replace Perth's gas lit lamps with electric lighting. For various reasons electricity was not supplied to the streets for many years. By 1914 Perth could still only boast 131 electric lamps in the city streets.

**1892** September – Bayley and Ford discovered gold at Fly Flat, Coolgardie. The news sparked a huge goldrush.

2 December – Alexander Forrest, explorer, financier and brother of John Forrest, sworn in as Mayor of Perth.

Copper found at Ravensthorpe.

17 June – Paddy Hannan, Dan O'Shea and Thomas Flanagan pegged Hannan's Reward claim. The area was later known as Kalgoorlie.

## 1892- 1893

Smallpox epidemic in Perth resulted in a number of deaths and the establishment of quarantine camps.

## 1893 – 1902

The timber industry experienced a boom period. New mill towns such as Waroona, Mornington, Yarloop and Wellington were established whilst existing mills, among them Jarrahdale, Karridale, Canning and Collie expanded.

**1894** The Mines Department was established.

November – the northern and southern railways were linked when the government constructed a line from Geraldton to Walkaway to connect with the Midland Railway line which ran from Midland Junction.

The railway and telegraph lines to Southern Cross were completed.

Perth Chamber of Commerce formed.

**1895** A typhoid epidemic struck Perth. 566 cases were reported in 1895, another 663 in 1896, followed by 1408 in 1897 and 800 in 1898.

25 November – eight Sisters of St John of God (four nurses and four teachers) arrived in Western Australia. The following year members of the newly established community commenced work in Coolgardie to assist typhoid victims.

State aid to the main Christian churches and all private schools ceased.

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Mining Act of 1895 introduced the dual title gold mining system. This allowed prospectors to search for surface gold on land already being worked at depth. The dual title was later abolished by Parliament and by 1900 alluvial mining was on the wane.

The popular Palace Hotel, built in Perth by John de Baun at a cost of 64,000 pounds, reflected the gold boom years.

Two large department stores, Boan Brothers and Foy & Gibson, opened their doors. These stores became major landmarks and served the public for many years.

A regular ferry service run by the Melville Park Estate Company commenced between Melville, Applecross, Canning Bridge and Perth.

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**1896** 1 January – Kalgoorlie linked by rail to the port at Fremantle.

Prominent citizen Charles Harper, founded the Guildford Grammar School when he commenced a private school primarily for the education of his own children.

First cinematographic film shown in Perth at the Cremorne Theatre.

A channel was dredged between the Barrack Street jetty in Perth and Mends Street in South Perth. The following year a ferry service was introduced with paddle steamers – the *Duchess*, *Empress* and *Countess*. In 1904 the *Valkyrie*, the first of many launches in the Valseries, plied between Barrack and Coode Streets.

Salt and freshwater baths, featuring distinctive onion-shaped domes were built on the Perth Esplanade. The buildings were dismantled after World War 1.

Bunbury harbour works commenced.

Construction of Mundaring Weir on the Helena River was sanctioned by Parliament.

By the end of 1896 goldmining companies floated for the WA goldfields numbered 780. The fabulous Golden Mile, a small area measuring about two miles long by half a mile wide, was soon recognized as the richest square mile of goldbearing country in the world.

1 December – the Government took over the railway line between Albany and Beverley (opened 1 June 1889) from the Western Australian Land Company.

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**1897** 17 April – the Perth Roads Board entered into an agreement with Charles Preston Dickson to construct tramway tracks within the city boundaries. The rights were later transferred to an English company.

4 May – *SS Sultan*, steered by Lady Forrest, became the first steamer to enter the new Fremantle Harbour.

*Sunday Times* produced its first issue.

Original wing of the Ministering Children's League Convalescent Home (now Wearne Hostel for the Aged) opened in the seaside suburb of Cottesloe. The first patients admitted were men from the goldfields convalescing after typhoid.

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**1898** Perth had its first view of a motor car. October – Perth Zoological Gardens in South Perth opened to the public.

Collie was in a position to supply coal for the entire State railway system.

15 March – members of the Police Force in Western Australia were issued with numbers for the first time. These were designed to be worn on the front of the cap of all non-commissioned officers. In 1903 registered numbers were transferred from caps to the collar of the uniform.

April – excavation work commenced at Mundaring Weir.

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**1899 – 1900**

Between these years explorer F.H. Hann discovered five new pastoral areas in the Kimberleys.

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**1899** 30 January – Perth Electric Tramways Ltd commenced construction of the first tramway from the Car Barn in Hay Street, East Perth to Thomas Street, West Perth. A spur line was extended along Colin Street and the first trial, watched by cheering crowds along the route, took place on 28 September 1899. The service which was taken over by the State Government in May 1912 ceased in 1958.

Education was made free at all Government schools.

The Royal Mint opened in Perth.

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2 April – a bitter five week strike over wages and hours ended on the Fremantle waterfront between ship owners and employers.

Daisy Bates, champion of Aborigines and a keen student of their languages and tribal customs, commenced her North-West tour.

17 August – Bill was passed for the extension of the suffrage to women.

7 September – first volunteers left Albany to serve in the Boer War.

By 1899 the annual value of gold production had reached 12.4 million pounds.

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## 1900

Parliament legalised trade unions and to ensure industrial peace, set up an Arbitration Court.

22 March – Premier Sir John Forrest and Lady Forrest officially opened the new Deaf School in Mosman Park. Editor of the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, J.W. Kirwan, promoted the Secessionist movement by leading a reform committee set up in London. For a time it seemed likely that the Eastern Goldfields could become a breakaway colony.

June- reluctant to surrender independence by joining the Federation, Western Australia held a referendum. The result was 44,800 votes in favour of Federation and 19,691 votes against.

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**1901** 1 January – the official announcement that Western Australia had become a State within the Commonwealth of Australia was made before a large crowd on the Esplanade. Sir John Forrest elected to Federal Parliament.  
31 March – census recorded a State population of 184,124 persons.

20 June – Alexander Forrest explorer and former mayor of Perth died. On 28 August 1903 his statue was unveiled by the Premier of the day, the Hon. Walter James.

October – an English company completed a submarine cable linking Perth with South Africa and London.

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**1902** 10 March – Charles Yelverton O'Connor the man responsible for the Fremantle Harbour scheme and the extensive pipeline designed to carry water from Mundaring Weir to the goldfields, took his own life near Robb Jetty.

31 July – the foundation stone of the first stage of Parliament House was laid. The works were completed in time for the Sessions which began on 28 July, 1904.

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**1903** 25 January – Sir John Forrest officially opened the Goldfields Water Scheme at Coolgardie. Later that same day the Premier turned on the water at Kalgoorlie.

Annual gold production in 1903 was more than 2,000,000 ounces.

To replace an original level crossing the Horseshoe Bridge was built in Perth to carry increased traffic over the railway line.

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**1904** WA's sheep population reached 2,800,000. Thomas George Anstruther Molloy built His Majesty's Theatre and Hotel on the corner of Hay and King Streets and a cost of 46,000 pounds.

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**1905** A tram service commenced operation in Fremantle. The service ceased in 1952.

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**1906** First sewerage system was introduced to Perth. Children's Protection Society set up in Western Australia to alleviate child abuse.

The construction of a popular English type pier with central rotunda commenced at Cottesloe.

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## 1906 – 1909

Alfred Canning surveyed a possible stock route from the Kimberleys to Wiluna.

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**1907** Fremantle Railway Station opened. The original building was situated west of the present site with an entrance at the end of Mouatt Street.

Land tax and graduated income tax was introduced (State).

The start of continuous export of wheat from Western Australia.

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**1908** The outer rabbit proof fence, surveyed by A.W. Canning completed. The fence stretched 1,140 miles (1834 km) from Port Hedland in the north to Hopetoun in the south.

Under the command of Admiral Sperry the United States' Great White Fleet of 16 vessels, made up of battleships, cruisers and destroyers and manned by a complement of more than 12,000 officers and men, visited Albany as part of a world goodwill tour.

**1909** Cattle used the Canning Stock Route for the first time.

**1910** Kimberley district experienced a disastrous drought which continued until 1914.

**1911** An Act of Parliament established the University of Western Australia. In May 1913 the first undergraduate students enrolled in a temporary building in Perth.

The first aeroplane flight took place in Perth when Joseph Hammond, from the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company, demonstrated a light bi-plane at the Belmont racecourse.

Newspaper man and benefactor, J. Winthrop Hackett, made a Knight Bachelor in recognition of his public services. Three years prior to his death in February 1916 he was awarded a KCMG. In 1926 the University of Western Australia received a legacy from his estate of 425,000 pounds and the Anglican Church an amount of 138,000 pounds.

**1912** Broome recognised as the pearling centre of Australia. Pearling was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporting industry in the State. At its peak (1912-1913) there were 1000 luggers and 3000 men of different nationalities at Broome.

State Shipping Service commenced operations.

Kinsley Fairbridge founded Fairbridge Farm for underprivileged youngsters at Pinjarra.

**1913** Commonwealth Bank of Australia opened for general business in St George's Terrace.

**1914** 4 August – Declaration of World War 1 meant that for the first time Australia entered a major war.

17 August – the first volunteers to enlist commenced training at Blackboy Camp near Greenmount.

2 November – first WA Trained troops for the Great War embarked on the transports *Ascanius* and *Medic* at Albany. The two vessels were part of a convoy of 44 troopships and escorts carrying members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The men were given further training in Egypt before sailing for Gallipoli. Approximately 10% of the State's population volunteered to serve. Some 6000 died and 12,000 were wounded.

With the outbreak of war many timber mills closed and did not re-open until after the cessation of hostilities.

Immigration, which had been highly successful before the war, remained at a standstill during the war years.

Country Party formed in Western Australia to represent the Wheatbelt regions.

Popular swimming baths opened on the river at Crawley.

**1916** State branch of the Girl Guide Movement formed.

**1917** October – the first train left Kalgoorlie on the newly completed transcontinental railway.

February – John Curtin, future Prime Minister of Australia, took up a new position as editor of the *Western Australian Worker*.

Industrial and political unrest on the wharves due to a lumpers' strike.

Women were appointed to the Western Australian Police Force. The first female constables were Mrs H. Dugdale (a nurse) and Miss L. Chipper (a social worker).

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**1918** 9 February – Sir John Forrest became the first Australian-born citizen to be raised to the British peerage when he was granted the title Lord Forrest, Baron of Bunbury. Unfortunately Forrest died 3 September that same year.

11 November – the end of World War 1.

December – inoculations commenced in Fremantle to prepare for the expected arrival of ships carrying patients suffering from pneumonic influenza. The Australian death toll during the epidemic was estimated at approximately 12,000. In Western Australia 538 deaths out of 3,857 in 1919 were attributed to Spanish influenza.

6 December – Perth Tramways held a mass meeting to discuss dissatisfaction with May 1917 wages award. The outcome was a two month strike.

**1919** 2 August – people flocked to the Western Australian Cricket Ground to see Major Norman Brearley give his first flying exhibition in Perth. Brearley, who had purchased two ex-military Avro bi-planes, was keen to introduce commercial aviation to the State.

More than 2,500 motor vehicles existed in Perth.

New export meat works opened at Wyndham.

In order to stimulate the State's economy, provide post war employment and expand undeveloped areas in the Wheatbelt and South-West, Premier James Mitchell advocated the production of a land settlement scheme.

4 May – a heated confrontation took place on the wharves at Fremantle. The event, which has since been known as "Bloody Sunday", involved Premier H. Colebatch, lumpers, returned soldiers, the police and a huge crowd of some 2000 persons.

**1920** A three day riot took place in Broome between groups of Japanese and Koepangers.

## 1919-1922

Almost 38,000 ex-servicemen from Britain came to Western Australia under the Empire Settlement Scheme.

**1920** December – the population of WA was approximately 350,000. By December 1929 this figure had risen to more than 400,000 – almost half of whom lived in the metropolitan area.

**1920s** There were increased job opportunities for labourers and new settlers. Nominated passages were granted to persons resident in the British Isles having a friend or relative willing to meet them on arrival and to take on the responsibility of settling them. Anyone of British parentage, mentally sound, in good health and holding a proper passport could enter the country without restrictions.

**1921** A Group Settlement Scheme was introduced to stimulate the dairying industry and to populate new localities in the South-West forest areas. Under this scheme migrants worked in groups until their dairy farms were developed enough to be allocated to them. The first group established on land near Manjimup in 1921 was reasonably successful. Settlers, however, faced problems in more inaccessible, heavily timbered areas and many disillusioned migrants returned home.

National Party member Mrs Edith Cowan became the first woman elected to any Australian Parliament.

**1922** Norman Brearley's West Australian Airways – the first regular commercial airline, operated between Geraldton and Broome. This service was extended from Perth to Derby in 1924 and to Wyndham in 1930 via Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. In 1934 the service was taken over by MacRobertson Miller Aviation Company.

**1923** The total value of mineral production Western Australia was 159,331,789 pounds.

**1924** Westralian Farmers Ltd transmitted the first radio broadcasts from Station 6WF.

**1925** Woollen Mills opened in Albany.

4 November – Paddy Hannan, discoverer of Kalgoorlie, died in Melbourne. He had retired there five years earlier and was buried in the Catholic section of the Melbourne General Cemetery.

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**1926** In order to train future farmers, the Collier Government established an Agricultural College at Muresk in Northam.

26 April – Detective Inspector J. Walsh and Detective Sergeant Pitman, members of the Gold Stealing Branch were brutally murdered at Kalgoorlie. Three men were arrested – one an accessory, turned King’s Evidence and two were sent to the gallows. On 8 December 1929 a monument was unveiled by the Governor in front of the former Police Barracks in James Street.

**1927** Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth) visited Perth.

During the season which ended in February it was recorded that 3,324,523 acres were under crops.

The Bank of New South Wales took over the West Australian Bank.

**1928** March – foundation stone of St George’s College, Crawley, laid by Archbishop C.O.L. Riley.

April – during an epic flight from Australia to England in the ‘Southern Cross’, Charles Kingsford-Smith and Charles Ulm were reported missing over North-West Australia. The aircraft and party were located 12 days later stranded near the Charnley River.

An Eastern States firm, Woolworth’s Pty Ltd opened its first store in Perth.

**1929** Western Australia’s centenary of the Foundation of the Swan River Colony. A centenary stamp was issued and Perth became a Lord Mayoralty.

Talkies (film movies with sound) were introduced to Perth.

Sydney to Perth Centenary Air Race won by H.C. Miller. Soon afterwards a regular commercial service commenced between Perth and Adelaide.

A decline in the fortunes of many mining companies affected a number of mining towns. In many cases businesses closed down and populations dwindled.

**1930** Migration schemes throughout the 1920s greatly contributed to a rise in the State’s population. By the beginning of the next decade the population had risen to 431,610 (232,868 males and 198,742 females).

A sharp fall in the State’s income from exports was just one of the many factors that led to the depression years immediately following the Wall Street crash in the United States. A sudden decline in manufacturing building, wheat, sheep and other industries created a period of unemployment and great hardship.

Although the whole of Australia suffered economically, Western Australia was more affected because of its reliance on primary produce. Within two years the State government’s deficit trebled.

The severe economic depression resulted in long queues of unemployed seeking jobs at factories, business houses and employment agencies. Soup kitchens were established and it was a common sight to see shabby, humiliated out-of-work men lined up to receive assistance in the form of a weekly dole, free grocery and meat tickets. In despair others sought employment in country areas – grateful to be hired for even the most menial type of work.

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## 1930-1931

Over 2500 unemployed men were given a job digging a 14 mile channel to divert the Harvey River.

The first shipment of bananas left Carnarvon.

**1931** Captain Hans Bertram and his mechanic, Adolph Klausman, rescued by Aborigines 45 days after leaving their damaged seaplane on the coast 160 km from Wyndham. Beginning their world flight in Germany the plane disappeared after setting out from Timor for Darwin. The men received treatment in a Perth hospital and later returned north to retrieve their aircraft before resuming their epic journey from Perth.

The famous Golden eagle (1,135 ounces) a rich nugget of gold, was found at Larkinville.

A proposal put forward by Westralian Farmers Ltd led to the establishment of the Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd under the Bulk Handling Act of 1934.

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**1932** A State lottery was introduced.

The University of Western Australia's main buildings in Crawley were completed and St George's College was officially opened.

**1939** 3 September, Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that Australia was in a state of war.

Joseph Parsons well-known and respected headmaster of Perth Modern School between 1912 and 1930 retired.

**1933** One in four men were unemployed whilst another one in four were on short-term work. The decision to commence building the Canning Dam offered some relief work. The dam project was completed in 1940.

27 March – Prime Minister J. Lyons addressed a noisy meeting during a visit to Perth to lead the anti-secessionist campaign.

Secession referendum in WA carried by a huge majority. Although the State Government went through the formalities of implementing the decision to secede from the Commonwealth it was later rejected as legally unsound.

30 May – assent given to the Commonwealth Grants Commission Act.

First Australian-born State Governor, Sir James Mitchell, installed as Lieut-Governor (1933-1948, Governor 1949-1951).

1 October – official opening of Perth's first trolley bus service. The first trolleys ran between East Perth and the West Leederville station.

**1934** January - bitterness on the goldfields, caused by job allocations, created a two day racial riot involving Australians and Southern Europeans. Several deaths occurred and extensive damage was done to houses, hotels and shops in Kalgoorlie and Boulder.

**1936** West Australian Airways became the Australian National Airways after being sold to a shipping consortium. The company was later taken over by the Ansett group.

Claude Albo de Bernales, the person responsible for the building of London Court in Perth and Overton Lodge at Cottesloe, became Managing Director of one of the richest companies on the Golden Mile – the Great Boulder Propriety.

**1938** A Royal Commission of inquiry was held into the administration of the City of Perth.