

Stuart Town Cemetery 1890 – 1933. Situated in George Crescent Alice Springs

Written by Margaret Lawrence March 2015

After the Telegraph Station, the Stuart Town Cemetery is the second most historic site in Alice Springs and contains the remains of some of the earliest pioneers and settlers in the area. The average age of the deceased is around 30 years which gives an indication of the hardships of life in those years.

There was no medical help in the town until August 1915 when Sister Jean Finlayson, a Presbyterian deaconess and nurse who had been in Oodnadatta South Australia since 1914 as a nursing sister for the Australian Inland Mission, arrived as the first official nursing sister. Until then medical help at Oodnadatta and Maree was 10 days or more away by buggy.

When David Lindsay carried out his survey of the town of Stuart in 1888 no provision was made for a cemetery, but in 1889 when Fred Spicer was killed in a riding accident and buried in the area a site was selected and plotted on the town plan. In 1890 the formal proclamation of the cemetery was declared and it continued to be used until 1933 when the Memorial Drive Cemetery was opened.

The cemetery was laid out in 6 rows of 17 graves which gave 102 plots. Reports of the numbers and names of people actually buried here vary. Only seven graves can be formally identified but the numbers could be as high 100 or more. Over the years, historians including Mrs AV Purvis and Kate Holmes have between them suggested an unofficial list of names in excess of seventy.

Disease or accident were common causes of death, as well as deaths at childbirth and early childhood. The following list provides a snapshot of 'life and death' at the time:-

Fred Spicer was the first person buried in this cemetery. Spicer who was 33 years old, died on 8 November 1889. He was a stock agent inspecting cattle for Elders on Undoolya Station when he had a riding accident and died from injuries. A family story says, "he was challenged to jump a wild horse over a gate and didn't make it". **Grave No 12**

Jim Cummings who died 11 May 1911, was one of the early stockmen who drove the first cattle in 1871 – 72 from South Australia to Owen Springs Station. In 1905 he was granted a pastoral permit near Mt Giles north of Ellery Creek. He was reputedly a horse breaker and keen supporter of the race club which he helped establish in Alice Springs. He was the Great Uncle of leading trainer and Melbourne Cup winner, Bart Cummings. He died when his horse fell with him about 16 miles north of Ellery Creek. He was buried near Ellery Creek, west of Alice Springs, but when the memorial headstone arrived it was too heavy to be carried by pack saddles across rough country so the headstone was erected in the cemetery in 1912. It reads: 'This stone was erected by public subscription in recognition of his sportsmanlike qualities and general good fellowship. 1912. (<http://www.wilmap.com.au/atts/113.html>). **Grave No 13**

George Medworth died 25 July 1902. Aged 68 years. He was a cook in Alice Springs and could have been a miner. His claim to fame was that at his death at aged 68 years, he had lived longer than many others given that the average age of those buried at that time was 30. **Grave No 4**

Max Draper was a child at Bond Springs Station. In the book *By Packhorse and Buggy* authors Powell and McRae wrote that one night the family was awakened by a horse rider from Bond Springs. Mrs Powell's mother was Mrs Price, the wife of the Post Master at the Telegraph Station. This was in 1921. Mrs Price had her horse saddled and she packed the few medicines she had and rode out by moonlight and star light the 12 miles of rough countryside to see if she could help, but unfortunately when she arrived Max had died from convulsions. He is buried somewhere in the cemetery. **Grave unknown.**

Doreen Mary McDonald died in 1931, thought to have eaten oleander leaves. She was the daughter of the first Station Master of the Railway Station. **Grave unknown**

Two babies, Harold and Clarence, born to Edie Espie, were buried here in 1923 and 1932. From the Gardner-Purvis list it is unclear which child died in which year. **Grave unknown**

A baby named Hong, likely to be the child of Chinese market gardener Ah Hong, is probably buried in the cemetery. The baby's mother, a Western Arrente woman, sadly died in childbirth and it is possible that when the baby died sometime later she was buried at the cemetery in 1913. **Grave unknown**

Frank Rees George was a geologist, mining engineer and explorer who led an expedition of government geologists prospecting in 1905-6 around the Petermann Ranges "when they were attacked by hostile Loritja tribesmen on the 5th of December. One member of the party, T.W. Hall, was speared in the eye, another, H. Fabian in the chest. They arrived at the Telegraph Station on 29th of March 1906, nearly four months later, after George had nursed the injured men until they were well enough to travel. George was worn out with exhaustion and anxiety, and died of dysentery at 5am on the 4th of April, aged 32". (<http://www.wilmap.com.au/atts/113.html>).

Grave No 11.

Johannes Christian Kadow was a well sinker who died 12 August 1903 at Temple Bar south of Alice Springs. He sank a well and was overcome by foul air and suffocated. **Grave No 3**

Annie Raggatt died 30 June 1903 aged 30 years. She was the wife of Fred Raggatt who was a teamster, store keeper and pastoralist who took up Glen Helen Station in 1901. Annie went to Oodnadatta for the birth of their daughter Molly where she stayed for a few months until the child was old enough to travel. Soon after arriving back in Alice Springs Annie caught typhoid fever during an epidemic at the Stuart and Winnecke Goldfields. **Grave No 5**

Henry Bruce Farrington Chapman died 9 September 1928, aged 20 years. He was a young man from Mt Barker South Australia who loved life in the outback. He was camped a day's ride from Coniston Station when two Aboriginal station workers came and told him of the killing of Fred Brooks. He sent a note via a loyal stockman to tell Randall Stafford (Fred's friend and owner of Coniston) and news passed on to the Government Resident in Alice Springs. Bruce buried the body and later returned to his camp but as he was feeling unwell he set off to Ryan Well. He had aches and pains and a bad headache and was given a lift to Alice Springs where he was looked after in the hospital, but despite care nothing could be done and he died of spinal meningitis. He was given a big funeral and twenty seven people which was nearly all of the town's residents, attended. **Grave No 6**

Others buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves

Danny Pedler - The prospector who discovered wolfram at Hatches Creek in 1914.

Peter Mahomet - The first Afghan cameleer to come to Alice Springs in 1872.

Jack Williams - who died in 1923. He built the old Stuart Town Gaol and the stone bunkhouse at Hamilton Downs. He was contracted to build Adelaide House and because he was unable to get good help, he worked single-handedly for much of the next three years. He quarried his own stone and burnt his own lime but had trouble getting sawn timber for boxing the concrete and steel for reinforcement. Things looked very grim when he died in 1923, with the walls up but the concrete floors unfinished. <http://www.flynnchurch.org.au/building-adelaide-house.html>

Johannes Mueller - The first Stationmaster at the Telegraph Station (1872-1879) was killed in an accident falling from a sulky at Bond Springs Station in 1922.

http://www.wilmap.com.au/atts/stuart_cemetery.html

