

HISTORY OF THE COLONY

Postmistresses in Colonial Western Australia

Continued from Bulletin No 2.

Two Aboriginal women were perhaps the most remarkable postmistresses in this period. Helen Cuper, née Pangieran, was appointed at New Norcia in August 1873. The office was upgraded to Post and Telegraph status in March 1874 and Helen became both postmistress and telegraphist. Unfortunately her health soon deteriorated and she trained another Aboriginal woman, Sarah Ninak. In 1876, Sarah happened to be running the office when Governor Robinson visited New Norcia. He was so impressed by her ability that he sent her photo, and a despatch couched in glowing terms, to London. Helen died in January 1877, but for some unknown reason, Sarah did not take over and Bridget Troy, the sister of the local policeman, was appointed.

By the early 1880s, a number of women had made the transition to full-time employment in the postal service although this was often a consequence of their telegraph skills. One of them, Emily Lloyd at Guildford, was quite prepared to resist what she saw as gender discrimination. In 1886 she pointed out to the PMG that *'The Supt. has taken for granted the statement of the Perth operators. I can well understand their endeavouring to screen themselves from blame, but, that they should do so at the expense of truth is much to be regretted...it is a pity the Supt. of Telegraphs should form such a rash judgement based on the opinions of those around him in the Chief Office and who, I have good reason to know are prejudiced.'* Emily married in July 1887 and resigned in June 1889.

The postal service's status as a respectable occupation for women was typified by Mary Locke, the wife of John Locke, a leading land owner at Wonnerup. Mary became postmistress when an office was opened at Lockeville in 1874. She died in June 1888 and was succeeded by her daughter Alma.

Despite the Wonnerup women, the period from 1888 to 1900 was noticeable for a dramatic fall in both the percentage and number of postmistresses. The department was expanding into the goldfields where conditions favoured male officials and furthermore, the level of full-time employment was rising at a significant rate. The expansion of the railway system meant that a number of post offices came to be worked by railway stationmasters, invariably male. Nonetheless, despite the number of postmistresses declining during this time, there was no general reduction in salary for those still working.

Women played a major role in the development of the postal services in Western Australia. There was no social stigma attached to working in the post office and neither was there any overt salary or skill

discrimination on the basis of gender. The only obvious discrimination was the exclusion of women from the senior positions in the department but this was typical of the public service as a whole. Working in the postal service provided women with an acceptable career structure, particularly in the smaller country offices other than those in the goldfields. The postal system in Western Australia could not have developed as it did, without their contribution. *(This series is concluded).*

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HASLUCK MEDAL

The E.M. Hasluck Medal commemorates the late E'thel Meernaa Caedwalla Hasluck and his fellow officers who served in the Colonial Post and Telegraph Department in Western Australia. It has been awarded under the auspices of the Western Australian Philatelic Council since 1983. Nominations from clubs and individuals are called for annually and the Medal is presented at the National or State level exhibition normally held in October.

Nominees must be residents of Western Australia who have given distinguished service to philately. Various aspects are considered, such as administrative positions held and for how long, publications, editing newsletters, exhibiting at club and higher levels and general promotion of the hobby in Western Australia.

1983	Myrna Hooker (dec)	1994	Geoff Elliott
1984	George Owen (dec)	1995	Peter Stewart
1985	Brian Pope	1996	Edward Hyde
1986	Ross Duberal	1997	Ross Wood
1987	Gordon Darge	1998	David Wood
1988	Arnold Creaser	1999	Graham Berry
1989	Mavis Deathe (dec)	2000	Robert Radley
1990	Arthur Pearce (dec)	2001	John DiBiase
1991	Lindsay Wilkinson (dec)	2002	Richard Vickers
1992	Phil Thomas (dec)	2003	Harold Clay
1993	Dorrit Hunt (dec)	2004	?

E.M. Hasluck joined the Post and Telegraph Department as a Letter Carrier on 1 March 1890 at the age of 18. He subsequently served in the Perth-Albany Travelling Post Office and was appointed an Assistant at Coolgardie Post Office in July 1894. He was at Coolgardie when the Post Office was destroyed by fire on 9 October 1895. In January 1896 he was posted to Albany to instruct the TPO staff in the sorting of the Goldfields mail. He left the Department later that year.

PRESENTATION OF PRIZES

All prizes will be awarded at a Presentation Breakfast at the venue at 9am Sunday 12 September. All exhibitors are invited free of charge. However admission will be by ticket only. Interested visitors may attend at a charge of \$5. For catering purposes contact Jan Gane on 0413 840 984 or email jan_dave@inet.net.au, prior to 9 September or contact the Committee desk, before 12 noon 11 September.