

D'Orsogna Bros.

Humble beginnings in Wiluna

*"Lamb: tasty, fresh and tender!
We have a reputation for securing
the primest qualities, which
guarantees you of the best cuts.
For courteous attention and quick
service try us, the Wiluna Meat
Supply. Phone 16"*

Advertisement in The Wiluna Miner,
January 15th 1937

On November 29th 1927 Luigi D'Orsogna stepped onto the wharf in Fremantle, determined to find a better life for his wife and eight children, whom he'd left behind in Italy. By 1931 the Great Depression had hit Western Australia hard and, hearing of Wiluna's prosperity, Luigi caught the train here in 1931 and found a job in the gold mines.

Two years later he'd saved enough to buy passage for two of his sons, Caesare (aged 16) and Tommaso (Tom, 14), who joined him in Wiluna. Luigi persuaded Jim Clarke, who managed the Wiluna Meat Supply, to give Tom a job. The youngster was to spend the next four years working in the smallgoods manufacturing operation adjacent to the butcher's shop – and this was effectively the beginning of D'Orsogna Limited, as it is known today.

It was not until 1949 that Tom opened his own shop in West Perth. By 1951 two other brothers, John and Caesare, had joined the firm and it became D'Orsogna Brothers Pty Ltd. Today, D'Orsogna is a leading manufacturer and supplier of meat products right across Australia – and it all began, right here on this dusty street corner in Wiluna!



The Wiluna Meat Supply can be seen on the right of this image, looking north up Wotton Street



Government of Western Australia
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ROYALTIES
FOR REGIONS

Shire of
Wiluna



The Pioneer.

From store to hall to Mission

"It comprised two separate buildings; one was a like a barn with shelves nearly to the roof. I remember that the tomato sauce was stored on the side that always got the hot sun, and there was always about an inch of black liquid at the top of the bottles. Sometimes they'd just go bang!"

Former resident Keith Quartermaine, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

In 1920 James Moylan and Augustus Lucanus purchased the Pioneer Stores and the old Weeloona Hotel, both of which stood across the street from here. The Pioneer was a large general store, and was among the businesses to advertise in the very first issue of the *Wiluna Miner*, published on January 24th 1931.

Despite the proprietor's long experience with general stores in Claremont, the Depression hit the Pioneer hard and eventually caused it to go bankrupt. In an ironic twist the unpaid creditor who'd caused the foreclosure, Sultan Mahmood, then set up shop in the barn-like building.

It is not known how long that business survived, because the building became the Kit Kat Dance Hall sometime in the late 1930s. Years later it was purchased by the Seventh Day Adventist Church and relocated out at the Mission, about 15 km east of Wiluna.



The Norfolk & Co "Pioneer Store", beside the original Weeloona Hotel



The Weeloona Hotel!

The longest bar in the world

"In 1897 a party of men went up with a horse and cart to make dried bricks and commence building. I applied for a general publican's licence, took up about five tons of wines and spirits, put it in a room, secured it with nails and told the builder not to touch the goods on any account."

Former resident August Lucanus, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



The first "Hotel Weeloona". Courtesy "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Luke Lucanus's stash of alcohol was gone when he arrived back in town some weeks later, but this did not stop him from opening Wiluna's first hotel. Originally known as the Lake Way it later became the Weeloona, and was the location of some of early Wiluna's most memorable events...

In August 1930 the Daily Telegraph reported that John Clark, the Secretary of the Hospital Board, clad in pyjamas and a dustcoat, inadvertently went "several rounds" with the publican's pet kangaroo at the rear of the hotel, before bolting unceremoniously for his life!

The original mud brick shanty was reconstructed in the heady days of the early 1930s, with a second story being added to provide accommodation. The horseshoe shaped bar was at one time claimed to be the longest in the world, though the grand old hotel last served as a freight depot and hay storage shed, prior to its demolition in 1978.



"Café Strip"

The Raffles, the Strand and the Golden Gate Café

"Sometimes the customer would be inebriated, but still in charge of his senses enough to order a meal. By the time he'd eaten he'd fallen asleep with his head on the table. Violet need to be paid for the meal, so with the waitress to witness the transaction she'd fossick in the man's pocket and extract the right amount. If the café was not busy he'd then be left to finish his sleep..."

Harold Peake, Vi Carter's son,
quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Cafés were central to life in old Wiluna, with the Raffles Tea Rooms, the Strand and the Golden Gate Café being some of the better-known establishments. The Golden Gate was notable as it was established by Violet Carter, a single mother – and a very astute businesswoman.

Hard working and efficient, Violet opened the café from 7 am right through to 1 am the next morning. Single men who lived out at the mine came into town to drink at the nearby hotels – and then came to the Golden Gate for a three-course meal. Vi also took in boarders, feeding them breakfast in the morning and providing their "crib" for lunch each day.

Down the road the Raffles targeted a different market, promoting itself in the local race book thus: *"Ladies – you may not be on a winner here, but you're always on a winner at the Raffles Tea Rooms, for morning and afternoon teas!"*



The Golden Gate Café, tucked between the local hardware and fruit shops.
Courtesy Ken Routledge



Brilliant breag.

Jim Hodder's beaut bakery

"In the morning I got up to cook brekky and when I unwrapped the bread there was a big mouse hole right into it. I looked at the wrapping paper and there was not a mark on it, so later I marched up to the bakery with the bread and confronted Jimmy Hodder. He was puzzled as he said, "we don't have mice here!" – but he gave me a new loaf, neatly wrapped as before."

Former resident Stan Gratte's recollection from 1948

As it turned out, it was not mice at Hodders that had eaten a hole in Gratte's bread, but giant cockroaches that were resident in the railway barracks where he was living. This would be no surprise to those who remember Hodder's Bakery for its brilliant bread. Long-term residents still speak fondly of the smell that wafted down the main street very early in the morning.

By the 1960s Jim Hodder was the only baker left in town, but through the hectic years of the 1930s it was Laurie Gerrick who supplied fresh bread in Wiluna. Gerrick ran a large general store on the main street for many years, and was also very active in the local community.

Indeed, he served as Road Board Chairman for two-year terms on at least three separate occasions. He was also known for his extensive involvement in local sport, through which he earned the nickname "Slogger". On two separate occasions his store burnt to the ground – perhaps as a result of his baking activity?



Steve Rogers on his bread delivery wagon



On the beat.

Policing early Wiluna

"The want of police protection is being keenly sought by local business people. Almost every week one of them is victimised by persons who run up accounts and then clear out by the light of the moon."

Quoted in G.H. Topperwien's "The History of Wiluna"

The demands of the early residents were finally met when Constables Smith and Neagle arrived by coach from Cue in November 1899. Their early base was far less accommodating than today's police station – P.C. Smith reported that they were *"forming a Police Station at present occupying a room in the Weeloona Hotel, pending the erection of the Police Tent"*.

Their first proper Station was finally opened on July 14th, 1901. The Station journal shows that mileages were recorded for each horseback outing, with 231 miles being travelled in the search for the deceased prospectors, Coultman and MacKenzie.

By 1938 there were nine policemen, a detective and a Sergeant in Charge based here. At the peak of the town's growth they had to deal with all sorts of local characters, including Ted Jessop, a wild giant of a man with a wooden leg. George Nicholson, who served here at that time, is reported to have said, *"if he was causing disorderly conduct the best thing was to try and quickly tip him over – you could control him better that way!"*

The old station was demolished in September 1981, making way for the building you see here today.



Policeman George Nicholson, with Tracker Alick.
Courtesy "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Once were heroes.

The town's banks

"Pay nights were very wild! As a matter of fact, living on the premises of the bank, I was so concerned on several occasions when the pubs seemed to get really out of hand that I slept with the bank's revolver under my pillow. I don't know what I'd have done if there was trouble at the bank, but I guess the revolver was reassuring."

Former resident Roger Fitzhardinge, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



The town's major banks can be seen at locations A, B and C in this 1935 air photo

Fitzhardinge was sent to Wiluna to help open a branch of the Commonwealth Bank in August 1934. From its earliest years the town had primarily been served by the Union Bank, and it remained the best supported as Wiluna Mines banked there. However, with the town growing rapidly both the Commonwealth and the Bank of New South Wales saw fit to open branches around the same time.

All three were located on the west side of Wotton Street, with the Union being a large building opposite this site, the New South Wales a little further north and the Commonwealth a block further south. It too, was a big wood and iron building that housed three rows of rooms. The tellers occupied the front room, the manager's office was in the centre (with no windows!) and Roger Fitzhardinge lived in the back room.

Now all of the banks are gone from Wiluna, as are all of the buildings they once occupied. But at one point, back when the town was thriving, they were a major feature here along Wotton Street.



The Club Hotel!

Last man standing

*"Tom O'Shaughnessy keeps a pub,
He also owns a mine;
The travelling public eats his grub,
And drinks his beer and wine."*

Wiluna Chronicle, July 5th 1924

The original Club Hotel was built way back in 1898, to serve the first prospectors and miners in the district. It was bought by Tom O'Shaughnessy (Snr) in 1918 and remained in the family right through until 1970. When "old" Tom died in the 1930s the hotel was taken over by his sons, Barney and Tom junior.

The old hotel was demolished in 1933 and replaced with the L-shaped brick and iron building you see here today. As the only double-storey building left in town – and the only remaining hotel of the four that once operated here – the Club is a significant reminder of Wiluna's chequered history. It has been the scene of many a celebration, many a wild brawl – and many a kind act, too.

During the depression years hundreds of destitute men came to Wiluna in search of work. Old Tom would not see anybody go hungry, and gave dozens a good feed at night. At Christmas long tables were placed on the back verandah and men out of work were given a fine meal, waited on by the whole O'Shaughnessy family.

The sporting O'Shaughnessy's found other ways to gain a reputation too – Barney being long remembered for bowling Sir Donald Bradman in the nets before the 1932 test match against England!



The original pre-1933 Club Hotel



The Ambassador's

Hall and picture theatre

"The first Bachelor's Ball was held on 5th June 1931 in the new Ambassador's Hall in Wotton Street, and was a huge success. The assemblage was described as the largest ever to attend, and the Ball was the best ever. The hall was tastefully decorated with coloured streamers, the lighting was good, and the floor was in excellent condition."

The Wiluna Miner, June 1931



The Ambassadors Theatre and tea rooms, most likely 1940s. Courtesy Battye Library 109490PD

The Ambassador's Hall was built over the road on the west side of Wotton Street in the late 1920s, and was a focal point of much of the town's social life at that time. On February 6th 1930 over 200 residents gathered at the "new" hall to farewell Constable Fawcett at a "musical evening, followed by speeches of appreciation".

The outdoor picture theatre was also across the road and it seems that this may have formed part of the Ambassador's operations, and that movies may also have been shown in the hall itself. During the hectic 1930s two sessions occurred daily – one for the morning shift and one for the afternoon. This was such a popular attraction that there were three changes of film per week!

At this time 18-year old Hugh McCormick and Billy Trenfield ran the outdoor theatre. These enterprising lads rode their bikes into town from Red Hill seven nights a week to re-roll the reels and operate the carbon-arc projector. On Saturday afternoons there was a matinee for children, and this formed a de-facto child-care service as many mothers did the shopping while the movies were on.

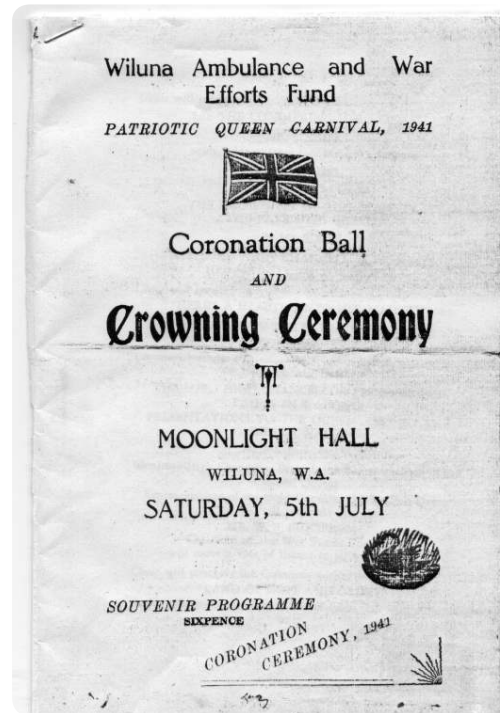


The Moonlight Hall.

A night on the town

"To say that the Infant Centre Welfare Ball, which opened the new hall built by Tom O'Shaughnessy, was an outstanding success would be putting it mildly... Dancing began at 8 pm with 400 dancers on the floor. By 10.30 pm 550 had paid for admission, and by midnight some 700 had crowded into the place. The "Name the Hall" competition had not been decided, as so many suitable names had been submitted..."

The Wiluna Miner,
May 1936



The Moonlight hosted many a grand ball

It took until August to sort through the 700 entries to the competition, and the winner was "The Moonlight Hall", submitted by Ellis Terrell of Scotia Street, who won the prize of one guinea. Built here behind the Club Hotel by the hotel's owner, the Moonlight became part of the folklore of Wiluna.

It had a brick frontage on Wotton Street, and featured a sample room, offices, a concert room – and the main dance floor, which measured the full 50 foot width of the building by 100 feet in length (15 metres by 30 metres). It cost the public-spirited Mr O'Shaughnessy 2,838 pounds – and it was available for community events free of charge!

On May 15th 1937 the popular "Miss Popular Barmaid" competition culminated in a ball which featured the first amplifiers to be used in Wiluna. Incidentally, "Miss Club" won! When the town went into decline after World War II the Moonlight was one of many buildings to gradually fall into disrepair, prior to its demolition (thought to have been in the 1980s).



The "old" school!

~~Between a rock and a hard place~~

"That's the worst I've seen as Governor-General, I have to say. Having said that, that's the building - what I do want to say is that the teachers and the kids and the atmosphere of the teaching environment were absolutely superb, and I commend them. The principal and the teaching staff and the people preparing meals and so on at the school... that was absolutely inspiring stuff."

Former Governor-General, Major General Michael Jeffery

When former a Wiluna resident, the Governor-General of Australia, made this comment early in 2006 the world was alerted to issues local residents had known about for years. What they refer to as the "old" school over the road had been built in the 1950s, and the location chosen was proven to be far from ideal.

The State Minister for Education in 2006 commented that *"the school is situated in close proximity to a pub, it is adjacent to a town sewage pond, and it is apparently on a road used by heavy haulage vehicles"*. Add to this a growing issue with the asbestos that had been widely used in its construction, and clearly the old school's days were numbered.

Despite all that was stacked against it, many who attended fondly remember the place. Locals obviously appreciated what the Governor-General referred to as the *"superb teaching environment"* and the *"inspiring"* staff, and are quick to talk about the good times they enjoyed there. A new school has since been built near the Shire Offices at the south end of town.



The "old" school in the 1970s. Courtesy "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



Curley O'Connor's

One of many boarding houses

"We used to get our meals at Curley O'Connor's boarding house. They were substantial meals, and the girls used to come around with a stack of bread in their arms, with their chins on top, and dish it out like a pack of cards."

Former resident Keith Quartermaine,
quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

In the booming 1930s Curley O'Connor ran the biggest boarding house in town, out near the mine a short distance east of here. Hundreds of single men lived there over the years, with their board being paid directly out of their wages by Wiluna Mines.

It was not just those who boarded there that partook of Curley's "substantial meals" – he, like Tom O'Shaughnessy at the Club Hotel, could not stand seeing a man go without food, and allowed many to put their meals on credit until they got a job. The mess hall had a large floor that Curley allowed to be used for social functions like children's fancy dress balls.

Over the years there were numerous other boarding houses around town. An annotated air photo taken in 1937 has six such establishments marked, including one across the street from here and two just a block further east from here. John and Elsie Hancock owned a large barn-like building on the main street, which she ran as a boarding house while he managed a local mine.



Inside Curly O'Connor's dining room

For all his goodwill, Curley is perhaps best known for the "lock out" which occurred over his dismissal of a young female employee – and which resulted in 200 men "stampeding through town"!



The bunker.

Wiluna's own bomb shelter

"There was a man called "Paddy the Pieman" who used to upset the younger workers by pushing a wax Vesta match through a hole in his nose. There'd be the blue head of the match on one side and the length of the match on the other. He'd carry on as if there was nothing unusual. He worked in the arsenic plant, and the arsenic had eaten a hole in his nose."

Un-named former resident, quoted in
"Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

What does Paddy the Pieman and his holey nose have to do with a bomb shelter, you ask? Well, as noted, Paddy worked in the arsenic plant – and during World War II Wiluna was the only place in Australia producing this toxic material, a vital component in munitions production. This led to the infamous Japanese propaganda broadcaster, Tokyo Rose, listing the town as "Japan's No. 1 target"!

Whether this was actually the case or not is unknown, but it appears to have prompted local residents to take precautions – hence the claustrophobic underground steel chamber hidden among the rubble across the road from here. It is not known exactly who built this structure, but it certainly looks like a homemade bomb shelter!

Arsenic was in fact a deadly by-product of the gold mining process, but it was a very good money-spinner for the mine. So important was it to the war effort that the men who mined it here were "manpowered" at the start of the War, meaning they could not enlist as it was considered essential that they remain in their jobs. This caused the unhappy workers to commence a "go slow" which ultimately led to the mine being closed down.



Drums of arsenic ready for shipment, 1940s



At long last.

A proper church for Wiluna!

"Throughout the early years Mission work was a case of "meeting sin with the gloves off", a real challenge to Christianity. Under a streetlight opposite the Mission a two-up school was in progress most nights. The resident minister could watch the game any night he chose. Even the local constable was a regular attendant – purely to watch the game of course!"

Former resident Rev. L. Broadbent,
quoted in "A History of Wiluna"

Before 1930 ministers stationed in Meekatharra made regular visits to Wiluna. Then, as the town began to grow, the Australian Inland Mission worked with the Methodist Inland Mission to establish a "proper church" in Wiluna. This block was purchased in 1934 and the church was probably built soon afterwards.

The concrete blocks have been laid in alternate rows, forming a decorative feature to what otherwise may have been a very plain building. The steeply pitched corrugated iron roof is typical of churches of that era. The 1930s also saw the arrival of an Anglican church (relocated from Day Dawn) and the construction of a Catholic church further down Scotia Street.

The last resident minister to be based here was the Rev. Don McCaskill, who flew a tiger moth out to surrounding properties to attend to his parishioners. In addition to his Bible he always took a set of baby scales and a dental kit, with which he performed fillings and extractions!

This is the only church remaining in Wiluna, and in recent years it has been home-base to the local Seventh Day Adventist congregation.



Rev. McCaskill and Sunday School
children, most likely 1950s.
Courtesy "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



The Commercial Hotel!

Bringing the best beer to town

"The object of the strike is securing a reduction in beer prices, but the hotel owners will not budge below their offered price. However, the men have rejected the offer and the strikers are holding out strongly at this point. The hotel-keepers are therefore feeling their position acutely."

Sydney Morning Herald, April 25th 1930

At the time of the Great Wiluna Beer Strike the Commercial Hotel was one of three in town – and was a small tumbledown place with only two bedrooms available to the public. It nearly lost its licence in 1931, but the next year was the subject of a major extension and refurbishment.

On September 19th 1932 the owners, Messer's Croft and Turpin, opened the new bar room with free beer for an hour in the evening. This salubrious space measured 60 feet by 40 feet (18 m by 12 m) and had 122 feet (37 metres) of counter space – which was claimed to be the largest in Western Australia at the time.

It was perhaps unfortunate that the new bar was not opened early, because in June that year the Commercial introduced Richmond Beer to Wiluna, an act that had been met with "scenes of sensational enthusiasm" right across Australia. The "absolute purity, wholesomeness and delicious flavour" were said to commend it to the "discerning public of the town".

It is not known when the hotel was demolished.



The Commercial Hotel, 1930s



The Capitol Hall.

Dance (and fight) central in the boom times

"There were 1000 men working on the mine and it was my job to pay them every fortnight. I enjoyed this, because as I pushed their pay under the grill on the window some would push a piece of paper asking me to go to the pictures or a dance with them. Obviously single girls were scarce in Wiluna, and I had a great time!"

Former resident Jessie Roberts, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

By the mid 1930s Wiluna had at least three halls, each of which hosted numerous dances and other social events. One of these, the Capitol Hall, was here on Lennon Street. Girls like Jessie Roberts would have spent many an hour on the dance floor here, twirling to the music of Nuts Henderson and the Wilunatics, The Bandits Dance Band, Joyce Jesson's Band or H. Chamberlain's Dance Band.

In the lead up to such events great attention was paid to the dance floor. Extra care was always taken to have the surface as shiny as possible. This was achieved by men pulling a "polishing machine" made of a wooden packing case covered by several layers of chaff bags and weighed down with sand bags! The last thing to be done was to lightly spread fine sawdust or crushed Weeties on the surface.

The Capitol Hall also hosted Wiluna's own "gymnasium" and boxing club. Established to keep teenage boys and young men off the streets and out of trouble, the club hosted many a grand fight night – and produced a number of quality boxers. As a bonus, the juvenile crime rate decreased as activity replaced boredom!



Nuts Harrison and his Wilunatics



The Lake Way Hotel!

A brash and bold late-comer

"Population is increasing steadily each month. The bars are congested from 3 pm until closing time on Saturdays, and the congestion is worse on pay days. My men frequently have to remove troublemakers from crowded bars. If a new licence is to be granted I favour the application of Mr Hayes, because it would be easier to control a crowd in the quieter part of town."

Police Sergeant Cooney at a Licensing Court hearing in 1935



The Lake Way Hotel, 1940s

Mr Hayes' application was successful, despite vocal opposition from the publicans from the three existing hotels, and construction of his new hotel, The Lake Way, commenced early in 1936. Situated away from the busy main street, it was considered both "imposing and commodious".

Upon its opening in July 1936 the *Wiluna Miner* bugled that "the residential accommodation rivals that of leading city hotels... There are 31 bedrooms; spacious lounges have been provided, each with access to the writing room which is elaborately furnished. The balconies facing Wall and Lennon Streets are exceptionally spacious, and the dining room will seat 70 to 80 guests..."

The hotel was of brick and tile construction, and it featured substantial refrigeration and a wireless system with controls in each room. Yet even this grand edifice could not withstand the decline of the town around it – for some years in the 1950s and 60s it housed workers for the Agricultural Research Station, before falling into disrepair and being demolished in the 1980s.



Pipes and Poles.

Power and water for the people

"A new electric light plant has been installed, and the townspeople were expressing their pleasure at being able to walk down the now brilliantly lighted streets after so long in the darkness."

Daily Telegraph, January 1931

The new lighting plant had in fact been installed out at the mine, and Wiluna was in fact one of the earliest small towns to gain electric lighting. When the mine ceased operating 24 hours a day (in the late 1940s) an auxiliary plant was established on this site to take up the load. This later grew into a full-scale diesel-driven power station.

Water was laid on around the same period – and again it was the needs of the growing mine that drove this development. Ten wells of approximately 12 metres depth were sunk beyond the mine. These produced close to a million gallons a day, three-quarters of which was required by the mine. The remainder was pumped to eight tanks situated on a small rise just east of town.

This provided a good "head" for reticulation around most of the local streets, and produced "grass lawns, vegetable gardens and flourishing fruit trees..." In the early years many mine workers built their houses along the pipeline. When they wanted water they simply punched a hole in the pipe, drew what they needed, and plugged it up again for future use!



Official opening of the Wiluna Town Water Supply Scheme, 1934



Bowls and golf.

Gentle sports for gentlemen (and ladies too!)

"One has to see the green to believe it, for where a few bits of stunted mulga and native weeds struggled for existence a few short months ago there is now a verdant sward pleasing to the eye, and a joy to all followers of the game made famous by Sir Francis Drake."

The Wiluna Miner, February 1937

The opening of the Wiluna Bowling Club's new green here on this corner was attended by "hundreds of friends and supporters". Mr W. Phillipson, in declaring the Club open, commented that he was proud to be present at the opening of what was truly "Wiluna's beauty spot" – and there's no doubt the lush green grass must have been a site for sore eyes in an otherwise dusty brown town.

As with other sporting facilities in town, it was the ready availability of water that made the bowling green a possibility. With the main pipeline coming right past the front door it is little wonder a transformation from stunted mulga to "verdant sward" was possible so quickly!

The other more genteel sport to become popular in Wiluna in the 1930s was golf. The course was established just west of town (immediately south of the Meekatharra Road), and was officially opened on Sunday July 14th, 1929. Photos and newspaper cuttings indicate it was popular with the town's womenfolk, and that the Golf Club was an indefatigable fundraiser, with the local hospital being the primary beneficiary.



The ladies golf "Associates", 1950s



Prospector's friend.

The former State Battery

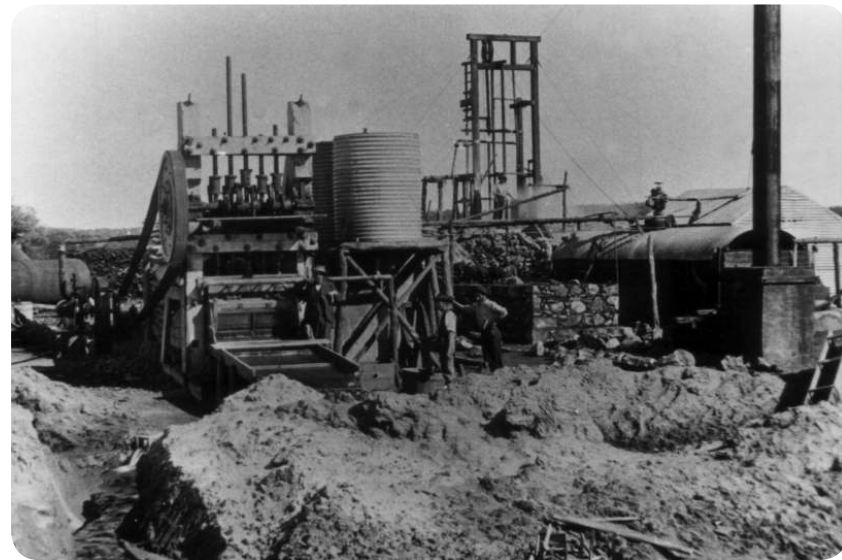
"Living so close to the battery we became used to the banga-banga, banga-banga, banga-banga of the heavy stampers as they crushed the ore. When the battery stopped at noon on Saturday until midnight on Sunday we found it difficult to sleep without the pounding of the stampers."

Ray Hepworth, battery manager's son, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Between 1927 and 1935 Alan Hepworth was manager of the State Battery that once stood just beyond the eastern town boundary. During this period the battery operated on three shifts for 24 hours a day through to noon Saturday. Standing here in those days you'd have been able to see it – and hear it – very clearly!

Opened on February 2nd 1904, the State Battery was a godsend for the many small prospectors working claims around town, as it processed their ore for a very reasonable per-ton rate. From 1915 to 1930 it also had a ball mill with associated cyanide vats, enabling more efficient processing of greater quantities of ore.

During the Hepworth's time the battery here worked until all stockpiled ore was processed, and then it closed temporarily. The Hepworth family and one shift of workers then moved to Sandstone to process the accumulated ore there. Once that task was complete they shifted again to Youanmi, usually for about six weeks, before returning to Wiluna to the start work on the ore that had been brought in during their absence.



An early Wiluna battery (possibly the State Battery)



Dead and alive.

The old morgue and the Matron's house

"While I voted for the motion of "No Confidence in the Doctor and the Matron", I feel the motion was too severe. Several nurses have left the hospital in the past few months, and I think its high time that a full enquiry be held... to arrive at the cause of the trouble that is continually happening at the institution."

S. Martin, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

If you look across the street you'll see two old buildings, the one in the foreground being very small (the old morgue) and the one hidden among the trees being much larger (the Matron's house). Unfortunately the resident of the house, the Matron of the time, was the final victim of the local politics being hotly played out back in the 1930s.

While we may never know the truth of whatever dramas were troubling the hospital staff, we do know some basic facts about both the house and the morgue. It is likely that the house, a simple timber framed structure, was built about the same time as the "new" hospital, in the early 1930s. It had verandas all round, though some have since been enclosed, and a Dutch gable roof.

The morgue started life as the old Clinic but when the then-new hospital was constructed in 1934 it was moved to this location and renovated for use as the town's morgue. Both the walls and the roof are corrugated iron, while ventilation (critical for a morgue!) was provided by openings immediately below the roofline.



The old morgue



The former hospital!

Still serving the town

"By 1936 the hospital had run up a substantial overdraft... When investigated it was found that it was overstaffed, all nurses were paid as Sisters regardless of their training, and brandy seemed a great fix-all, with Doctors ordering it for so many patients that there was four times the quantity used in Wiluna than at any other similar sized hospital!"

"Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Wiluna's original hospital was built on this site in the early 1900s. It was known as the Lake Way Hospital, and was a timber-framed structure with walls that were part corrugated iron and part whitewashed hessian. By the 1930s the local population had well outgrown this old structure and a major rebuild was commenced.

The new hospital consisted of four wings forming a rectangle around a central courtyard, and joined by their wide verandas. It was a hugely expensive project for the time, with the State Government funding less than half the total cost. The Wiluna Gold Mine contributed substantially, with the remainder coming by way of subscriptions and fundraising.



The hospital buildings, before renovation by the Shire

At its peak in 1937 it had a staff of 30, and had an average occupancy rate of 31 beds per night. At that time there were 5 doctors in town, but by 1948 the town's population had plunged and there were none. The hospital closed in 1966, though it operated as a nursing post until 1970. It was restored by the Shire of Wiluna in 1981, and continues to serve the town as the Council's offices and the community's civic centre.



Government of Western Australia
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ROYALTIES
FOR REGIONS

Shire of
Wiluna



Life-savers.

The town's swimming pools

"One would think everyone would be highly appreciative of Mr O'Shaughnessy providing a swimming pool, but there are a few who aren't, for recent visitors took their pet dogs out for a dip. Such action denotes either extreme thoughtlessness, or a mental deficiency."

Wiluna Miner, January 1933



One of Wiluna's early pools (most likely the town pool)

A swimming pool in a place like Wiluna would seem to be a real life-saver – and it appears that in the boom years of the 1930s the town may actually have had three! The first of these was most likely the one constructed out at the mine, which used surplus water from the de-watering of the mine. Tom O'Shaughnessy's pool is something of a mystery, but the details of the first community pool are much better known.

The Town Swimming Club (formed in 1931) took the lead role, and negotiated Road Board support for a pool to measure 33.3 yards by 12 yards with a depth ranging from 4 feet to 8 feet. A children's pool of 12 yards by 8 yards and just 2 feet deep was also proposed – and both were built here on the south-eastern corner of the recreation grounds.

Locals could either take out an annual membership or pay per swim. Dressing rooms, a kiosk and lawns completed a "monument to the vision, energy and enterprise of the small band of enthusiasts". Swimming carnivals proved very popular, with competitors coming from as far away as Perth.



The new school!

A place to be proud of

"At Wiluna Remote Community School we endeavour to work in partnership with our community to ensure all students can attend school in a safe and inclusive learning environment, and reach their academic and social potential."

School Vision Statement

This bright modern and funky-looking school is a direct result of the furore that erupted in 2006 after the Governor-General's visit to the "old" school near the hotel. Driven by a real sense of urgency an early decision was taken to use transportable buildings – but the way these have been integrated into this site is both unique and highly creative.

The 13 modules were arranged into zones to serve particular functions (administration, pre-primary, library etc), and these zones were linked by a landscaped inner quadrangle. The integration of elevated timber decks and the eye-catching parasol roofs created a strong sense of permanency around the whole complex. These raised roof structures also help reduce the impact of extreme summer heat.

Early involvement of the local community led to the bright art panels that protect the school from prevailing winds – and create such a strong street impact. The theme for these panels is the Canning Stock Route, and colours and patterns used have formed the basis of recent interpretive work around the town.

The new school was handed over to the community in November 2007.



The Governor-General with children at the "old" Wiluna school in 2006



Government of Western Australia
Department of Regional Development and Lands



ROYALTIES
FOR REGIONS

Shire of
Wiluna



The Archbishop.

The convent school's celebrated student

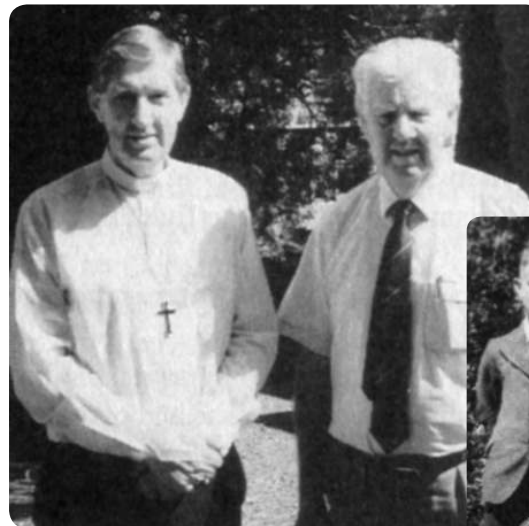
"At Wiluna I attended the Convent school, and some of the sisters there were Sisters Joseph, Anthony and Leila, and Mother Thomas. At Kalgoorlie I progressed to Christian Brothers College, and then went to St Charles' Seminary in Guildford. After that I was sent to Propaganda Fides College in Rome... and was ordained a priest."

Former resident Barry Hickey,
Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth

The Hickey family moved to Wiluna in the 1940s, and it was then that the young Barry attended the local Convent that stood here at the south end of town. The Presentation Sisters had opened the school in February 1931, having had the building relocated from Sandstone where the population had plunged.

When they opened the school they only had 11 pupils, because no one knew they were coming to town! Each afternoon two of the three sisters caught the bus into town and made house-to-house visits, with the result that by the end of February all of the Catholic children in town were at the Convent (50 to 60 children).

It is thought the school building was timber framed with a corrugated iron roof. Alongside it stood a large brick Church, and a cyclone-netting fence about a metre high enclosed both buildings. The Convent closed in 1948 when the mine closed, and the Church blew down in a violent storm in November 1963.



Barry & Brian Hickey



The Hickey family in Wiluna,
with Barry front right.
Courtesy "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



Red Hill and Lakeside:

Life in the outer suburbs

"We returned to Wiluna in 1935 and found our home exactly as we'd left it – even the treadle sewing machine was still there. Home was whitewashed hessian walls, tin roof and chimney, wood stove, and an earthen floor. Our bath was a forty four gallon drum cut length ways. Most of the homes at Lakeside were similar."

Former resident Nell Wright,
quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

In March 1930 there was considerable upheaval in Wiluna when the Government proclaimed a substantial extension to the town boundaries. It was feared that the new residential areas – Lakeside, to the east of town, and Red Hill to the south, would result in a "twin town" scenario similar to Kalgoorlie-Boulder or Leonora-Gwalia.

Locals need not have been alarmed, as the rapidly growing population ensured that these new suburbs were soon fully integrated with the original town site. Indeed, by 1933 it was said that all of Red Hill was taken up, with only five blocks remaining in Lakeside. Local bus and taxi services were fully stretched, ferrying people too and from the town or the mine.

Lakeside was reputed to house many migrants of Southern European origin, while Red Hill was considered the married men's suburb. A walk through the bush to the south of town shows clear evidence of row after row of houses. In many cases the layout of the house – and indeed the whole yard – is still apparent, making this a fascinating insight into Wiluna's hey-day.



A typical Red Hill house



At long last!

The railway comes to Wiluna

"This Act may be cited as the Meekatharra Wiluna Railway Act 1927. It shall be lawful to construct and maintain a railway and all necessary roads and usual works and conveniences in connection there-with along the line described in this Act."

Statutes of Western Australia, Act 32, 1927

So, at long last Wiluna was to get its railway line! Both Meekatharra (to the west) and Leonora (to the south) had a rail connection to Perth by the early 1900s, but Wiluna had to wait almost 30 years more. And it had to endure a heated debate about which of those towns should be the connection point if a line was to be built.

In the end it was the blunt instrument called "cost" that won the day for Meekatharra. Despite the Leonora option passing through more mining centres on the way and opening up more good pastoral country, Meekatharra was closer and therefore cheaper – and that was the end of the argument.

Construction began on March 1st 1929 and the line was completed early in November 1932. The final length of the line was 110 miles (175 km) including a spur out to the mine, which was the main beneficiary of this new service. General freight costs immediately dropped by more than half, and finally the residents of Wiluna could travel to and from Perth in relative comfort.



Level crossing smash, outskirts of Wiluna, 1930s

Rail services ceased in August 1957, and the line was removed in 1964.



Down the line.

Travelling the train to Perth

"Farewelling our train on Sundays was a big social event – it was between the two pub sessions. The journey was 700 miles (over 1000 km) long, and the train arrived in Perth on Tuesday morning. What a pleasant smell was the black smoke billowing from the engine!"

Former resident Harry Woosnam, quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"



Local children waiting to board the train (date unknown)

By 1938 there were two passenger timetables in operation. One offered three trains a week to Perth via Mullewa, with the quickest being the Sunday night departure mentioned by Harry Woosnam. The other was for three services a week to Geraldton, though this was mainly a freight service to the port there.

Travelling through the night (often two nights) meant either packing food or buying whatever was available along the way. Former bank manager Roger Fitzhardinge recalls seeing men in the railway refreshment rooms along the way in the early hours of the morning "drinking a large glass of cold beer and eating piping hot pies". Apparently passengers ate whatever they could get – or they went hungry!

Stan Gratte, a long-time railway employee, recalls there being showers on the "very comfortable" passenger service to Wiluna. Given the roasting heat of summer travel an icebox had been installed to keep the water cool. On stepping out of a shower on one trip Stan noticed another man "hanging around", and when he investigated he found the icebox packed with beer!



Sport:

The glue that binds a community together

"Wiluna does not slumber in the sunshine, it is not a "sleepy hollow". Like all mining communities it works hard – and plays harder, playing not for the sake of killing time..."

Wiluna Miner, July 11th 1941

Indeed, Wiluna played hard – it played often and it played almost anything. It has been said that at its peak there were more sporting clubs in Wiluna than in any other town in Western Australia. The list included cricket, football, cycling, golf, boxing, athletics, racing, clay pigeon, soccer, shooting, bowling, swimming, motor cycle, hockey, badminton, basketball and more. Sport was at the very heart of the community.

The town was blessed with good rich red soils – and with an ample supply of water. During the hectic 1930s the mine was very profitable and it funded extensive sporting facilities for its workers (and the rest of the town, too). Four grassed recreation grounds were established, as were several bituminised hard courts for tennis and basketball; the racecourse was active, as were the golf and bowls clubs and the swimming pool.

Wiluna Cup day was a major event in the social calendar. Olive Willoughby, wife of the then-postmaster, has written of the "great excitement" as the first race came around. *"The townspeople were dressed in their finery; the Aboriginal women wore colourful dresses, and the men had fancy bandanas, ten gallon hats, mail-order silk shirts, elastic-sided boots and moleskins to match their station bosses."*



The 1935 Towns cricket team



You champion!

Great games on the town oval

"In the final seconds of the game the siren was expected any time, with Wiluna hanging on grimly, one point ahead! Twice the ball rolled close to the Geraldton goals but was forced out of bounds. Wiluna's Rettalack cleared the ball out well with only seconds to go, and victory seemed assured.

But the Geraldton player Dann marked, sending their screaming home crowd into a frenzy. Although a considerable distance out he sent a beautifully executed punt kick through for a point to tie the scores as the siren sounded..."

Wiluna Miner, August 1936

Football was the dominant winter sport in Wiluna, with clubs such as United, Rovers, Wanderers, Towns and Mines all featuring over the years. Such was the standard of the local competition that combined Wiluna outfits went head-to-head with both Geraldton and Murchison Region teams, in what were often hard-fought battles as described by the Miner.

In summer the men switched to cricket on the grassy town oval, turning out for teams representing Towns, Country, Colts, Red Hill, Cosmopolitan and Mines. In the later 1930s, as the workforce at the mine grew and grew, its club split into separate Surface, Underground and Moonlight teams, though it was Towns and Cosmopolitan that featured in the classic tied Grand Final of 1939...

Defending a two run lead, fearsome fast bowler Barney O'Shaughnessy took three wickets for one run in four balls to finish the game. Imagine the pressure on the umpire who gave the final "leg before wicket" decision!



The Underground football team, 1932



A tale of two schools.

The original primary, and the School of Mines

"We were taken to school in Wiluna, which was between the power station and the recreation ground. Jack Scott drove us in an old T-model Ford truck, and would pick us up again after school. I remember there were often bags of pollard or bran and they sometimes had a hole in them – we would eat whatever we could on the way home!"

Former resident Maitland Quartermaine,
quoted in "Wiluna: Edge of the Desert"

Wiluna's first primary school was built approximately where the swimming pool is now located, way back in 1901. This followed an extended period of "cat and mouse" between frustrated local residents and an Education Department that was seeking to preserve its funds. The original enrolment of around 24 started classes in what was a tiny building.

A larger building was constructed here in the 1920s, but it too was soon outgrown. A second primary school was then built halfway to the mine, with this one teaching the lower grades and the "mine school" teaching the upper. Another new building was erected here in 1939, as the town reached its peak population.

At the same time (in the late 1930s) it became apparent that the hundreds of new workers flocking to the mine needed training, too. In 1937 the School of Mines began offering night classes here, with 105 men enrolled in a total of 172 classes. Numbers declined during the War, and the final adult classes finished late in 1946. One building was transported to Kalgoorlie in 1950 and the other was destroyed by fire in 1951.



The boys class, Wiluna Primary School, 1933