

William FINLAY (1840-1886)

Introduction:

William Finlay was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1840, the son of William Finlay (1807-1890) and Marjory Allcock, William Finlay Snr was a former Sergeant in the 97th Regiment (Earl of Ulster's) with service in the East Indies and the Mediterranean and having *been* pensioned from the Army subsequently became an Enrolled Pensioner Guard. At the age of ten young William with two other siblings accompanied his parents on the *Scindian*, the first ship to convey convicts to the Swan River colony. The *Scindian* arrived at Fremantle on 1st June 1850 after setting sail from Portsmouth on 4th March 1850. The start of a new life in the colony did not start out with inspiration as the ships company and passengers were required to stay on board at anchor until an old warehouse was converted in Fremantle for accommodation. It was a twist of fate that the first landmark young William probably came into contact with was Arthur's Head at Fremantle which was to be the location eight years later for his enlistment in the Western Australian Police Force. William Finlay Snr was subsequently allocated a grant of land of one half acre (Lot 20) at Freshwater Bay and nine and one half acres (Lot 18 later retitled Location 238) at Butler's Swamp (Claremont). Young William probably received elementary education from Mrs. Herbert, wife of Pensioner Guard Henry Herbert at Freshwater Bay and spent his childhood assisting on the family land tenements.

In 1858, William Finlay joined the Western Australian Police Force at Arthur's Head, Fremantle with his records showing he was 6'1" in height, single and his former calling was labourer. He was recommended by Lieutenant Colonel John Bruce, Commandant of the Colonial Defence Force.

William married Sarah Coppin in Busselton on 6th February 1861. Sarah's

parents James and Charlotte had earlier arrived in the Colony on the *Diadem* in 1842 to the failed Marshall Waller Clifton's Western Australian Company's Australind experiment. They were farming in Busselton during the 1850's and 1860's. Policing became a family affair as Sarah's brothers Henry, Walter and Christopher also served in the Western Australian Police Force. Christopher was the Lance Corporal on the beach at Rockingham when the Fenians escaped. William and Sarah subsequently had eight children.



William's Promotions:

Constable	26 th November 1858
Corporal	1 st January 1861
Sergeant	30 th March 1861
Sub-Inspector	1 st July 1865
Resigned	27 th August 1878

It is worth noting that William Finlay was in his 25th year when he received his Commission as Sub-Inspector. He was one of the youngest commissioned officers in Western Australian policing history - and a very able one. Finlay had exceptional leadership qualities and was respected by all who served under him. At the time of his commissioning with seven years good conduct pay; his salary and allowances were 155 pounds per annum.

It is to be noted that his resignation

was actually a retrenchment - the position of Sub-Inspector had been abolished by order of the Colonial Government. Through no fault of their own, five capable and experienced Sub Inspectors had to find other employment during the course of 1878.

Transfers:

Perth/Fremantle area: 26 November 1858
Bunbury: by November 1860
Vasse (Busselton) as Officer in Charge
1 January 1861
Champion Bay (Geraldton) as Officer in
Charge: 16 April 1861

(Note-Finlay made his name by sorting out disciplinary problems and suppressing sly grog selling among settlers).

Albany as Officer in Charge: 15 April 1862

(Notes: Finlay controlled the Whalers and Sealers that operated in the area. Finlay as a Police Sergeant and Chairman of the Albany Co-operative was subject to petitions from Albany merchants alleging interference to trade. The allegations were dismissed by Sir Alexander Cockburn Campbell as an attempt to damage the Co-operative, and explained that the signatories of the petition were the storekeepers, their relations and dependents, and the town drunks and others who disliked the police.¹ Finlay distinguished himself by leading a party to capture the bushranger William Graham at Fitzgerald River in May 1864)

Northam Division as Officer in Charge of District: 1 July 1865.

(Probably based at York - the district eventually contained at least eight police stations)

York Division as Officer in charge of District: 1 April 1872.

(A change of district name, with more responsibility)

Albany Division as Officer in Charge of District: by July 1873. (The district

extended to the 131 Mile Police Station at Arthur River and Etipup, east of Kojonup. Finlay was responsible to oversee the safe passage of the mail stagecoach from the Albany district).

Later career:

When Finlay left the Police Force in 1878 he was still Officer in Charge of the Albany Division. After his resignation, he obtained the minor Government posts of Clerk of Customs and Tide and Landing Waiter. He eventually became a leading citizen of the town and helped establish a militia unit, the Albany Rifle Volunteers. He was a Lieutenant in the Company before his resignation and he became Captain and Officer in Charge in March 1879. The Unit disbanded in March 1885.

Finlay served at various times as Chairman of the local Board of Education, Secretary of the Boat Licensing Board and a member of the Mechanics Institute. He was also active in the Masonic Lodge and immediate Past master at the time of his death.

After being a Member of the Municipal Council for two years, Finlay was elected Mayor of Albany in 1885. Finlay's enthusiasm within the Town Council gradually saw the increase of street making and town improvements. In 1884 the first street lights were erected from the jetty along the Terrace and up York Street. He was instrumental in calling for tenders for the building of the Albany Town Hall but never saw it built. He died in office on 16th June 1886, still only in his 46th year. Finlay's sudden death caused great shock and sorrow in the town and cast a gloom over it. The esteem in which he was held was illustrated by his funeral, which brought Albany to a standstill and was the largest seen in Albany to that time.² This former police officer was an outstanding member of Western Australia colonial society and one of the founding fathers of Albany. Finlay

¹ Albany, A Panorama of the Sound

² Op. cit.

had spent a lot of time and money on charitable work and left a large family who may have suffered financially because of his premature death.

William Finlay is buried in an unmarked grave in the Albany Pioneers Cemetery with his wife Sarah who had died in 1885. Various descendants in the male line still live in the district. Finlay is recognised by the naming of Finlay Street in Albany and a photo hangs in the Albany Council Offices recognising him as the first Mayor of Albany.

Acknowledgments: We thank Mr Les Green and Peter Conole for sharing with us the interesting and diverse career of William Finlay. We hope this will be the first of a series of articles to be submitted on the close relationship between the Enrolled Pensioner Guards and the Western Australian Police Force. Ed.

Ron Sutton.