

## THE MOUNT ELIZA DEPOT.

Throughout our research into the Enrolled Pensioner Force there are references made to the Convict Hiring Stations or ‘Depots’ throughout the Colony. At the end of 1853, there were 1045 convicts in the Fremantle Establishment, and the branches at North Fremantle, Freshwater Bay, Clarence, Guildford, Greenmount and Toodyay Road, and apparently about 300 at Hiring Stations (depots) further afield, at Toodyay, York, Bunbury, King George’s Sound, **Mt. Eliza**, Port Gregory, and York Greenmount. At each of the depots, except Port Gregory, north of Geraldton, a chaplain for convicts was also stationed. Where the convicts went, there also were members of the Enrolled Pensioner Force. The Mount Eliza Depot is frequently mentioned in records.

### **“Springing from History”, by Mr. William de Burgh, a local historian and author of “The Breakaways”**

Under Mt. Eliza, at the north-east edge of the Swan Brewery is a spring of fresh water. This spring and the flat area of ground was used by aborigines in the early days as a camping and fishing spot. It is thought they had a path up the cleft to hunting grounds in what is now known as Kings Park.

The earliest use the colonists made of the important site where the Swan Brewery buildings still stand, was to build a small shipyard. After this venture was abandoned, the Government started an institution in 1833 for the welfare and instruction of the native people. But few availed themselves of the service, and the school was moved. In 1838 the buildings comprising the former native institution were licenced for the operation of a flour mill. In July 1839 the Perth Gazette reported that the steam mill commenced working. The Government was satisfied with its performance and the partners were given freehold title to the block designated ‘Perth Suburban Lot 6’ in July 1840. Though mechanically successful, the mill ran into financial troubles.

The premises at Mount Eliza, with imposing two storey building, tall chimney, miller’s house, outbuildings and jetty, were then occupied by John Stringer and his family. He was a director of the Western Australian Bank. The Stringer family left the colony in 1846, and the ‘steam mills (so called) was sold to Henry and Robert de Burgh (sheep graziers). It was to remain in the de Burgh family for the next 33 years.

**The First site of the Mt. Eliza Depot** was in fact the old steam mill. It was used from June 1850 until the end of 1851 as a temporary ticket –of-leave hiring depot. It was during this time that the Mount Eliza Depot was built at the site of the Kennedy Fountain, to the east of the mill. When I spoke to Mr. DeBurgh, he said that Robert de Burgh and family lived next door to the Mount Eliza Depot for about 5 years before moving to Caversham in January 1856.

### **The early Days of Mt. Eliza...**

#### **Chapter One of ‘The History of Sunset Hospital’ by Ann Whyntie.**

According to these records, the building was erected in 1853 by a total of 223 male convicts. (Comptroller General’s Correspondence 25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1853). Progress was slow as twenty eight of the men could not be spared from North Fremantle where they were building Pensioners’ cottages, warders’ quarters and the hospital.

By 1863 the work station at Mount Eliza became the hiring depot for Perth where unemployed ticket-of-leavers were forwarded to wait for work.

1868 saw the end of Transportation and the ready source of labour it provided.

Early in 1869 the Imperial Government handed over to the Colonial Government all buildings connected with Convict Establishments including the Mount Eliza Depot. It was vacated by the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment and fitted out as an asylum for old and incapable male paupers. There were 83 paupers needing indoor relief at that time.

By 1872, the buildings had come to be known as the Invalid Depot, the original buildings housing the paupers for 10 years. An extension was completed in May 1880.

All able bodied Paupers were employed from 8 am to noon, and from 1 to 6 p.m. with domestic and outside gardening duties, and assisting the sick.

There are copious records in the State Records Office records on the ground floor at Alexander about the conditions in the Depot, the duties expected of the 'inmates', the formalities of being 'admitted into the depot', the food, the privations, the 'selective' admissions for 'indoor and outdoor relief', the surrendering of pensions for upkeep, the 'labelling' of poor souls, the harsh assessments of needs.

I have attempted to summarise these records in the CSO with reference to the Enrolled Pensioners and their families, to assist members with their research. From 1862 to 1883 they have been summarized and the records are still being collated for our records in WAGS. An example of the items summarized:-

**CSR Volume 505 PAUPERS Mar. – Dec 1862**

**Folio 122 Application for poor relief by James Mahony and wife Ellen Mahony.**

You can see from the information, what the name is, and the reference is for you to look for if you are researching James Mahony. I still have to do the indexes.

Sunset Hospital, previously known as the Old Mens' Home, was built on a rise overlooking the Swan River at Freshwater Bay in Dalkeith, W.A. Work commenced on the building in 1904 and the first men were admitted in March 1906 and it was proclaimed a Poorhouse. In late 1939 the name was changed from the 'Old Men's Home to 'Sunset.

Old women were first housed in an "Old Women's Home" in Murray Street Perth, and later in the 'Asylum" in Fremantle. Although they lived under the same type of regulations as the men it seemed to be a greater crime to be poor if you were female.

**Sunset Hospital, Its History and Function. By Ann T. Whyntie can be found in "Early Days", The Journal of the Western Australian Historical Society) Volume 8, Part5.**