

OUR ROOTS #8

by Gary Bartholomeusz



Weeks after his disappearance, and not knowing how or why, Albany's football fraternity found it very difficult to come to terms with the fate of champion player **Harry 'Cab' Wheeler**. The 31-year-old was in his eleventh consecutive season with the North Albany Football Club and was expected to play against West Albany the day after he vanished, on Friday May 24, 1929.

'Cab' and his mother lived in the hub of town, near Perth Road (now called Albany Highway) and **Mary Wheeler** had sensed that something was bothering him the last time they spoke - the night he went missing. **William Nott** had a conversation with him outside his York Street home around 10.30pm that same night and is believed to be the last person to see 'Cab' before he vanished.

William told police that Wheeler had confided in him and said he had written a letter to a lady he was keen on but found out she had burned the letter. Until then, no one, not even any of his North Albany teammates, knew 'Cab' was interested in a lady. William informed the police that Wheeler had been drinking alcohol and was "looking ill."

On Monday June 17 that year, local police were notified on the discovery of a clothed decomposing body at Pullen's Creek in Yakamia, five miles from Albany's town centre. Dairy worker **John Burn** was rabbit shooting in the area when, around 3pm, was attracted to the water's edge by his dog's constant barking at a concentrated spot. The mystery of missing 'Cab' Wheeler had been solved when Burn found him deceased beside the creek. Doctor **Alfred Vivian** did the autopsy and reported to the Albany Police Court on Friday June 28 that the death was by suicide. Constable **G Flanders** gave evidence informing the Court that "Wheeler's hat and coat had been found on the bank of the creek with a note pinned to his hat."

His funeral service took place at St. John's Anglican Church, Lower York Street, on Wednesday June 19 and the majority of mourners in attendance were from Albany Football Association's three clubs - East, North and West Albany. The pallbearers were **Romero Miller** (AFA president), **Charles Milne** (AFA secretary), **Fred Jacka** (North Albany Football Club president), **C Graham** (NAFC secretary), **Basil Harris** (NAFC captain) and **John Nott** (NAFC vice captain). East Albany footballer Reverend **William 'Bill' Halliday** conducted the service.

'Cab' is the only player to represent the Albany Football Association at its first seven Great Southern Football Council carnivals and played in five grand finals which included its inaugural 1922 premiership and another in 1925. He was regularly among the best AFA players at carnival level but, in 1925, was wrongly-recorded as the Council's fairest and best player when that honour belongs to Association teammate **Tommy 'Napper' Angove**. 'Cab' won the 'Most Promising Player' award.

'Cab' Wheeler's league debut for North Albany Football Club came in 1919 and it took his untimely demise to end his career in 1929. In his eleven seasons with the red and whites, he was a member of the Club's 1925 premiership, was in seven runner-up teams and three times third. He was NAFC's captain in 1927 and twice a club vice captain.

Prior to the East Albany versus North Albany league match on Saturday June 22, 1929, North Albany's league and reserve players, all wearing black armbands, marched single-file to the centre of Centennial Oval as a mark of respect for their lost teammate. Once at attention, the Association's green and gold inaugural premiership flag from the 1922 Great Southern carnival victory was lowered to halfmast on the flag pole. No doubt, everyone at the ground on that day would have known how much that flag meant to 'Cab' and what his contribution had been to Association and Albany football overall.

But even his closest friends were unaware of an emotion to which he kept close to his heart but provided the reason why he terminated his life! #

*When initials are used and you know the christian name, please notify me on 0428 514 605 or gjbartholomeusz@westnet.com.au

Albany Football Association 1897 - 1941

Recess 1914 - 1918 and 1942 - 1944 due to War



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Southern Districts Football League 1945 - 1990

Great Southern Football League 1991 - current