

## OUR ROOTS #10



by Gary Bartholomeusz



The Parade Street Recreation Reserve was the original headquarters of Albany football, lasting three and half decades, encompassing the turn of the 20th century. Nowadays, its significance seems lost through time! Decorated local historian **Robert Stephens** recorded that Parade Street is so titled because it was the thoroughfare used to parade troops to the town centre and became the central line to which surrounding streets were aligned. Sir **Harry Ord**, the Governor of Western Australia in 1878, granted the Reserve to the local municipal and its people as “a place of public recreation only.”

Kalgan River settler **Nathaniel McKail** wrote that he was one of the workers with a horse and cart who removed sand from the south bank of Vancouver Street to reclaim a creek which ran from Mount Melville to Princess Royal Harbour during construction of the area. “Once a proper surface was accomplished as the village green, and before a cricket pitch was laid, it became known as the Parade Street Recreation Reserve” he informed.

The Reserve was used regularly for family picnics, popular pastimes and sporting events but, after continuous use, the surface struggled to cope. It remained Albany’s prime sport and recreation area until the mid-1920s when the Albany Municipal Council conducted a public debate and ratepayers’ referendum on developing the Ulster Road Recreation Reserve - which was officially renamed Centennial Oval on Boxing Day 1926 to commemorate 100 years of Albany.

Momentum grew and regular busy bees were organised to bring its surface up to standard. A register with the names of all the volunteers was kept during construction of the site with the intention to allow these people free admission into the venue in future years. The main workers were **Albert Bruce, Nick Carter, Fred Jacka, Jim Lang, Jack Manea, Arthur Martin, Ralph Mason, Percy Mills, Robert Augustus ‘Gus’ Nesbitt, Tom Nesbitt, Dan O’Grady, A. Richardson, Steve Roots, William James ‘Boss’ Sounness** and Albany Member of Legislative Assembly **Arthur Wansbrough**.

One of the lesser-known helpers was future Shire of Plantagenet president **Bill Frost**, after whom Frost Park in Mount Barker is named. He was a student at the Albany High School at the time. While the busy bees were in full swing, a team of ladies, led by **Alice Clark** and **Mrs ? Martin**, provided food and drinks for the workers. Surveyor **George Medcalf** planned the layout of the Ulster Road complex, including the horse racing track and perimeter fence which surrounded the grassed playing area. Local builder **Harry Wiley** erected the original grandstand. A shelter shed, scoreboard and siren, which did not exist at the Parade Street Recreation Reserve, were also installed.

Following years of anticipation, the Ulster Road venue became available for football matches. Teams were limited to 15 players at the Parade Street ground because of its small playing surface but, with the opening of the 1927 Albany Football Association season, came the introduction of 18 players per side at Centennial Oval. Around 400 spectators watched the official opening match at the town’s new football headquarters when East Albany won over West Albany. The AFA sought to play games on Sundays around this time but a Council by-law existed that sport was disallowed there after 10am on Sundays.

And, just when town folk thought the old Parade Street ground would not be used again for football, the Association reverted back to it for the entire 1937 season as Centennial Oval too experienced excessive wear and tear. Most local football fans claimed Centennial Oval failed to have the same atmosphere as the town’s original headquarters and did not mind returning to it. The Parade Street Recreation Reserve was officially renamed Foundation Park at a Albany Municipal Council meeting on February 28, 1946.

Robert Stephens wrote in the ‘Albany Advertiser’ newspaper on November 24, 1953, “that the Parade Street Recreation Reserve has a record of events so legend that this article would be too small to contain all the famous victories upon it. If there exists within Western Australia any special plot of ground which should be sacred to the memory of Australians, it must be this Reserve,” he continued. “Victories of willow, leather, spiked shoe and wheel. Footprints of men great in achievement and unsurpassed in courage.” An emotional connection similar as Robert’s is why I sit alone at Foundation Park on various occasions and savour its many special parts of history. Its significance to Albany is not lost on me! #

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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