

Talk for Heritage Seminar Kalgoorlie 28th April 2016

By Moya Sharp from the Western Australian Virtual Miners Memorial

Theme Industrial Heritage

My name is Moya Sharp and I am the founder of the Western Australian Virtual Miners Memorial. So, what is the WAVMM? There are a few memorials throughout Australia that commemorate a particular mine or a mine accident. However there is nothing nationally, which recognises and honours the men and women who have lost their lives in a workplace accident in all sorts of mining through the whole state.

Some fifteen years ago, when I was involved in the local family history society, I found that a great deal of enquiries were coming from all over the world about family members who may have been killed in the WA mines. At this time the only publically available record was the 'Miners Book of Remembrance' which was held in 'hard copy' at the WA Museum of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. The handmade book was open to a single day displayed in a cabinet showing the name of anyone killed on that date. It was necessary to make a request to view another date. This of course was only available to visitors in person. Although this is an excellent record and meticulously researched it only covered the area called 'The Golden Mile'.

So a fellow researcher and I decided to rectify this by creating an online database so that the information would be available to everyone, everywhere. We set about collecting everything and anything on mining accidents on the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia. Some of the many sources were:- The Miners Book of Remembrance (previously mentioned), Newspapers (original and microfilmed pre TROVE days). Dept of Mines and Petroleum Annual Reports and maps. Death certificates and inquest results, Police gazettes and information supplied by relatives and friends.

Now fast forward to 2008, when I was approached by the Eastern Goldfields Miners Memorial committee who had been raising funds for a physical memorial for the miners of the Eastern Goldfields for the past 20yrs. They asked me if I was able to provide them with a comprehensive list of the names of every miner who had been killed in a mine accident from 1892 to the present. Each name had to be researched and I was to provide two primary sources for each name and make sure that it complied with a set of criteria set by the committee and occurred in a designated area. The name of each person was to be engraved in gold leaf on the marble memorial giving, first name, initial and surname and listed in chronological order by year. This I proceed to do but with one hitch. My idea of the 'Designated Area' was considerably larger than the committee wished and included the Goldfields of Yalgoo and the Murchison. All of my research so far had included these areas. Unfortunately my efforts were to no avail and I decided to remove the deaths I had located that were outside of this area to avoid confusion until the Miners Memorial was finished. However I did tell them that as soon as the memorial was dedicated I was going to add back all the names I had temporarily removed. And I did just that !!!

Also, around this time, I happened to stumble upon the online virtual memorial for the sailors who died at the sinking of the HMAS Sydney.

<http://www.sydney memorial.com/>

Each man had a designated page and along with the official information from the navy there were photos, letters, stories and all sorts of addition data provided by family and friends. This was definitely a 'light bulb' moment !!!! I didn't know how I would do it but I knew this is what I wanted to do for the Western Australian Miners.

So, proceeding with a budget of zero, I had a bit of a problem. My son was able to build me a basic web site from scratch, design me a logo and I set up a Facebook page and just started emailing and posting to everyone I had been in touch with over the last few years plus anyone else I could possibly think of. I had kept every single contact I had received over the last fifteen years and the response was just amazing.

Many of these deaths fell outside of the 'designated area' of the Miners Memorial but I had kept them in my personal database and used the information for online enquiries. Also, during this time I had been amazed at the number of people wanting to include miners who had died of the various conditions of 'Miners Lung'. I explained that the criteria for the memorial stated that it was only to include people who had died in a mine accident. I however did sympathise with them though and one lady in particular said "well he didn't get Silicosis on purpose so it must have been an accident" fair comment I thought!

Here enters my very good friend and fellow historian and renowned author Dr Criena Fitzgerald. His specialty field was on the medical and social history of silicosis in the WA Goldfields. So after we talked about it we, 'rather rashly' decided that we would join forces and not only also include 'Dusted Miners' but we would expand it to the whole state of Western Australia. I must say that the odd one or two people thought we were 'quite barking' but really to include the rest of the state was not a much bigger job as 80% of the deaths occurred in the area we had already been researching. So the 'combined' WAVMM was born.

Since then it had taken on a life of its own. We have been honoured by awards, namely, a winner of The Mining Prospects Awards for 2015 for Contribution to Mining. Another nominee in the category was Gina Reinhart of Hancock Resources and I think that this fact alone made the whole thing much more newsworthy. But that's fine, it got some great publicity for the WAVMM and we appeared on Sydney news and in the Huffington Post. We were then a finalist in the 2016 heritage awards and in the Australia Day awards and we had numerous newspaper, radio and mining magazine articles published. This of course amounted to a lot of enquiries from people wanting to add their relative's names. We were getting up to 20-30 enquiries per week and we were recording these as fast as we were able while still working on expanding what we already had.

Well the poor old web site couldn't handle the volume of traffic and kept crashing. So now our complete lack of funds reared its head again when we realised that we needed to have a much more dynamic web site which looked more professional as well. I'm sure people thought we had a staff of a dozen people rather than just Criena and me (:

So where are we going from here.? Well we clubbed together and begged and borrowed the funds to have a completely new web site designed from the ground up especially for us with a facility for people to upload their own data. This is being done as I speak and it looks like all will be ready to re-launch on about 8-10 weeks, touch wood !!!! It has been suggested that we should have started fundraising and asking for sponsors etc. but as there just the two of us and we also have 'day jobs' so we decided that the web site was the next step and we would go on from there.

So 'watch this space' and I would like to dedicate this talk to my son, Andrew (Andy) James Heaney who was killed in an accident at the Super Pit on the 2nd May 2004.

Thank you !!!!