

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's  
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service  
on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> June 1983 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Citation by Honorable Ron Davies

First of all, I must apologise for the Premier this afternoon. He regrets very much that prior commitments prevent him from being with you but he does send along his best wishes and also has asked me to express his appreciation for the job the Historical Society does in continuing to honour our pioneers in this way.

I, nevertheless, am delighted to be with you and honoured to have the opportunity of presenting a short address.

When I was much younger, I imagine that if someone had asked me to spend a sunny Sunday afternoon in a Cemetery, I would have heaped scorn upon them, but I suppose our attitudes change with age. Consciously or unconsciously we recognise we are going to have an appointment with a Cemetery and that it's probably best to get on at least friendly terms.

This, however, is a special occasion. I have been fortunate enough to travel overseas on quite a few occasions and have often been in awe of the places visited. The younger I was the more impressed it seems I was.

In many countries in some towns, museums, buildings, paintings, even roads, mountains and the like, often had a special attraction and I was probably in awe of them, because it had been drilled into us at school that these were places to wonder at; these were places often associated with history, or with people we should respect and revere. I was 'reacting to some sense of history.

Apparently there was nothing in our own country that we should so honour. It always seemed that things falling into this category were overseas. On reflection, it is probable that our education was lacking in regard to local content in my school days.

It is true we were taught the brief history of our founding, something of people such as Stirling, Roe, and Forrest and one or two others, but because our State was young, perhaps we were expected to know its history without having to be taught.

There were still people around directly associated with some of the early settlers and many who could speak with authority of the latter part of the 1800s.

Foundation Day was just another holiday, as I recall it, acknowledged only by a flag raising ceremony at Fremantle. But we ignore history to our peril.

Thankfully, some modern-day pioneers have done something to awaken awareness of national and State pride.

Progress has been slow but it has been sure.

Our 150th celebrations did a great deal in this regard. Generally, we are now more conscious of what there is to interest, respect, even revere, right here in this State. Moving around the city, there are many things that jog our memory. We have been made conscious of our history.

There is Captain Stirling's statue, if we walk down Barrack Street, and plaques marking such historic events as Mrs Dance's official attack on the environment, another commemorating the first Methodist Church service, and indeed many others, thanks to the Historical Society.

I like visitors to ask me why and what is the Barracks Arch and I like to explain something of its history. Even in the building where my own office is located, the Old Treasury Buildings, I thoroughly enjoy, the environment and sometimes,, leaving the building late at night, half expect to see some old ghosts wandering down the corridors. I appreciate talks from time to time with the Executive Officers of the National Trust. I enjoy talking with the people from the W.A. Historical Society. I feel lucky, therefore, that I can relate so easily to the things around us which are part of our heritage, but I find a real kinship with our history when I make a visit to this Cemetery. That's why, for myself, I mark this ceremony a very special occasion.

Not only does this graveyard mark the last resting place of many of our well known and famous pioneers, but it's also the last resting place of many ordinary people, ordinary pioneers.

To have merely lived in this State in the early days would have warranted respect and recognition and who amongst us would not fail to acknowledge the remarkable qualities which our pioneers possessed; the remarkable vision; the remarkable spirit, dedication and energy reflecting, I believe, a faith which, as referred to in the New Testament reading this afternoon, was a substance of things hopeful, the evidence of things not seen.

I said earlier we ignore history to our peril. We do indeed G.K. Chesterton said some 50 years ago: "The disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present. History is a hill or a high point of vantage from which alone men can see the towns in which they live or the age in which they are living".

Much later, Adlai Stevenson said, in 1952: "We can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we know the path which has led to the present". And when we look at the past and when we survey the present, we realise that the remarkable qualities shown by our pioneers are the very qualities equally needed in our lives today, so it's good and proper that we should be reminded of our history by celebrations such as today's. While it is a matter for some regret that it has taken so long for local history to come to the fore, and for events such as W.A. Week to take on some meaning, we can be grateful that some people have been dedicated in their endeavours to promote State pride through its history.

If I could draw on another quotation, Thoreau said a century or more ago: "Wherever men have lived, there is a story to be told and it depends chiefly on the story teller or historian whether that is interesting or not".

And it's to these latter-day pioneers who have made the story, — the history,—interesting that I would like to include today's tribute.

These are the past and present members of the Western Australian Historical Society. This embraces a great band who have been diligent and dedicated in researching and recording our past; lobbying and prodding Members of Parliament; causing community leaders to think about our heritage; educating people; liaising with kindred organisations to bring people with a common cause together; printing and publishing books and papers; arranging displays; recording old history, and so on, and so on, and so on.

All of this is done by a band of dedicated people in practically a completely voluntary effort to ensure our history, be it good or bad, does not pass into obscurity.

Founded in 1926 initially to commence thinking about the 1929 Centenary Celebrations, the Society has enjoyed the support and assistance of many distinguished people. Many scholars have contributed to the Society's records. The volumes of early days are, to me, a great pleasure to read and I am sure Thoreau would class the authors of the various articles as story tellers or historians with a flair for an interesting tale.

I take this opportunity to extend the thanks and sincere appreciation of the Government to the Society for the work that it has done and is continuing to do so very well and I would like, also, to add my personal thanks, particularly for organising this ceremony today as it has every year since 1954 to honour our pioneers.

I hope that for you, as for me, the ceremony enables you to experience a special link at this time with those pioneers, the people who built this State, be they famous or ordinary, whose lives, deeds, and example will show us the way to a great future.