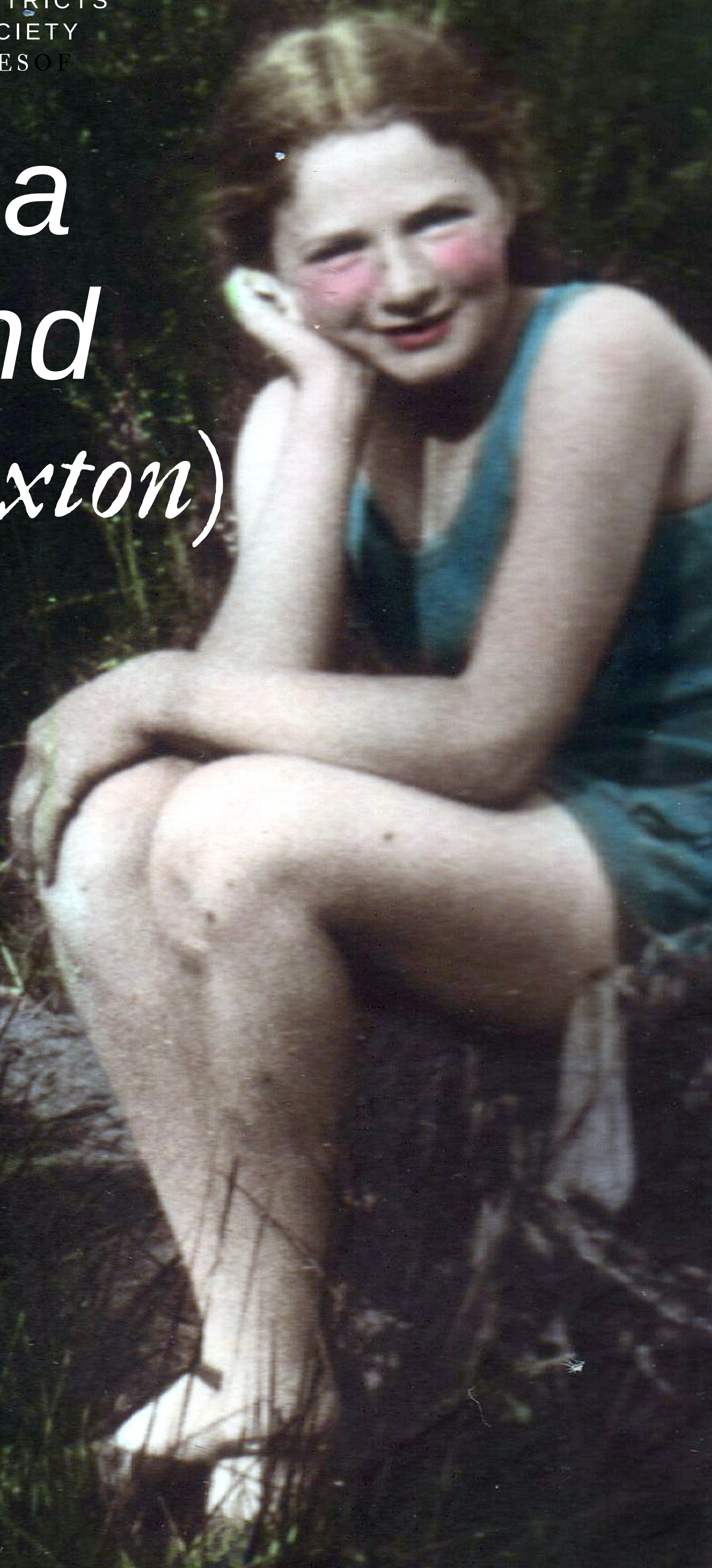


KALAMUNDA & DISTRICTS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ORAL HISTORIES OF

# *Roma Ireland (nee Croxton)*

A MEMOIR

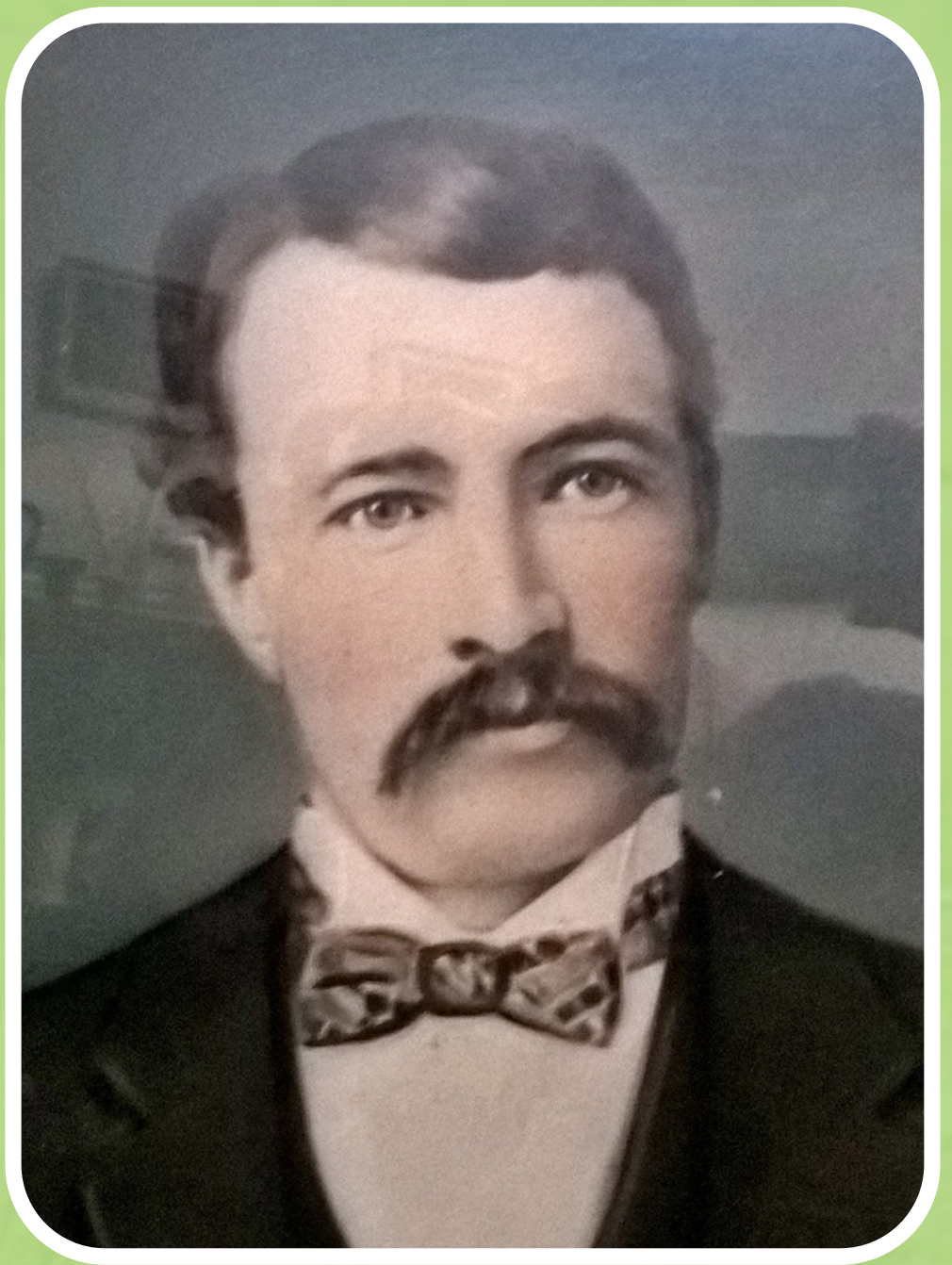
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In the early 1900s Dad had an orchard in Piesse Brook, fruit trees mainly.

*"they shifted to a property half-way to Kalamunda and the road was called Croxton Road, after my father. It's still there."*

He had several acres of land where he grew strawberries for the market, he would send them to Midland.



# Frederick John Croxton

BORN 1874



# Cecilia Mary Croxton (nee Helm)

BORN 1878

An interview of Roma Ireland (nee Croxton) was conducted by Gigi Hesterman, April 2016 on behalf of the Kalamunda and Districts Historical Society.

This summary of the original interview was prepared on behalf of the Bill Shaw Oral History Group



Fred Croxton at Piesse's Brook property. Early 1900s



Roma Marie Croxton, circa 1925

Roma Marie Croxton, born 25 November, 1921 in Midland, Western Australia was the youngest of nine children. Her parents were Frederick and Cecilia Croxton (nee Helm).

Roma believes that her fathers' family were originally from England. Her father was born in New South Wales, Australia. Her mothers' family are thought to originate from Germany with Cecilia being born in Victoria, Australia.

Frederick came to Western Australia to work in Coolgardie in the late 1800s during the gold rush. He later sent for Cecilia to join him at which time they married.

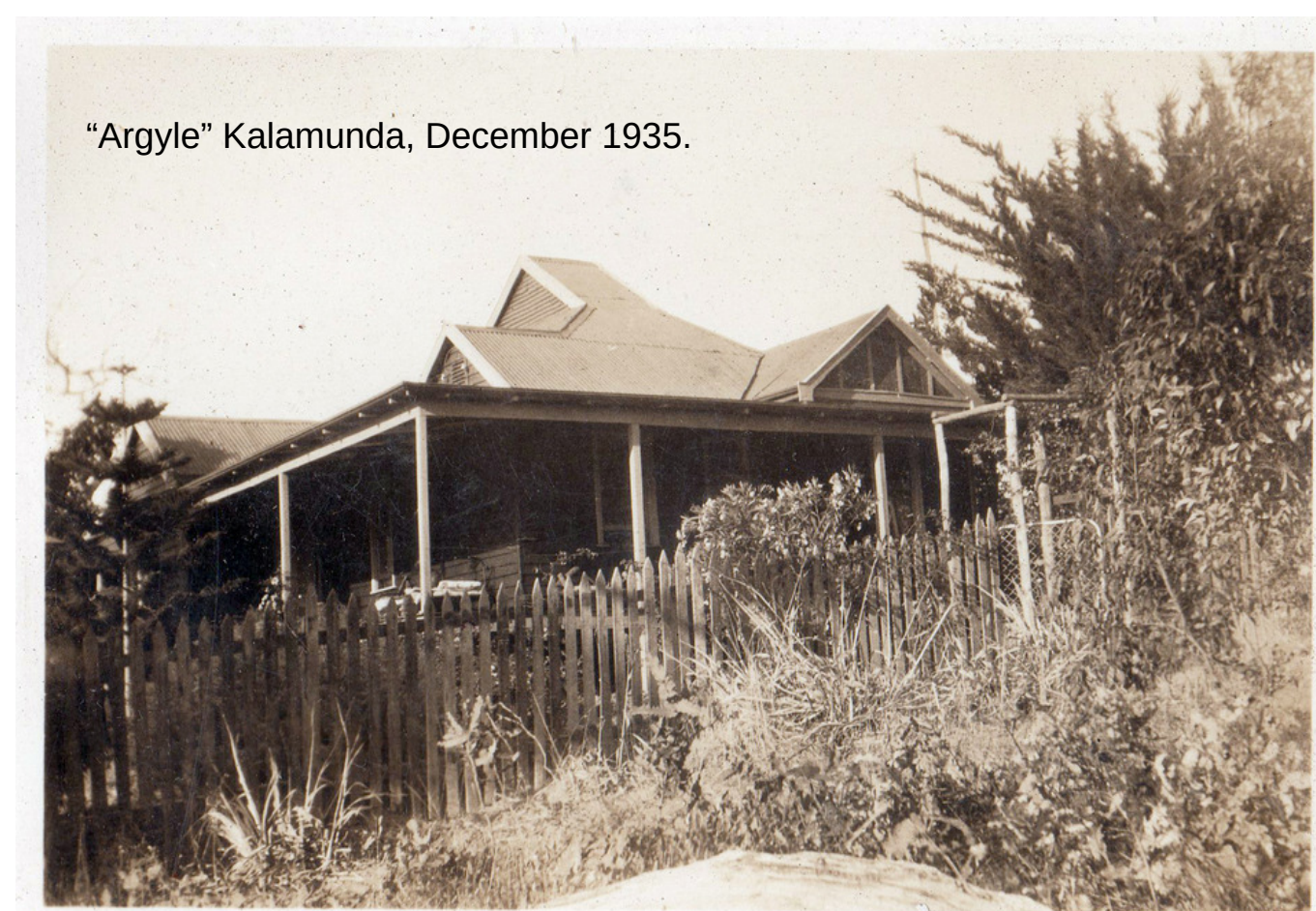
The Croxton's settled in Piesse Brook in the early 1900s where they planted and grew fruit trees in their orchard. They later moved halfway to Kalamunda where they grew strawberries on several acres of land transporting their produce to the Midland markets by horse and cart.

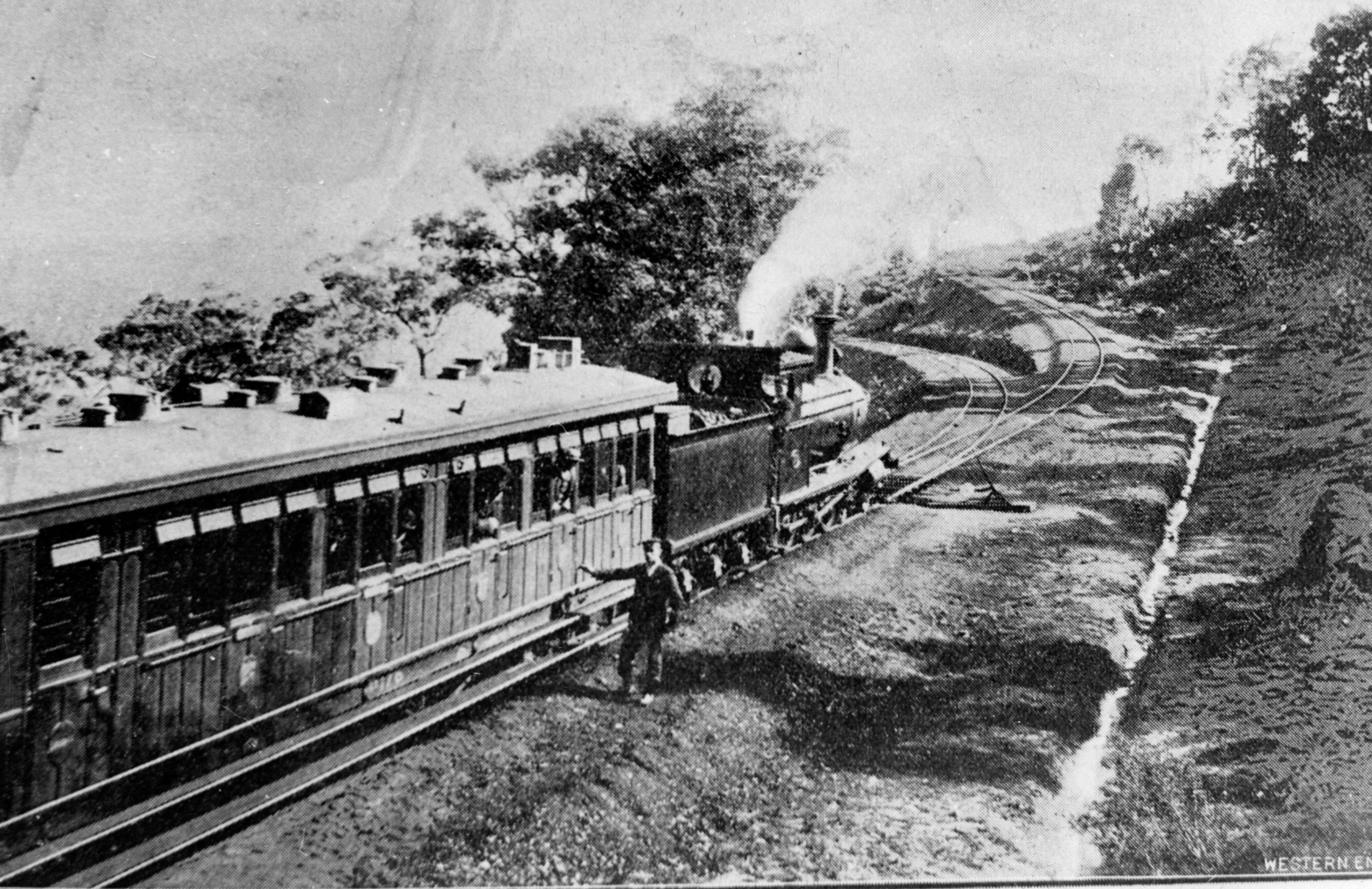
They finally moved up the valley and settled on the corner of Short Street and Headingly Road, Kalamunda. Roma's father worked as a teamster for the Darling Range Roads Board. He would travel 10-12 miles from home delivering supplies by horse and cart and they wouldn't see him from one week until the next.

As women traditionally stayed at home and looked after the family the children stayed at home with their mother who spent her days doing the housework.

Their home was named 'Argyle' after a place in Scotland. The weatherboard house had a lounge, a large kitchen and five bedrooms. In the winter the family would gather around the fuel stove in the kitchen after tea and warm their feet by the open oven door.

The laundry, separate from the house, was about halfway across the yard. It had one open side to it. Roma's mother washed clothes in a copper which she stirred with a pot stick and squeezed them out with a wringer that was attached to the troughs. They often walked in the dark to the toilet that was down by the back fence. There was no electricity or telephones at the house then and water was drawn from a well.





EN ROUTE TO KALAMUNDA—SCENE ON THE ZIG-ZAG RAILWAY.

## *Explosion on the Canning Farrah Company Line*

It was reported in the West Australian Newspaper on 23 March 1899 that legal proceedings were underway against Roma's father, Frederick Croxton, a gardener of Gooseberry Hill.

Frederick was charged with carrying gunpowder onto the Government railway. The maximum penalty for this offence was 50 pounds. It was further stated that the damage to the rail carriage was estimated at nine pounds, ten shillings.

Frederick was in Perth and needed to get home to Gooseberry Hill. He transported three pounds of gunpowder on the train travelling from the city to Midland Junction. He had wrapped the explosives in a sugar bag which looked like he was carrying supplies.

When boarding he noted that all the train carriages were full of passengers so he got onto a wagon. He placed his parcel on the floor at one end of the wagon and sat at the opposite end.

Some distance before they reached Gooseberry Hill a spark from the engine ignited the gunpowder. The door of the wagon was completely blown off and the end of the truck was blown out. Additionally there was some minor damage to the Saloon carriage next to the wagon.

When Frederick appeared in court he was lucky not to be fined the maximum penalty for the offence. Instead he was ordered to pay three pound which was about a week's wages in those days.



St Brigid's College circa 1930s



St Brigid's College circa 1935

Front: Faye Gurling, Betty Brenchley (boarder) and Lena Parrott  
Back: Roma Croxton, Marj Thorogood and Celia Connell

## *Roma at School in the 1930s*

Roma attended her first year at school at the Heath Road Primary School which was about a half mile walk from home.

The following year she moved to Mary's Mount Primary School in Gooseberry Hill. The Catholic boarding school taught students up to year six and only catered for a few day scholars.

Roma recalls how the girls played basketball against the boys and the nuns would join in. When it was very hot they were allowed to swim in the swimming pool at lunch time. The pool was located at the bottom of the orchard that was attached to the Convent. The boys were allowed to swim after school and on the weekends.

After attending Mary's Mount school Roma went to St Brigid's College in Lesmurdie where they had 60 boarders and 20 day scholars. The original two storey school building had previously been a hospital. The boarders slept upstairs and the classrooms were on the ground floor. The kitchens and laundry were on the same floor and the Leaving and Junior students were in a separate weatherboard building.

Roma's friend, Jean Robertson, rode her horse about five miles a day to school travelling from the other side of Gooseberry Hill and would tether her horse in the cow paddock.

Mother Theresa was the head of the school which started at half-past-eight and finished at five o'clock. Students attended school five and half days a week so were there on Saturday mornings.

Roma was friends with Faye Gurling whose father was the Kalamunda Station Master. She rode her bike to school with Joan Wood, Faye Gurling and Lena Parrott.

Following the completion of her Junior Certificate, at the age of 15, Roma attended Business College for one year before entering the workforce.

She recalled that the University of Western Australian was only an option for very smart children or those who came from wealthy families as it wasn't free to attend.

Shirley and Roma Croxton feeding lambs at Shirley's farm in Graball, December 1934





Croxton boys and others at Rocky Pool, January 1933



L-R: Gordon, Roma, Victoria and Beatrice Croxton. January 1935

## *Siblings aplenty*

There was a significant age difference between the Croxton children. Roma's siblings included Florence, Violet, Beatrice, Victoria, Harold, Gordon, Phyllis and Ray.

Florence married fairly young and her oldest son was two-and-a-half years older than his Aunt Roma.

Violet was a seamstress who had her own business in Perth with seven or eight girls working for her before she joined the Army.

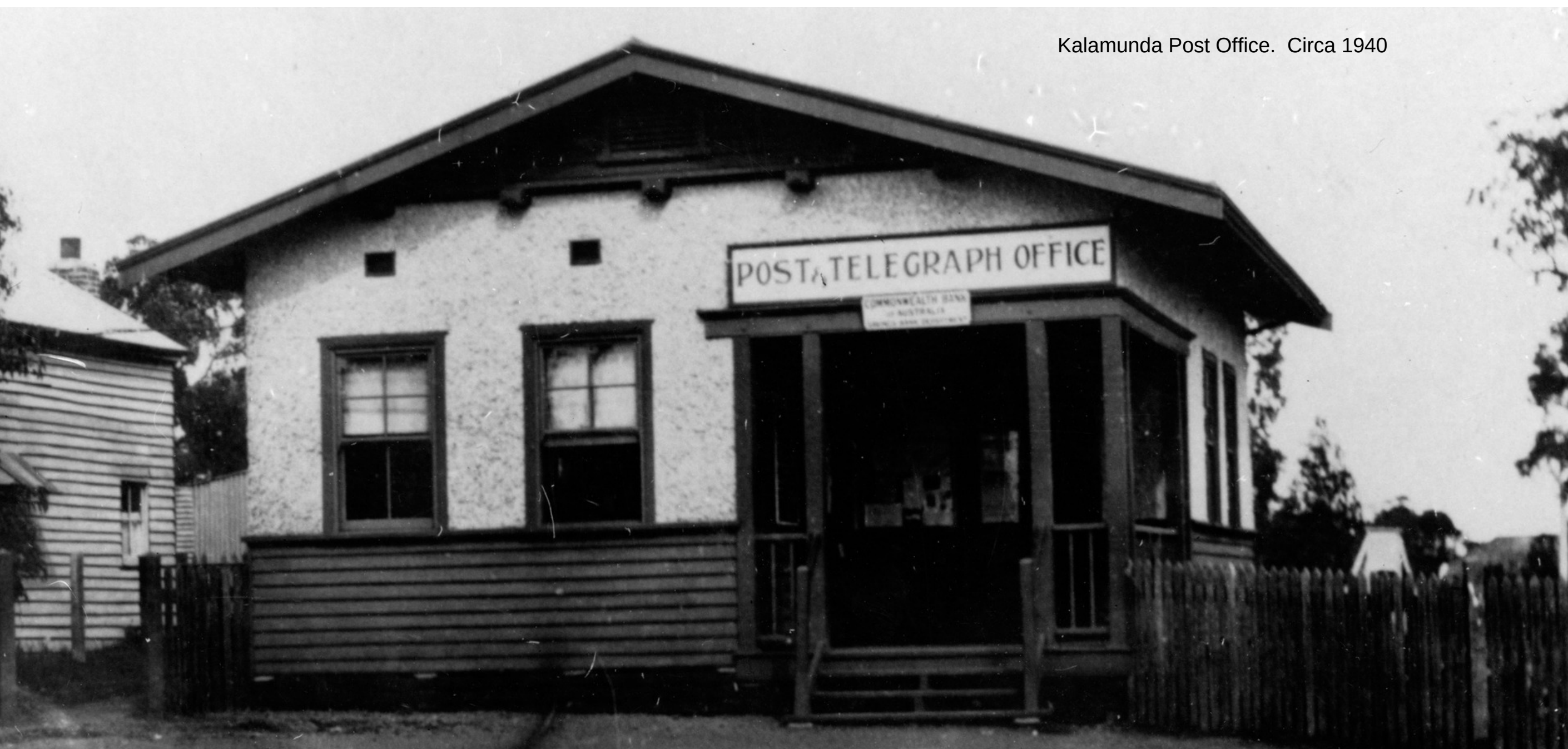
When Roma's mother died, Beatrice, aged 23, looked after the Croxton household and never married. Roma was just seven years old at the time.

Victoria drowned at a young age. Harold worked in the Kalamunda Post Office Telephone Exchange at night although there were only two or three calls a night.

During the day he worked for an Architect in Perth. Roma remembers taking Harold a cooked breakfast at the Post Office in the mornings. She would ride her bike up the hill before the Post Office opened and when Harold had finished his breakfast he would catch the bus to work in Perth.

Gordon joined the army but returned to teaching when he was discharged. Phyllis worked as a hotel cook when she left school and Ray also joined the army and was stationed in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Roma fondly remembers that she and her brothers would swim at Rocky Pool. They walked through the bush and along a dirt track to get there. If they got thirsty on the way they simply drank water from the creek that ran alongside the road.



Kalamunda Post Office. Circa 1940



Roma Croxton, Perth circa 1940,



Roma Croxton, A.W.A.S ( Australian Women's Army Service) Bushmead, circa 1940s



Roma Croxton circa 1940s

## Working women in the 1940s

Roma used her business college skills and worked in the office at Cyclone Fencing where she did the daily banking run in the city.

With the commencement of World War II she and her sister Violet joined the Australian Women's Army Service where Roma worked in a clerical capacity for four years. Roma remained enlisted until 1946, longer than most, to assist with completing the records management requirements.

Once discharged from the army, Roma took a five week shorthand and typing refresher course in Sydney and she managed to get a job for a few months.

She met George Ireland who was also in the Army. They married on 25 January 1947 when she was 25 years old. She continued to work but soon became pregnant with her first child and was required to leave work when she was around six months pregnant in keeping with the working policy of the day.

When their first child, Denise was a little over a year old Roma and George returned to WA. They bought 'Argyle' in Kalamunda, from Roma's older sister, Beatrice. They continued to live there for the next ten years. They had another six children, Neville, Geoffrey, Tony, Carol, Beverley and Paul.



Violet Croxton, circa 1940s



Roma and George Ireland  
Chatswood, January 1947

## Ireland family

L-R : TONY, DENISE, GEOFFREY, ROMA,  
GEORGE, NEVILLE, BEVERLEY, CAROL  
AND PAUL

Circa 1970s



Cover image: Roma Croxton swimming at Piesse's Brook, 1930s

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