

**Kalamunda & Districts  
Historical Society  
Oral Histories**



a Memoir of

**DORRIS  
CRAIG**

(Nee Stirk)

# KALAMUNDA'S FIRST SETTLERS

Early Stirk dwelling



## THE OVERFLOW HOUSE

The overflow of the Headingley Hill house.  
Taken from the South side with the family



Harry Stirk Circa 1910

'Dad used to work on the orchard, that was his job. That's what he did. That was why he never went to the First World War, because he was the only son and his father was getting older and he wouldn't allow him to go. But that was what he did.

He had his horses and there were cows. And he'd grow his vegetables. Oh, they used to make wine down there too. And we'd go down there of a night - - - the old house was a lovely old house, a real beautiful home. It looked beautiful – just a beautiful home'.

An interview of Dorris May Craig, (nee Stirk) was conducted by an unknown interviewer in 1981 on behalf of the Kalamunda and Districts Historical Society.

Dorris' cousin, Gladys May Knopp (nee Armstrong) contributed to the interview

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



Dorris Stirk. Circa 1915



Harry Stirk, Headingley Hill, Kalamunda. Circa late 1910



Annie Stirk with Dorris and Leila, Circa 1918

Dorris Craig, nee Stirk was born 15 November 1914 to Harry and Annie Stirk nee Herring.

Dorris' paternal grandparents were Kalamunda's first settlers, Frederick and Elizabeth Stirk who left Yorkshire, England in 1875. They originally settled in the Guildford area until Frederick found Kalamunda whilst working as an axeman.

Frederick bought 15 acres of land in 1880 naming the property Headingley Hill. The family lived in a tent while the land was cleared. In 1881 they built a simple two roomed wattle and daub cottage roofed with shingles.

Dorris' father Harry was the only son of the nine Stirk children. He was born in Stirk Cottage in 1889.

Dorris' mother, Annie Herring, was born in 1888. She arrived from Broken Hill with her parents when she was nine years old. When they first came to Kalamunda they stayed at Kefen, a guesthouse on the corner of Stirk Street and Canning Road. Annie was the youngest of six children. After her father died, when she was 13, her mother ran a guesthouse near St Elmo's.

Harry first saw Annie when she went to get strawberries and cream from the Stirk orchard. Dorris tells how he peeped through the keyhole and said to his sister Bena, 'Hm, not a bad looking fish I think I'll sling out my line'. Dorris' parents went dancing often and had great times together. They married in 1913 in St Barnabas Church and had three children, Dorris, Leila and Lindsay.



Stirk Family at the back of Stirk Cottage.

Back row, left to right: Robert, Jane and Lizzie.

Front row, left to right: Harriet, Mary, Fred, Edith, Elizabeth, Lil and Harry.

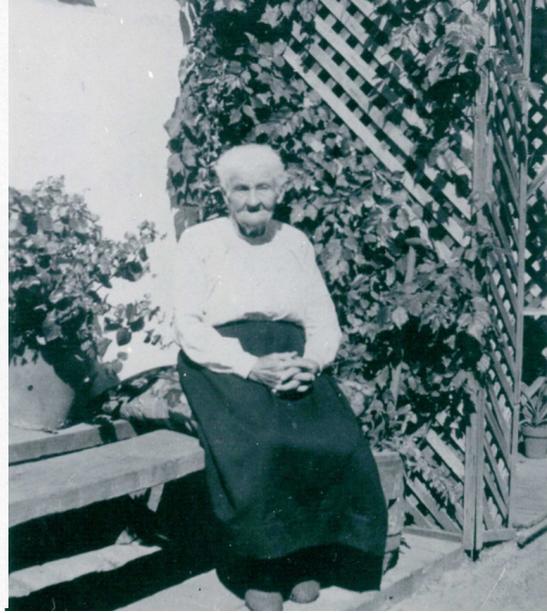
Circa 1898



Elizabeth Stirk



Stirk family group. Circa 1898



Elizabeth Stirk, Headingley Hill, Circa 1946

## Coming home to Grandma's - a wonderful thing

*Dorris and her cousin Gladys fondly remember their Grandparents*

'Grandma used to work and work' said Dorris. She would work under the trees and kneel on a sugar bag. She always wore very long dark coloured skirts with a light coloured blouse.

She had a pet butcher bird that her brother, Jack brought back from Muchea. The bird would sit on her shoulder and she would feed it all the grubs and insects.

She never sat down without anything to do. She was always knitting socks for her children and when the toes and feet wore out she would unpick that part and re-foot them. During the First World War she knitted 98 pairs of socks for the soldiers.

Down at the end of the old house there was an old jarrah tree stump that was covered in morning glory. On one side of it was a piece of railway line and a bell. She would use her hammer to hit the bell letting everyone know when it was time to stop work and come up for a meal.

Grandma would go to Guildford in her horse and cart. One day on her way home some aboriginals hung onto the back of her cart and scared her so she made the horse go as fast as it could until they finally dropped off.

'I remember when I was three or four and we'd have the whole orchard to run around in.' said Gladys. The property was beautiful with flowers everywhere and grapevines all over the back trellis. The drive, from the house down to the corner was one mass of flowers and shrubs which would have taken a lot of time and work to establish.

Dorris and Gladys's grandfather, Frederick spent most of his time in the orchard. He made his own wine which he sold and always had on hand for visitors.

They had a lot of cows in the old garden, where Stirk Park is now. They would milk the cows and Grandad would deliver milk whilst Grandma set the cream and made butter.

Dorris and Gladys fondly recall family holidays with their grandparents. They would travel to Como or North Beach by horse and cart from Kalamunda.



Overflow House, Headingley Hill



Headingly Hill Strawberry Gardens. Circa late 1890s

Eva and Lilly Stirk

## Working in the Strawberry Gardens

Dorris reminisced about when she was very small and how her two aunts would wear their lovely big sun bonnets as they worked in the orchard with her Dad and Grandma. Aunty Liz did the cooking and sewing and would make beautiful cheesecakes.

She recalled how her Aunts grew strawberries but as it was back-breaking work they wanted her grandfather to put in fruit trees instead but he wouldn't have it. When he travelled to England in 1901 the girls removed the strawberries and planted fruit trees.

There were a few trees in Haynes Street but the orchard was mainly down the front where they grew plums, apples, pears, lemons and oranges. The orchard went down as far as Elizabeth Street and across to Lindsay Street. In the corner, from Elizabeth Street nearly to Guildford Road, now known as Kalamunda Road, they had the grapevines.

Dorris' recalled Aunt Janey telling her that they had all been working very hard in the orchard and Janey said to her Dad, Frederick, 'My feet are tired, I can't do any more.'

He answered, 'What a lot of nonsense. Sit down and take your boots off and change your socks over to the other feet and put your boots on again and it'll be all right, then away you go girl.' And that's what she had to do.

They would take their produce down to the markets in Perth by train. They travelled by train several days a week and had to be at the station pretty early. Dorris' Grandma told her that they would go to the station in the morning and hope that there was a train coming some time during the day to take you to Perth. Then you would have to wait for a train to come along to bring you back.

Dorris' Grandad made both red and white wine which was always on hand for visitors. There would be a pot of mulled wine on the hob of the open fire to get warm and home-made biscuits. Even the children had their drink of wine which Dorris was not fond of because it went to her legs.



Annie, Lindsay and Leila Stirk with brothers-in-law Jack Delamare (back) and Tom Turner. Circa 1923



Harry and Lindsay Stirk, Headingley Hill. Circa 1930s



Leila, Dorris and Lindsay Stirk. Circa 1938

## Entertainment and relaxation in the Hills

Dorris recalls a wonderful childhood with her younger sister Leila and brother Lindsay. The family were involved in various entertaining activities.

Dorris' Dad, Harry loved crabbing and would take the family to Como in the horse and cart where they would stay overnight. Her Dad would go crabbing and cook his catch before returning home the next day. She remembers when they arrived at the dirt track at the bottom of Dog Hill how the horse could not be held back as he galloped up the hill to get home.

Harry would play dominos, cards and bobs with the children. Bobs was similar to billiards using a cue to shoot numbered balls. The aim was to put the most balls into the holes to get the highest score and win.

They would go to the Croxton's house and play table tennis on their large table. When there were a lot of players they would hit the ball over the net and drop the bat for the next player so that everyone got a chance to play.

Dorris' Dad was an experienced bushman and he would take the children bushwalking over to Lesmurdie Falls.

When Dorris was about sixteen she recalls one Sunday when they walked to Mundaring Weir, ate dinner and walked back home again through the bush.

Doris remembers playing chasey and hidey and she and her friend Lila would sew clothes and dress their dolls. When she lived in Haynes Street there was a lot of bush where they would make pipes out of nuts and fill them with the flower of the prickly bush and 'smoke' their pipes.

Dorris' family was a very musical one with her Mum being an accomplished pianist and her Dad playing the violin. They were both wonderful singers with her Mum being a soprano and her Dad almost a tenor.

The family would often gather together with friends and enjoy musical evenings. Her Grandfather's favourite songs included 'I'm shy Mary Ellen, I'm shy' and 'She sells sea shells on the sea shore'. Her Grandma didn't sing but her favourite song was 'The Rose of Tralee'.

Her Mum, Annie would sing 'The Holy City', 'Bethlehem', and 'He Wipes the Tear'. She played 'Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'Flash Light' on the piano. Her piano skills were so high that she would play at the silent pictures in Kalamunda.

Cover image: Dorris Stirk, circa early 1940s

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