

**KALAMUNDA & DISTRICTS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ORAL HISTORIES**

***a Memoir of*
George Spriggs**





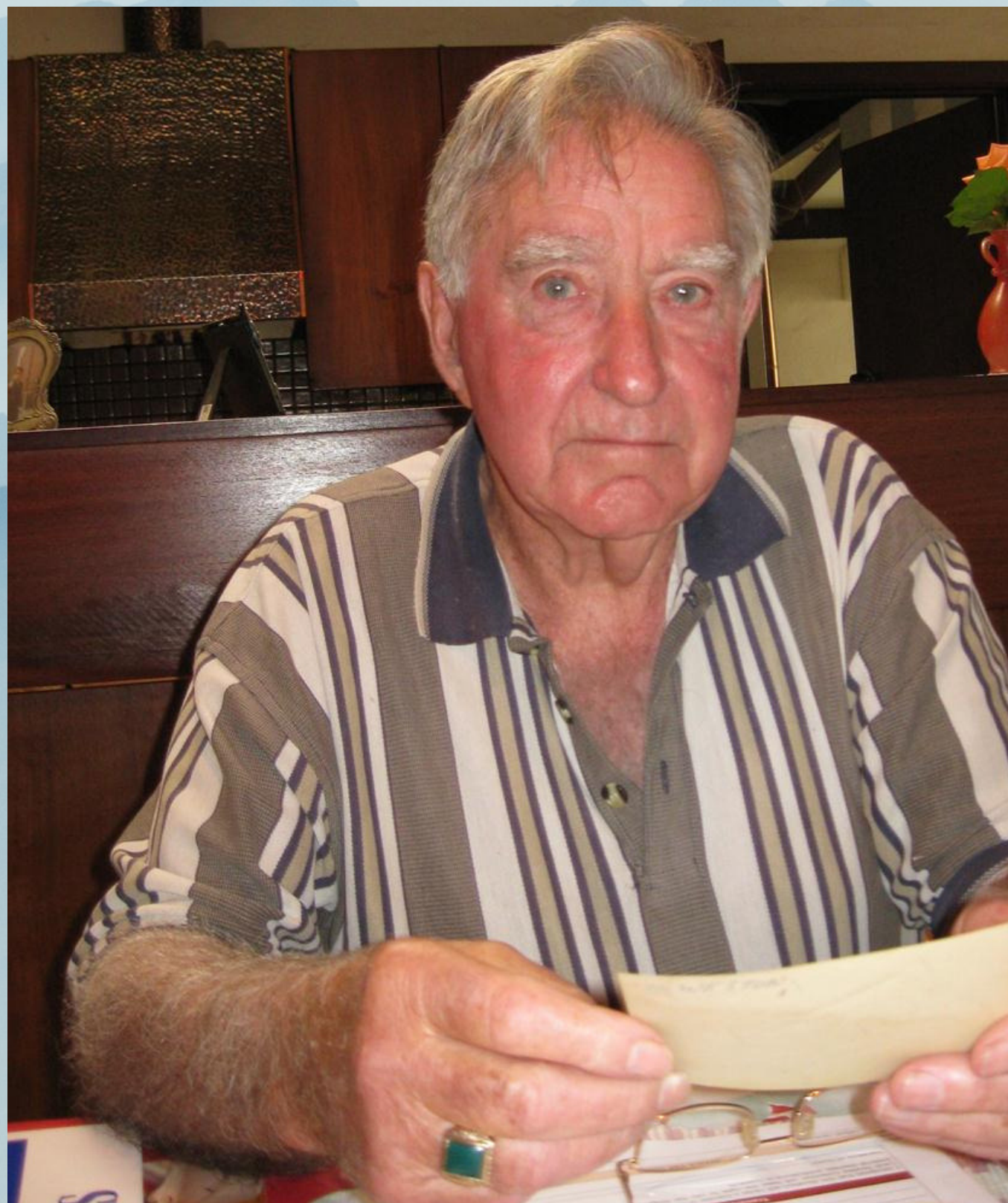
George Spriggs Circa 1927

'Well, I actually was lucky as far as I was concerned because I loved the orchards and I loved working there and so I continued to do that all the time. It never really was work to me.'

George Spriggs

ORCHARDIST - BUSINESSMAN - POLITICIAN

George Spriggs Circa 2012



An interview of Mr George Spriggs was conducted by Gretchen Forrest with Pat Pettman, 22 May 2009 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

PICKERING BROOK PIONEERS

Greg Weston,
Harry Hawkins,
Tommy Roads and
Archie Owens



**George remembers
working alongside
his father around
the age of eight. His
job was to sweep the
dogs on the railway
sleepers with some
blackboy sticks.**

**The railway gang
would put pennies in
a wage packet for
him.**

George Clarence Charles Spriggs was born on 28 January 1926. George's father, Charles William Spriggs, came to Western Australia with his mother, aunt and five siblings in 1915. Arriving by ship they decided to disembark in Albany because of the rough weather.

George's Grandma settled her family in Pemberton and worked in the bush cooking for forestry workers. The Spriggs children all attended the Pemberton Primary School and were the first pupils to attend the school.

George's dad met his mum, Leila, in Mansfield, Victoria where Charles enlisted in the army and went off to war. Around 1920 he returned to Western Australia a married man and started work on the railways near Tammin where George's sister and brother were born.

About 1924 George's dad was stationed at Pickering Brook Junction, as it was called then. The railway line ran from Midland, to Kalamunda, Pickering Brook, Karragullen, then on a private line to Barton's Mill and a further 20 miles into the forest. This was originally built by Millars to serve Barton's Mill, one of nine mills in the area. The railway line continued to be extended as the timber industry expanded.

Two years later George was born in Haynes Street, Kalamunda in a midwife house called 'The Brown House.'

CARMEL SCHOOL

1929 - 30



George at school

George attended Carmel Primary School and occasionally rode his horse the four to five kilometres to school. He was able to keep the horse in a paddock during the day.

Mr Sanderson was the principal, Miss Martin the Monitor and there was a teacher's assistant. The school numbers ranged from 20 to 56 students.

George recalls the time when he and Ernie Crocus had a bet to see who could get the most canes in one day. He says it didn't hurt them because their hands were tough and the shortness of Mr Sanderson's stick meant that he couldn't inflict much pain. They managed to get about 20 cuts in a day but it seems no one remembers who actually won the bet.

Frank Furfaro was a class mate whose parents migrated from Italy just before the war. When he came to Carmel School George and his friends would tease him because he couldn't speak English. Frank taught them how to swear in Italian and when the junior teacher, who also spoke Italian, heard them Frank got his revenge.

After sixth grade, students had to travel 19 kms to Kalamunda where Mr. T B Millar was principal. There were no buses in those days so George still had to ride to school each day. George left school when he was 14 years old as did the majority of students in those days.

George's dad became a carrier and bought a truck, they went everywhere in it. There were only two cars in the whole of Pickering Brook then. Everybody else had a vehicle but it was either an old truck or ute.

'I had a brumby and when I was eight, or nine we would go out and break in brumbies.

They were pretty common from Victoria Reservoir to Barton's Mill and beyond.

We had no trouble finding them. We used to get one or two and break them in and sell 'em. We probably only got a few shillings but that was our pleasure and our work'.

George Spriggs



George Spriggs 20 YEARS OLD

Circa 1945

Work, life and love

When George was 14 he would go out into the bush with his dad to cut wood and cart it into town. They were paid about thirty shillings a load. Later he worked as a drain digger making one pound a chain of drains. Nearly every orchard in the hills had drains installed about every forty feet and around three foot deep.

When George was just 17 years old he took over the orchard. He gained a contract to grow vegetables for the army and subsequently built up the orchard.

In the 1930s during the depression sustenance workers, who were paid the same as unemployed people but they had to work for it, camped along Canning Road with their families. They built the road with the use of horses and wheelbarrows. Canning Road was a major construction challenge even for modern machinery but they did it with scoops and graders that were all horse driven. Enterprising children sold bunches of Spider Orchids and Kangaroo Paws to visitors watching the overflow of the Mundaring Weir and Canning Dams.

Saturday night dances were held at either Karragullen, Pickering Brook, Barton's Mill, Mundaring Weir or Kalamunda where George eventually met his wife Daphne Collings.

Daphne was in the Land Army and came to Kalamunda to work for Mrs Alice Beard. Mrs Beard had twins and was still running the shop with her husband so she employed Daphne to help with the babies for a few months.

George was 21 and Daphne was 19 when they married on 22 June, 1947. They lived on the orchard in Canning Road and had four children; Barry, Judy, Kerry and Murray.



Daphne Spriggs (nee Collings) as a land army girl aged 16 years



Daphne Spriggs (nee Collings) on their wedding day at Pickering Brook Hall



George and Daphne Spriggs

AT A DARTS EVENING IN
PICKERING BROOK HALL

The business man

Whilst on the orchard, from 1959 until 1970, George established and ran Hill's Cold Stores, the biggest exporting cold store in the State at the time.

They used their packing shed to pack their own fruit but they also handled other grower's fruit. Once packed the fruit was put into cold storage and shipped out as transport became available. There were no forklifts so they would manually stack the jarrah boxes 16 high in the cold store. Cases were handled multiple times from picking them up from the grower, taking them off the truck into the cold store, taking them back out of cold store and putting them onto the truck to go to the wharf and again when unloading them on the wharf.

They employed seven or eight people to pack the loose fruit that came in bins. They handled apples and various stone fruits which were exported mostly to Singapore. There were two or three inspectors in the Pickering Brook hills area and nothing was exported unless it was inspected ensuring fruit was of the highest quality.

They also exported to Germany and Austria and on one occasion when the Suez Canal was sabotaged they had around 13,000 cases of fruit stuck in the Suez Canal. Fortunately for George this event was covered by insurance.

It became a very large and lucrative business which required working long hours. George sold Hill's Cold Stores after about 11 years in business.

George then bought the Pickering Brook Store and Garage which he combined into a single family business with a focus on bulk handling of fuel.

We used to send some to Indonesia too, but Indonesia was pretty difficult to deal with because you had to bribe two or three people to get the damn stuff off the truck – off the boats.

It wasn't particularly easy to deal with Indonesia but Singapore was quite good.

George Spriggs

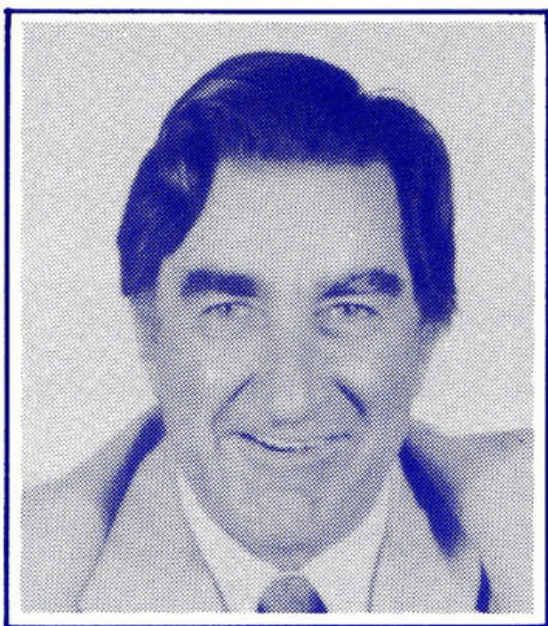
GEORGE SPRIGGS

Perhaps we
couldn't
change the
world but we
did some
good.

The Politician



Member of
Parliament for
Darling Range



George SPRIGGS,
Member for
DARLING RANGE
J.P., M.L.A.

- Born in Kalamunda.
- Married with four children.
- Educated in Carmel and Kalamunda.
- Past Shire President Kalamunda three years.
- Foundation member of Kalamunda and Districts Hospital Board three years.
- President Pickering Brook Sports Club 28 years.
- Member Roleystone Country Club.
- Past President Outer Suburban Golf Assn.
- Patron — Kalamunda Swimming Club
Lesmurdie Basketball Assn.
Kalamunda and Districts
Agricultural Society
Kalamunda Netball Assn.
Hills Football Assn.
Hills Districts Cricket Assn.
- Honorary Member of Kalamunda and Kelmscott Rotary Club.
- Member Local Government and Town Planning Committee.
- Represented W.A. State Government at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in Bahamas.
- Shadow Cabinet Secretary.

George spent some years in local government as a councillor and was the Kalamunda Shire President for a number of years. During this time the RED Scheme provided funding for many developments. These included improvements to the Pickering Brook Club, the tennis courts on Railway Road, Stirk Park upgrades and funding of the Historical Society. He was offered the opportunity of getting into Parliament and he went in with the idea of doing some good and changing the world.

He was elected as a member of the Liberal party representing Kelmscott, Roleystone, Pickering Brook, Karragullen, Lesmurdie, Walliston right through to Stanhope Road in Kalamunda. This area was practically all orchards and agricultural constituents.

He focused on the development of schools and playgrounds and made several significant contributions during his term in office.

He managed to secure \$15,000, to have two shelters built for the Walliston and Lesmurdie Schools. He was also active in getting the Lesmurdie High School changed from a junior high school to a senior high school. He managed to get the Roleystone Junior High School started which was a major achievement for Roleystone.



VOTE LIBERAL



George's grandson, Jack Smith on the hydroponic flower farm circa 2001

Back to Business

After leaving Parliament instead of retiring George started a hydroponic flower farm on four acres of land. He grew carnations, roses, chrysanthemums and gerberas.

The advantage of hydroponic growing was the saving of water and fertilizer. There were no weed problems and as the plants grew in sheds with plastic roofing over them there were no issues with the weather.

Flowers were sold to around 70 local florists and a couple of markets in Perth. They were also sent up North to Broome, Kununurra and Darwin.

George ran the business very successfully for around 12 years before retiring and simply closing the business down.

George describes his life as 'wonderful' and 'very lucky' with no complaints.

'Well, we marketed over to Japan for a month once to check the market up there and by the time we got around to where we were interested in it, Japan had gone into a slight recession so the opportunity disappeared'

George Spriggs

Cover photo: George Spriggs with grandson Jack Smith circa 2001

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