



Silvina Lanyon: One Woman's Enterprise in Mandurah: Theatres and Entertainment –1920s – 1940s

Background

In a time where theatres, dancing halls and moving pictures were available in the early 1900s, a lady of unusual and exemplary character came to her peak as an entrepreneur in a small town south of Perth. Her name was Silvina Ruby Hannah Lanyon, and that town was Mandurah.

Silvina Ruby Lanyon left a legacy to her descendants in the form of a vibrant history of her achievements in business, her love of Art and her commitment to community and social activities.

Silvina was born in Herberton Queensland in 1883 to parents Mary and William Rowe. At the age of 17 years, Silvina married James Caddy Lanyon aged 19 years at Cobar, N.S.W in 1900.

James Caddy Lanyon was born in Ballarat to a mining family and with this background, he and Silvina, with other members of their family migrated to the Western Australian Goldfields.



Silvina Lanyon cont'd

Silvina started to show her skills as a business woman early in her married life.

During 1905 and 1906 James and Silvina (as proprietress) advertised in the local paper of the availability of rooms and dining situated opposite the railway station in "Murrin Murrin".

James worked for the Golden Gate mine and then with the Western Australian Government Railways until his enlistment in 1916 for WW1, and registered at Guildford. In Midland Silvina operated a confectionary and fruit stall while waiting for her husband's return from the war.

When James returned with shellshock in 1918, the family moved back to Kalgoorlie. James Caddy Lanyon died on September 2nd 1919.

After James' death and burial, Silvina and her family returned to Midland Junction. Silvina applied for a tender to conduct a fruit and confectionary stall in 1921.

Silvina attended a concert in 1922 in Denmark Western Australia, where she is acknowledged with others for her contribution.

In 1923 when Silvina's home burnt down, she received an insurance payout of £550. The money received from the insurance payout allowed Silvina to invest in a mobile projector and van, travelling to country towns around the Peel region.

In 1923-24, Silvina started showing moving pictures at the Mechanics Hall, Pinjarra and the surrounding areas of the mill towns.

In 1924 she opened up an "outdoor talkies" known as the "Open Air Pictures" in Mandurah. A guesthouse was opened in 1924 called the "Ol Roy Lodge". The Lodge was run by one of Silvina's daughters Olive and husband Roy Campbell.

Tragedy struck Silvina when in 1925 her son William aged 16 was killed in a shooting accident at Wuraming and is buried in the Dwellingup cemetery.

In 1928 Silvina built her first picture theatre alongside her 'open air picture gardens', called 'The Hotham Valley Theatre' in Mandurah and sold her mobile projector and van to the Kanzler Brothers who took over the picture circuit in the hills.

Holding social dances and pictures was the entertainment of the country towns and was a draw card for those people living out of town. Silvina also had drawn Perth people to Mandurah with her charity fund raising for the RSL and Red Cross.

The Gem Pictures was also under the management of Silvina Lanyon and was showing the acclaimed film 'The Golden Road' in Pinjarra and Waroona. This film had a phenomenal run in the Eastern States and Perth, and was only being shown for a short while in the South West of WA.

It was with this success that Silvina sold her Hotham Valley Picture Theatre to the Tuckey family and started to build the Capital Theatre, also known as the "Memorial" theatre in 1934. Silvina as proprietor, also sold the Gem Pictures in 1930 to Frank H. Green and Louis R. Tapper. The Capital Theatre became a major success and much was written in the papers of the social events, films and people attending this venue.



Silvina Lanyon cont'd

Silvina was committed to supporting community activities, she held fund raising events for the RSL and Red Cross and through her commitment became a member of the cemeteries board in 1940.

Her companion at her side in Mandurah was Henry Edwards whom she married in 1933.

Silvina had 6 children, her fourth child Ronald George Lanyon born 1910 sadly died at 13 days old and is buried in the Boulder cemetery in the goldfields.

Her daughters were married and settled, leaving the youngest daughter Ellen, known as Nell helping with the running of the Capital Theatre.

Silvina's name was still attached to the census with her occupation being recorded as 'Picture Theatre Owner' until 1949.

The Capital theatre was then in the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Campbell until their departure from Mandurah. Mr. Peter Hickey became the new proprietor in 1949.

Silvina died in 1960 aged 77 years and is buried in Fremantle Cemetery.

Disclaimer:

All information is taken from Trove scanned newspapers of Western Australia between the 1920s and the 1940s.

Other information was taken from family documents held at the Mandurah Museum.

