

James Herbert Wilson

<https://hmwilson.archives.org.au/people/james-herbert-wilson.html>

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Biography

At the Perth Barracks, c.1900.

James Herbert Wilson (known as 'Jim' to everyone save his mother; she called him Herbert) was born on 6 February 1872 in Collingwood, Melbourne¹ to Mary McHarg² and William Wilson (1839–1914)³. The family had land in Kinglake in Murrindindi Shire,⁴ and in his early 20s Jim went there to grow potatoes so that he could earn some money to support the family⁵ back in Melbourne. While he was living up there in a small shack he built himself, his younger sister Jessie died of TB, and his brother Andrew moved to Perth to practise Architecture.⁵ At the peak of the gold rush, c.1890–95, Jim followed him and they went to find gold in Kalgoorlie, but with no luck⁵.

He married Edith Olive Hall⁶ on 30 January 1904 in Perth,⁷ when they were living in a rented house in Lyall Street in South Perth.⁵

“and then I think after Jean and Gordon were

¹Victorian Pioneers Index 1837–1888, National Library of Australia. Birth certificate number 1823.

²<https://hmwilson.archives.org.au/people/mary-mcharg.html>

³<https://hmwilson.archives.org.au/people/william-wilson.html>

⁴VICNAMES online geographical name database. <http://services.land.vic.gov.au/vicnames/>

⁵Hussey, R. c.1990, http://hmwilson.archives.org.au/Rae's_documents/JAMES_HERBERT_WILSON.doc unpublished manuscript, held in the H. M. Wilson Archives.

⁶<https://hmwilson.archives.org.au/people/edith-olive-hall.html>

⁷Western Australian Department of Justice Online Index of Births, Deaths and Marriages 1841–1931. Perth. Marriage registration number 1195.

⁸Certificate of marriage of James Herbert Wilson and Edith Olive Hall, 1904. Via Ancestry user Jennibarryb. <https://archive.org/details/JamesEdithWilsonMarriageCert1904>

born, he had a stroke of luck and won 100 pounds, whether on a horse or a lottery or a raffle I have no idea, but the result was that he was the owner of two blocks of land west of Subiaco. Andrew designed and supervised the building of the house.”⁵ “In the middle of June of 1914 my father bought as farm at Quairading for which he paid 1000 pounds sterling.”⁹ Avon Location 8286. Train to Perth. c.1920: pressure from family to sell farm (for £2000) as Charlie had started C.M. Wilson Pty. Ltd. in Murray Street.⁹

Had a house in Shenton Park on half an acre. It's still there, although unrecognisable.

Mid-thirties had a heart attack on the boat home from Devonport, got home and Charlie insisted he stop work.⁹

Jim died on 1 June 1942 in Perth.⁹

<https://archive.org/details/james-herbert-wilson-birth-certificate-1872>

Related items (2)

Item 208: Jim at work at the PWD

TYPE: Photograph

DATE: c. 1900

DESCRIPTION: Jim Wilson at his desk in the Barracks, West Perth.

From the Wilson family brown cloth Kodak photo album.

Item 32: JAMES HERBERT WILSON.doc

TYPE: Manuscript

DATE: c. 1995

DESCRIPTION: Rae Hussey's recollections of her father Jim, probably written in the mid 1990s on her new laptop.

JAMES HERBERT WILSON (1872-1942)

My father.

So it is not easy to write objectively as I had very little personal conversation with him as often hap-

⁹Hussey, R. c.1990. http://hmwilson.archives.org.au/Rae's_documents/James_Herbert_Wilson_continued.doc Unpublished manuscript held in the H. M. Wilson Archives.

pens in a large family. What I can write about is what I remember about the things he did, and facts I have gathered over the years, mainly from papers kept at Linlathen where his mother, brother Charlie and sisters Maimie and Margaret lived from about the mid-twenties. After the last of them died I was living in Melbourne and Frank and I had been more or less looking after them for years and it fell to me to sort out all the family stuff, and there were quite a number of suitcases filled with old papers and letters, it was a large home and Charlie had also had a self-contained unit added to it where he lived when he was not living in the home he had built at Sherbrooke.

JIM as my father was always called by his family and friends (my mother always called him Herbert) had a sister JESSIE who was a few years older, and she had developed Tb. which was then called consumption, and the family resources were at a low point, with the older brothers more or less keeping things going by teaching in Government schools wherever there was an opening so it was likely that Jim did not get the full education the others had received but really was quite well educated as they always were a very united family and the older ones made sure that the younger ones did not miss out. I know that Jim when young developed a stammer, and the older boys put their knowledge of the classics to good use by getting him to read slowly, and effectively, with the result that when he was 11 or 12 he won First Prize for elocution, the prize being a large, illustrated volume of Shakespeare which is now in the possession of my nephew Alan.

The family had acquired a block of land at Kinglake up in or near the Dandenongs, and it was decided that Jim, who was a strong healthy lad, would go up there and start growing potatoes, always considered a good cash crop, and that his younger brother Charlie would later join him in the enterprise. Jim worked very hard, first chopping down trees, then building a small cabin (he was able to get a bit of casual help), then digging a well. He was able to work out all the specifications etc and wrote frequently to the family making suggestions as to how things could be done, His handwriting at this time I found very interesting, showing the beginnings of the really beautiful script he developed as he got older. In later years, in fact not long before he died, his bank manager told me that his writing, and his signature, were quite remarkable in that they were both easily read and beautiful and never had varied in all the time he had known Jim. Anyhow, when Jessie died the family became very concerned about Jim, as he was getting too many bad bronchial attacks, and as his brother Andrew had gone to Western Australia and developed quite a

reputation as a good architect, Jim should go and join him. Charlie had shown no interest in growing potatoes. A bad storm finished the Kinglake venture as a large tree came down and fell across the little cabin, destroying everything in it including a violin which Jim had taught himself to play. He had a beautiful tenor voice and later in Perth was a member of a men's choir called the Leidertaffel, they used to put on concerts regularly in the Perth Town Hall.

At this time gold fever was nearing its peak, (I have not yet discovered how to put in an apostrophe with this little keyboard, much smaller than the Desktop) so it was not long before Andrew and Jim decided to go to Geraldton, and head out to I think somewhere near Mullewa. Great adventure. But no gold. So it was back to Perth and Jim had no difficulty in finding a post in the Public Service, where his good mathematical ability as well as his handwriting were an asset. He was in the Accounts Department for some years, there is a photo somewhere of him at his desk, a large one with many pigeonholes as was normal for the time. I remember when a small child, he told us he had that day counter-signed the largest cheque the department had ever written, it was for over a million pounds, an enormous sum for those days. Andrew continued as an architect, years ago when travelling in the area with Frank I saw a brass plaque on the Boulder Town Hall with Architect- Oswald A. Wilson on the bottom after all the other names.

My father was evidently enjoying life. He had joined a rowing club as well as the choir, and his name is mentioned as being a member of the West Perth Presbyterian Church (later to become the Ross Memorial when the fine new church was built). He won the sculling Championship, and that is how a very good pair of binoculars came to our family. I used them for some years but gave them to one of the young people who went yachting, probably Alan. I had a smaller pair for myself which Frank and I used a lot when travelling, and now have a very small pair, still used occasionally. He married in I think 1903, living in a rented home in Lyall Street in South Perth, and then I think after Jean and Gordon were born, he had a stroke of luck and won 100 pounds, whether on a horse or a lottery or a raffle I have no idea, but the result was that he was the owner of two blocks of land west of Subiaco. Andrew designed and supervised the building of the house. I saw the specifications after my mother died and later on gave it to the present owner. There was no road, Onslow Road was hardly more than a gravel track. And public transport was about ten minute's walk to the west, and there was a tram a bit further in the op-

posite direction. The house was built in 1908 and the Rosalie School had been opened in 1906. My father put up a summer house in the back yard, built of untrimmed logs and a fence all around the outside, just uprights with two strands of wire. The postman came to the back, near the kitchen, on a horse, mail was delivered morning and afternoon and on Saturday morning. That was the time of penny post. A wooden wash house, wooden shed where tools and wood were stored, and a W.C. with a pan which was emptied once a week by the nightman who came in the early hours of the morning. Rubbish was disposed of by putting it in "the hole" which was as I remember about four feet square and quite deep, dug of course by my father. He worked so hard. Leaving soon after 8am and getting home well after 6pm. Saturdays about 1pm. These were the normal working days even long after I started work. And in his little bit of spare time he mended our shoes, grew the fruit and vegetables, planted the garden, clipped the hedge in the front which served as a fence for many years, replaced the wire fence with wooden palings, calcimined all the inside walls periodically, made insect screens for all the windows - these are things I remember him doing. Much would have been during his annual two week's holiday.