



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Suicides and Settlers : Their Place in 19th Century West Australian Social History* by Claire McIntyre. Hesperian Press, Carlisle (WA), 2008. Soft Cover, 223 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-0-85905-446-1, RRP \$28.00.**

This interesting and informative book, compiled by the author of *On the Edge – Deaths at The Gap covering the period 1863 – 1963*, follows the approach that Yvonne and Kevin Coate adopted in *Lonely Graves of Western Australia & Burials at Sea* and in *More Lonely Graves of Western Australia*. It presents information on 315 suicides, listing the people alphabetically by surname. To help readers locate those of specific interest, it also groups the names under localities. In a nice touch, that listing also gives the year of the person's death and, if known, his or her occupation.

In the localities listing, the names for Broome are: Leon Dumana (1898, Prisoner), Sabbero Nakashima or Nagashima (1896, Boarding-house keeper), and Severino Robato (1899). Those for Halls Creek are: Charles Duffy (1899, Miner) and Arthur Wokes (1897, Miner), while a third miner, Archibald Morrison, is recorded for Kimberley Goldfields. No entries are recorded for Derby or Fitzroy Crossing but the names for Wyndham are: Ah Moy (1886, Cook), Peter Alexander Kemp (1888, Telegraph line inspector), James Moniz (1889, Teamster), and J Verunda (1886), whose name also may have been spelt Veronda or Veronnda.

Some of these names will be familiar to people interested in Kimberley history but others will be new. The entries for Leon Dumana and Severino Robato, for example, are drawn from the *Police Gazette*, a very rich historical source but one to which historians and researchers tend to go only for specific topics. The entry for Sabbero Nakashima also comes from the *Police Gazette* but, instead of having only the sparsest of information, it has details gleaned from a police file and a newspaper article. The presence of the former is indicative of the author's assiduousness in following up file references given in the gazettes while that of the newspaper material may reflect the equally dogged work done by Peter Bridge ([Hesperian Press](#)) in combing old newspapers for interesting historical information.

The following up of file references has been particularly fruitful. The entry for Arthur Wokes' death, for instance, includes a transcription of a poignant letter in which he asked Joseph Fagan to take his money and property, and to give Bob Button a share if that man would accept it. In asking Joseph to take his pup "Whiskey", he wrote: "if you don't want him destroy him I would have done so myself but I haven't the heart to do it". Sad and evocative, such letters help to fill the many blanks that exist in our knowledge of the past.

Importantly, from the reader's point of view, the existence of the transcript of the dead man's letter could become evident to someone who was searching for only Joseph Fagan or Bob Button. Like the Coates, the author of *Suicides and Settlers* provides an index of associated people who are mentioned in the book. That index also contains abbreviations that identify people who were Aboriginal, doctors, or police. There is no separate index for places or vessels (features that are particularly useful in the *Lonely Graves* books) but one can hardly complain about that omission.

Claire McIntyre's *Suicides and Settlers* is a welcome addition to the range of biographical dictionaries that record Western Australian people and deaths. She is to be applauded, too, for including only those deaths for which there was a formal finding of suicide.

Cathie Clement (September 2008)