

Willagee

This suburb was thought to be named after Wilgee Lake located in what is now Kardinya. The name 'Wilgee' is a Nyoongah term meaning 'red ochre'. Wilgee and other lakes in the area had an abundance of red ochre which was traded to other areas in Australia. Wilgee clay had medicinal value and was also burnt in fire to make powder and combined with grease to make body paint for ceremonies. Willagee had important spiritual significance in The Dreaming because it was the place of the emu, where they bred. Emus were also a popular food source. Other food came in the form of mullet, crabs and edible roots.

The suburb which became Willagee was part of the land belonging to Swan Location 73. It began to be developed in 1951. Many of the streets are named after people who arrived on HMS Success in 1827 such as Drury Street and Garling Street. In the early 1950s the State Housing Commission



A327_8 Willagee house

saw the need for low cost housing and opened up 1400 housing sites. As a result 240 Austrian tradesmen were brought out to help build the Austrian prefabricated kit homes designed for working class families. The Willagee Primary School was established in 1954 and Carawatha Primary School in 1959 to cater for the increasing population in the area. Caralee Community School opened in January 2005 on the site of the Fremantle Language Development Centre as an amalgamated school with the closure of the first two schools.

The Willagee Park Hotel opened in November 1956 on the corner of High Road (now Leach Highway) and Stock Road in Melville. It was closed in October 2002 and was used for bar scenes in the 2003 Australian film 'Japanese Story' starring Toni Collette. The building was demolished to make way for a supermarket. In December 1956 the outdoor Garden Theatre opened in Archibald Street. However, the popularity of TV saw its demise in 1958-1959 and the land was sold off.

The major parks and reserves of the suburb include Winnacott Reserve, Webber Reserve, Harry Bailey Park and Harmony Park. In 1999 George Humes Park located in front of the Willagee Library, was created to honour a well respected Noongar boxer George Humes (1936– 1995). He was twice a Golden Gloves boxer and Sportsman of the Year in 1962 and 1963. George spent his life assisting Aboriginal people in need.

Community groups include the 1st Willagee Kardinya Scout Group, the Melville Men's Softball Club and the Willagee Alive Group.

If you have any items, photographs, or historic information relating to the City of Melville or our suburbs please contact us.



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