

Kalamunda & Districts
Historical Society
Oral Histories



Rex Hutchison
A Memoir

"They were the first ones into the bush. Croxton, the chap that pioneered this place".

HE WAS A SLEEPER CUTTER AND A TEAMSTER

He had a team of horses and he'd cut sleepers and haul them into Kalamunda with his team. He'd haul for other cutters that were operating in the area as well.

That was the first move when settlement came to the district. The sleeper cutters went in.

Rex Hutchison

An interview of Mr Rex Hutchison was conducted by Donald Dawson, 29 May 1995 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



Arthur Hutchison Senior aged 21, circa 1900

Rex Hutchison, born 7 October 1916, was raised in Kalamunda.

His ancestors arrived in Australia in the 1850s with both sides of his family following a similar path.

His mother's family travelled from Cornwall, England as indentured miners to the copper mines in Burra, South Australia. His father's family worked in the Victorian goldfields around St Arnaud and Maryborough. They moved across to Western Australia, settling in Kalgoorlie / Boulder around 1896.

Rex's father, Arthur, was a shift boss on the mines. After saving some money they relocated to the Piesse Brook area in Kalamunda. With little knowledge of the orchard business Arthur bought 125 acres of land and ran his own orchard.

The small orchard, already established on a couple of acres of the land, was developed into a much larger holding over the years. They grew stone fruit and citrus with peas, swedes and potatoes in between.

Piesse Brook was very isolated at that time. The nearest neighbour was Mr Croxton, who originally started the orchard. When he sold the land he moved a quarter of a mile up the hill.

The Loarings were the other neighbours but there was no access between the properties. The track to Kalamunda, now called the old Mundaring Road, was very rough and there was no connection this way until Aldersyde Road was built after the war.

Rex had two younger brothers, Neil and Frank. Rex's uncle, who was living with them for a while moved into Kalamunda and married into the Stirk family.

Over the years much of the land was sold leaving 30 acres that continues to be run by Rex's family.

The three HUTCHISON BOYS

L-R Rex, Neil, Frank. Piesse Brook. circa late 1920s





Developing the land

In the early 1920s land was provided to soldiers when they returned from the Great War. This was called the Soldier Settlement Scheme. Rex remembers the clearing of the land in Kalamunda with the steam traction engine pulling trees up and down the valley.

Using a horse they would pull out a large cable from a drum attached to the rear axle of the machine. The cable was pulled out for about a quarter of an acre and the other end was anchored to something solid. The machine was started, put into gear and the rope would wind up pulling the tree over. Sometimes they came out clean but often the roots had to be removed manually.

Once the trees were down a team of Irish migrants would cut the logs, bore holes in them and detonate the gelignite placed in the holes to burn them quickly. The wild Irishmen, as they were referred to, camped down by the junction of Aldersyde and Mundaring Roads.

It was an uphill battle for many of the servicemen on the land. Those who came back fairly fit and with a pension did particularly well. Many however failed because they didn't stay on the land long enough to make any money.

Properties, under the control of the Agricultural Bank were put on the market and sold to anyone who could afford them at that time.

The Italian orchardists bought some of the properties and with their past agricultural experience, dedication and hard work they ended up with large areas of land going right up to Carilla as well as around the Stanhope Road area.

The Soldier Settlement Scheme

The Western Australian government settled more than 5,000 returned soldiers, many from the British Army, on farms.

By 1929, just over 3,500 remained on the land.

National Museum
Australia

Italian Orchardists succeeded

THEY WORKED HARD AND
HAD FAMILIES THAT
WORKED HARD

"SO THE SITUATION WAS
TO HAVE A LITTLE WIFE
AND A BIG FAMILY AND
YOU COULDN'T LOSE!"

Rex Hutchison

Wild Horses

Settlers caught wild horses that were roaming in the Kalamunda bush. They trained them but they often proved to be very temperamental. The horses were quite small and because of their size were not suited to farm work but were suitable for riding.

When Rex started school he had to travel along a lonely track into Kalamunda. His parents thought that a pony would be the safest way for him to travel through this uninhabited area.

Mr King, who owned a property near Kalamunda, had a brumby that had simply wandered into his paddock. Although still wild Rex's father bought the brumby and had it broken. Rex's ability to handle a horse at the age of eight was limited and he remembers climbing on one side of the horse and falling off the other.

Scouts in the 1930s

Rex joined the scouts when he was about 14 years old. A Kalamunda troop was established around 1930 by the Methodist Minister who lived in Lesmurdie. It wound down after a while but was later revived by the Morell family.

Rex spent a week at a scout camp in the Karrakatta Military Depot where the boys learned about various industries. He remembers it as being 'a real eye opener for boys from the bush'.



L-R Neil, Rex and Frank on a brumby. Piesse Brook Circa 1926

"I don't think they were true brumbies"

They were a conglomeration of horses that had been turned out. They just grouped together in a herd and roamed around.

Rex Hutchison

On the last day of camp the troop attended the Jamboree at the WACA. Lord Baden Powell, founder of The Boy Scouts Association, addressed the troops in Western Australia as part of his world tour.

Rex fondly remembers his scouting days as a boy.



Burnt Aldersyde Road Hutchison house. 8 February 1940.
(now number 53 Aldersyde Road)

School of hard knocks

There were no opportunities for Rex to learn a trade in the Kalamunda area as there was no industry there at the time. Limited transportation contributed to his lack of trade choice as he would have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to get to work at eight.

Rex's future was ultimately decided for him when his father's health started to fail two years before his death in 1934. Rex left school at the age of 14 to help his father and eventually took over the running of the property when he was just 16 years old.

Rex was familiar with the tasks at hand as he had been driving a horse and plough since he was around 10 years old. It was a very hard time economically for the family, as it was for many during the depression. With limited academic qualifications, a mother and two brothers still attending school he did the best he could to keep the property going.

On 2 April 1935 a severe storm swept through the valley right through to Pickering Brook. It destroyed the crops and fruit trees had to be pruned back because of the hail stone damage.

The following year a bushfire raged through destroying the house and packing shed. The family had experienced fires before and always managed to beat them but this one was simply too fierce and out of control.

Rex's mother was on her own in the house whilst he was establishing a fire break about twenty yards back from the road. Suddenly a strong wind rushed up the valley and lifted the fire across the road heading straight for the house. Rex ran back to the house as fast as he could and managed to drive his mother to safety using his old utility.

Fortunately the house was insured and neighbours rallied together to help each other. Mr Elson, who lived on the other side of the hill, was a retired carpenter. He offered to rebuild the house for the cost of the insurance money as long as Rex did the labouring work.

This turned out to be a great opportunity for Rex as Mr Elson taught Rex many skills over this time. These skills were put into use some years later when Rex built his own house.

Burnt Aldersyde Road Hutchison house (now number 53 Aldersyde Road) 8 February 1940. House was built about 1914 for Arthur and his bride Stella.





Merle and Rex Hutchison 22 November 1941 at St Barnabus Church, Kalamunda.

The turning point

For entertainment the young people attended the local dances held at the Agricultural and Church Halls. The sixpenny dance was held in the middle of the week and the big dance was on Saturday nights. On Sundays they would go to Mr Wallis' property in Walliston and play tennis, swim or socialise over afternoon tea.

Rex met Merle Jackson who was working in one of the Guest Houses in Kalamunda. Merle's father, originally from Bendigo, knew Rex's family from their time in the Goldfields.

Rex and Merle married at St Barnabus Church, Kalamunda in 1941. They had two daughters and three sons. Rex continued to run the orchard but also took on contract ploughing, with a horse and plough, for the additional income. After the war he worked for Chamberlain's tractor factory as a tradesman's assistant. He learned many skills there and started to build fruit graders. His welding and general structural skills were put to use for maintaining machinery. Later he worked in a large furniture factory before he retired due to failing eyesight.

Merle remembers that Kalamunda was a very popular destination in the 1940s with quite a few Guest Houses catering for the visitors. During the peak holiday season she would watch the buses coming up the hill, full to capacity with people standing on the running boards and luggage racks.

Many business people owned homes in Kalamunda so they could retreat to the bush for the weekend or for a holiday.



Merle Jackson with her father, Albert Victor Jackson
22 November 1941



Arthur, Don and Marie Hutchison in garden next to Nanna's (Stella Hutchison) house. Circa 1950



Marie and Don Hutchison on the front verandah of Aldersyde Road House. Circa 1953



Fashionable Fruit

Fashions apply to everything including fruit. Early in the orchard business there were only a few varieties of apples, which included Granny Smith, Yates, Cleopatra and to a lesser degree, Jonathons.

Rex recalls that these were all very popular apples and then newer varieties started to appear and more or less replaced them. Although the Yates were a nice apple, growers didn't like them. It was thought that it may have been because they didn't keep very well.

The Delicious apple were originally developed from the Five Crown Pippin. The newer varieties included the Red and Golden Delicious. Other varieties developed included the Royal Gala and the Pink Lady. These all became very popular over time.

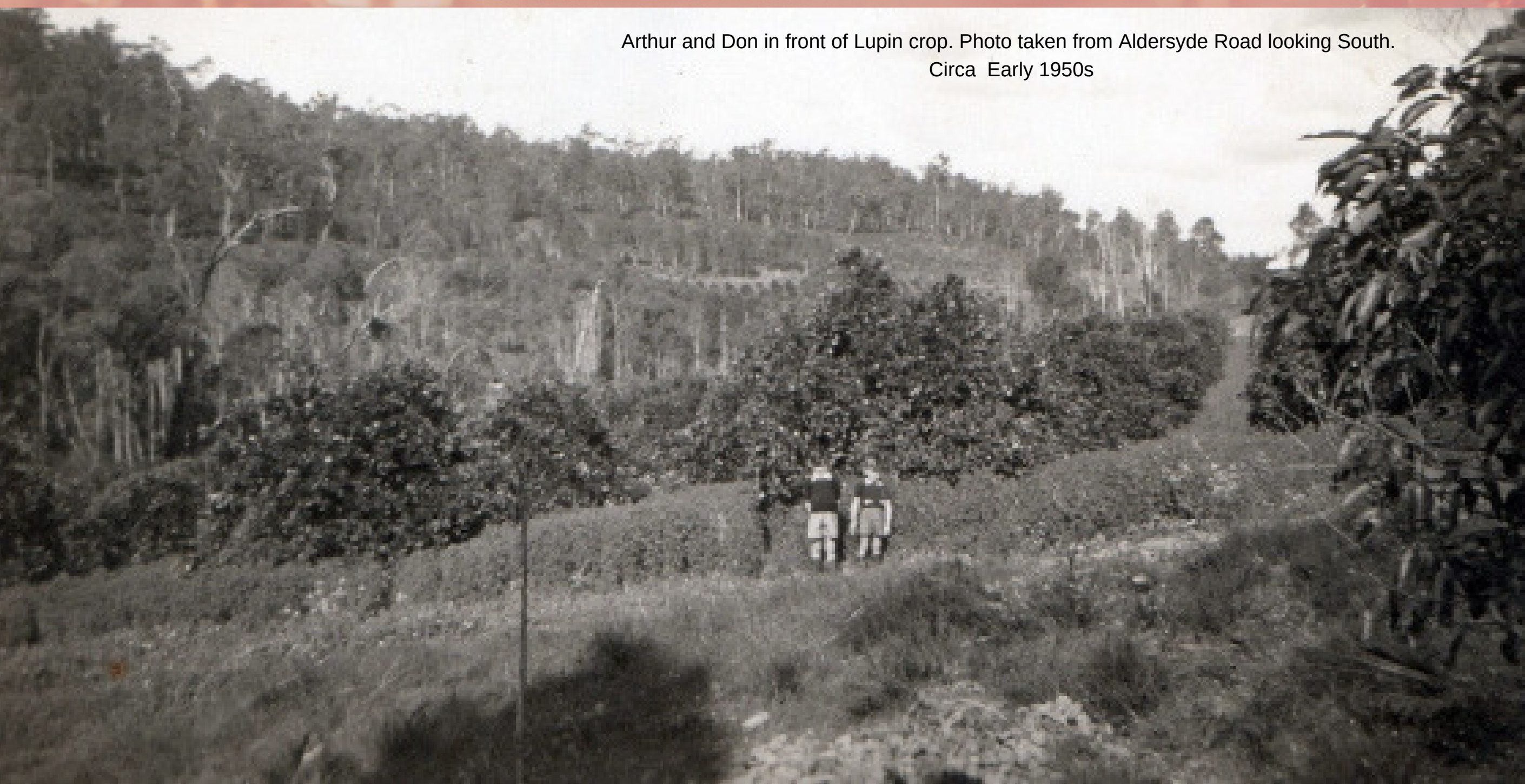
Many of these varieties were developed in America, but some were developed in Western Australia in the Stoneville Research Station.



Rex Hutchison picking oranges circa 1941.

LUPIN CROPS

Grown between rows of orange trees to plough in for fertilizer.



Arthur and Don in front of Lupin crop. Photo taken from Aldersyde Road looking South.
Circa Early 1950s

Cover photo: On the steps of the Hutchison family house. Circa 1926
At Rear; Stella and Arthur Hutchison, Front: L-R Neil, Rex and Frank

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