

Information Sheet No. 20



Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

CHARLES FITZGERALD – “Our Namesake”

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| 1791 | - Born in Kilkee, Co Clare, Ireland. |
| 1809, Mar 17 | - Entered Royal Navy. |
| 1826, Mar 27 | - Received his first commission. |
| 1838, Jul 26 | - Command of HMS <i>Buzzard</i> . |
| 1840s | - Governor of Gambia settlements, West Africa. |
| 1848-1855 | - Governor of Western Australia. |
| 1887, Dec 29 | - Died in England. |



Charles Fitzgerald. Photo from *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, J. Battye, 1912.

Captain Charles Fitzgerald was the Governor of Western Australia between 1848 and 1855. The town of Geraldton is believed to have been named after him, although it was never officially “Fitzgerald’s Town” or “Gerald’s Town”. Who chose to give Fitzgerald’s name is not certain, but it was most likely John Septimus Roe, the Surveyor-General.

The naming honour recognized Fitzgerald’s intimate involvement in the activities leading to Geraldton’s establishment. On arrival in the Swan River colony he could see that it was economically stagnant and perhaps likely to collapse. There was a need for new pastoral land and mineral resources. He personally set out to view those in and around Geraldton recently described by Gregory and others, arriving at Champion Bay on 6 December 1848. Led by A.C. Gregory, the party travelled on foot to see the lead deposit at Galena on the Murchison



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River. On their return the party encountered a hostile group near King's Table Hill on the Bowes River. Charles Fitzgerald was speared in the thigh by a man named Dga-bena, and also shot dead the Aboriginal leader Orr-da-ma-ra. The group made it back to Champion Bay and travelled onwards to Perth, where the Governor eventually recovered from his wound.

Fitzgerald's wounding did not deter his plans for Geraldton, which he instigated without informing his masters in England – a sign of his "autocratic temperament". In some sense the fatal affray contributed to his intent to make the establishment of Geraldton as much a mission of peace to the Aborigines as it was a grab for new economic resources. Fitzgerald, as a man of his time, saw peace as being on European terms, hence the military detachment that established Geraldton initially. In subsequent years he often stressed to William Burges and other Champion Bay officials that fatal force was to be used judiciously.

In 1852 Charles took a second trip to the shores of Champion Bay to see the results of his plan. The tour was extensively reported in the Perth press. Fitzgerald departed for England in 1855, succeeded by Kennedy. Although he never returned to the west coast, he was eulogised as "having evinced until his death the liveliest interest in Western Australian affairs".

References

*Text taken from **Geraldton: 150 Years, 150 Lives**, Local Studies Department, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 64.*

Copies are available from the Library, 37 Marine Terrace, Geraldton (PO Box 101, Geraldton, WA, 6531) for \$27.50 (plus \$6.50 postage and handling).

