

Information Sheet No. 29



City of
Greater Geraldton
Regional Library



Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

O'DEA FAMILY – 70 Years of Music

The name O'Dea is synonymous with music in Geraldton and three generations of the O'Dea family have been key members of various local orchestras and bands, particularly the Geraldton Town Band.

James

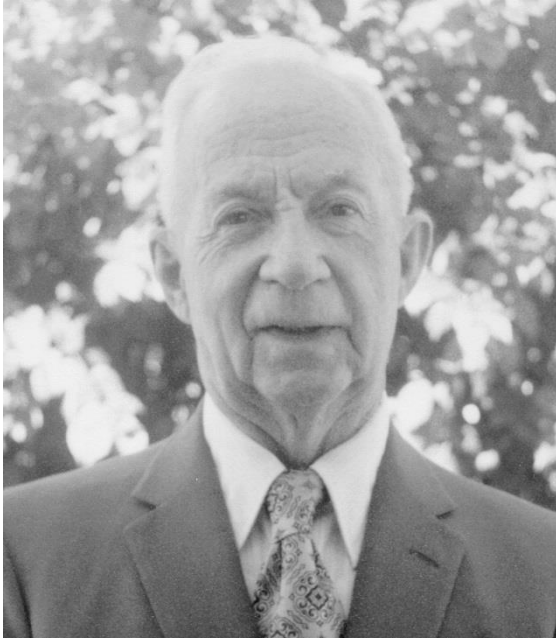
- 1896, Jan 15** - Born in Malmsbury, Victoria.
- 1924** - Married Eva Blanche Hill at Parilla, South Australia.
- 1930** - Moved to Geraldton to join Geraldton Newspapers.
- 1933** - Inaugural member of Geraldton Town Band.
- 1969** - Life Membership of the Geraldton Town Band.
- 1976** - Awarded an Outstanding Citizenship Certificate.
- 1980** - Awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.
- 1986, May 13** - Died in Geraldton.

Born on 15 January 1896 in Malmsbury, Victoria, James (Jim) O'Dea moved to Geraldton in 1930 with his wife, Eva, and infant son, Vincent, to take up a position as factory foreman with Geraldton Newspapers Ltd. One of six children, Jim had lost his father at the age of 15, which meant that he and his brothers were forced to help the family survive by trapping and fishing. His first introduction to music was on the piccolo, playing in a small group at local dances, but he soon developed a preference for brass bands.

By 1911 Jim was a playing member of the Creswick Brass Band and learning the printing trade at the *Creswick Advertiser*. His work led to a move to Pinnaroo in South Australia in 1918 and while with the *Pinnaroo and Border Times* Jim was reporter, photographer, typesetter, printer and distributor. He also found the time to join the Pinnaroo Brass Band. He met and married (on 13 January 1924) Eva Blanche Hill and the couple decided to try their luck in the West about 1929.

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James O'Dea.

Photograph courtesy of Mr V O'Dea.

After their arrival in Geraldton, two more children, Audine and Leslie, were born and Jim joined the RSL Band, both as a player and a teacher to youngsters. In 1932 Jim joined forces with a local pianist, Miss Lynda Marsh, and other instrumentalists in a small orchestra and the group grew into the Lyric Orchestra, performing at many local functions.

In 1933, Jim and other members of the now defunct RSL Band formed a new Geraldton Town Band, an organisation that continues to provide music to the Geraldton public today. Around 1936 Jim became involved in helping musical and choral groups at Stella Maris College, which had a strong musical education tradition at the time. This involvement led in turn to the formation of the Xaverian Orchestra which in 1943 was twenty-eight members strong. Jim conducted the group and played clarinet.

Jim was honoured with Life Membership of the Geraldton Town Band on 12 February 1969 and he continued to teach music until 1975. In 1976 he was awarded an Outstanding Citizenship Certificate by the Mayor of Geraldton, Mr C W Mildwaters.

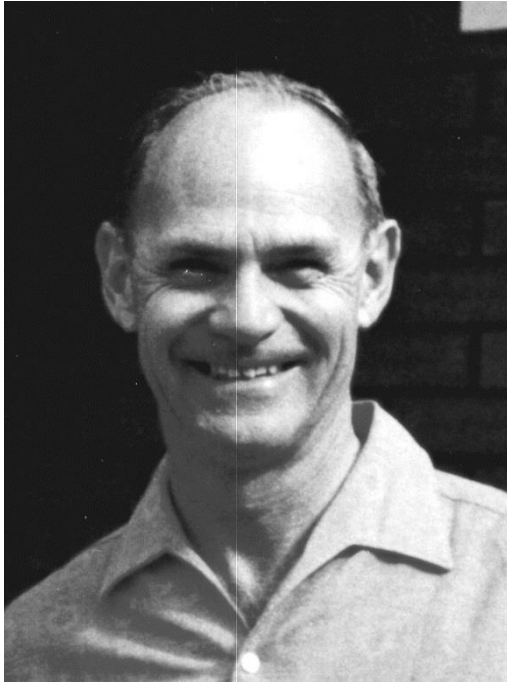
On 26 January 1980, at the age of 85, James O'Dea was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for fifty years of service to music in Geraldton. He died on 13 May 1986. Jim's wife, Eva, celebrated her 100th birthday at Nazareth House on 25 August 1999.

Vincent

- 1928, Mar 9** - **Born in Pinnaroo, South Australia.**
- 1930** - **Moved to Geraldton with his family.**
- 1943** - **Inaugural member of Xaverian Orchestra.**
- 1944** - **Joined Geraldton Newspapers.**
- 1952** - **Married Patricia Murphy at Cottesloe, WA.**
- 1989** - **Retired**

Vincent: Born in Pinnaroo, South Australia, on 9 March 1928, Vincent (Vince) William O'Dea was educated at St Patrick's College, Geraldton, and learnt his music from Mother Peter at Stella Maris College. Vince's instrument was the keyboard and with Mother Peter's encouragement he began playing the harmonium at St Francis Xavier Cathedral for Benediction and then Mass and Evening Devotions. He continued to offer his musical services to the Church throughout his life, either playing the organ or conducting choirs.





Vincent O'Dea.

Photograph courtesy of Mr V O'Dea.

In 1944 he followed his father into the printing trade, joining Geraldton Newspapers as an apprentice compositor and retiring as General Manager in 1989 after 45 years with Geraldton Newspapers. In that time Vince witnessed, and adapted to, the huge changes in technology in the printing industry. Vince also designed the new Geraldton Guardian premises when the newspaper moved from Marine Terrace to Barker Street.

Vince married Pat Murphy on 27 December 1952 and the couple went on to have four children, Peter, Margaret, Michael (deceased) and Mary. Vince devoted much of his spare time to various local musical enterprises, including the Xaverian Orchestra, the Geraldton Glee Singers, the Geraldton Music Lovers Club, the Geraldton Combined Churches Choir and the Geraldton Choral Society, of which Vince was the inaugural conductor. When St Francis Xavier Cathedral celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, Bishop Hickey

had six special medals struck to commemorate the occasion and presented one of these to Vince O'Dea. Since his retirement, Vince and Pat have done considerable travelling throughout the world and continue to enjoy their eight grandchildren and various other interests.

Peter

- 1955, Oct 7** - **Born in Geraldton, Western Australia.**
- 1967** - **Joined Geraldton Town Band.**
- 1994** - **Life Membership of the Geraldton Town Band.**
- 1996** - **Appointed Band Master, Geraldton Town Band.**

Born in Geraldton on 7 October 1955, Peter was educated at St Patrick's College. He learnt music from his grandfather and joined the Geraldton Town Band in 1967 at the age of eleven, playing cornet. A builder by trade, Peter has continued his association with the Band over the years and was awarded Life Membership in 1994. Peter has also played with the Canning City Band as first solo cornet and performed in the Australian Brass Band Championships in Adelaide in 1990. In 1996 Peter took over the position of Band Master, relinquishing the position in 2000 when he moved to Perth with his wife, Lorraine, and children, Rebecca and Kelvin.

Peter's sister, Mary, is also a playing member of the Geraldton Town Band, playing (in 1999) the euphonium. Her son, Kyle Watts (Jim O'Dea's great-grandson), is a recent member, joining the percussion section to become the fourth generation of this family to make a contribution to Geraldton's musical activities.



References

Text taken from **Geraldton: 150 Years, 150 Lives**, Local Studies Department, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 129.

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).

