



Margaret Feilman

(*The West Australian*, 7 July 1948, p.3)

Margaret Anne Feilman (1921-2013) was born in Perth on 22 June 1921. Her parents, Calcutta-born teacher Herbert Bernard Feilman (1882-1951) and Ethel Anne Feilman nee Turner (1894-1976) from York, Western Australia were married in December 1916. Herbert had enlisted with the Australian forces for First World War service, at Blackboy Hill, two months prior to the wedding. Leaving Ethel at their home in Colin Street West Perth, Herbert Feilman departed Fremantle on the *Miltiades* in January 1917, hence disembarking in England at Devonport, Plymouth in March. He crossed the English Channel and served in France from late 1917, joining the Australian Corps Intelligence Police, and was returned safely to WA on the *Anchises* in April 1919.

'Herb' Feilman had previously been working in the State School system, teaching at Marble Bar as early as 1914, and soon returned to his employment upon return to Perth. Herbert and Ethel's first child, John Bernard, was born in 1920, but died at suburban Carlisle in September 1922. Following the birth of Margaret in 1921, a third child Patricia Edith was born in December 1925. Herb was teaching at the Carlisle School in the three school years 1922-1924, and was also active as a State School Teachers' Union representative, and then later with the Country Teachers Association from 1926. It has been noted that Margaret's love of the environment stemmed from playing in the forests around Dwellingup and Jarrahdale as a child. Herb was headmaster at Jarrahdale by 1933, but teaching back at the Perth suburb of Rivervale by 1941.

Margaret's academic drive and perseverance was apparent from a young age. Earning a scholarship at Perth College from 1934 until 1937, she became a Prefect and was named Dux in her final year of secondary schooling. In 1937 Margaret was articled to WA Public Works Department (PWD) Principal Architect Albert 'Paddy' Clare (1894-1975), becoming the first female architectural cadet the State had possessed.

During her four-year cadetship, Margaret also studied part-time at the University of Western Australia for an Arts degree in History and Economics. When architect Zoie Tjhou Bennett (1911-1985) left Perth in 1941 to make a new home in Victoria, Margaret was promoted to being in charge of the drawing office at the WA Workers' Homes Board, first formed in 1912, and later to become the State Housing Commission. She completed the Arts degree in 1943, and successfully took the final examination of the Architects Board of Western Australia in late 1945. Margaret registered as an architect (no. 176) during December 1945, just the fifth female in the State to do so, and in 1946 both Margaret Feilman and Margaret Pitt Morison became Associates of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). Nancy Allen, Dorothea Hancock, and Zoie Bennett were the only preceding female members of the previously male-dominated memberships of institutes of architects available within the State (West Australian Institute of Architects 1896-1921, Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia 1921-1943, and RAIA (1930 onward).

Despite a promising increase in the number of women entering the profession in WA in the 1930s, with the disruption of the Second World War (1939-1945) hindering the potential studies of both men and women, just six females were registered as architects in Western Australia in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Marie Jackson was the sixth female registrant (Feb. 1949, no. 200). Preceding her were Margaret Pitt Morison (Oct 1924, no.102 & Aug 1929, no.129), Nancy Allen (Dec 1932, no.138), Dorothea Hancock (Dec 1932, no.139); Zoie Bennett-Fryer (Dec 1933, no.142), and Margaret Feilman (Dec 1945, no.176).

Some years after completing her cadetship in the PWD – the first and, at the time, only woman in its professional workforce – Margaret accepted a role as an architect in Queensland, working for the Brisbane City Council, but moved to

Melbourne after being told she lacked sufficient experience to apply for a British Council Scholarship to study town planning. With the bombing of Darwin and much of New Guinea during the war, Margaret was soon employed in the newly-established planning unit within the Head Office of the Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing in 1947 to reconstruct towns at these places. This practical work, combined with her qualifications, provided eligibility for the desired British Council Scholarship. In mid-1948, Margaret was delighted to hear that she had secured an award valued at £430 per annum plus travelling expenses for the period 1948-1949, granted to allow her to study Town and Country Planning at the University of Durham. Margaret gained her post-graduate certificate and diploma in Town and Country Planning with honours and was admitted as an Associate Member of the Town Planning Institute (London). The British approach to town planning and the reinstatement of cities devastated by war was of particular interest to her. Margaret returned to WA in August of 1950, relating to a *Western Mail* journalist that she had recently 'hitch-hiked through Holland and France, where I was able to view reconstruction work on ruined cities'. Margaret considered that Holland was very much further ahead with its work than any other war-devastated countries in Europe.

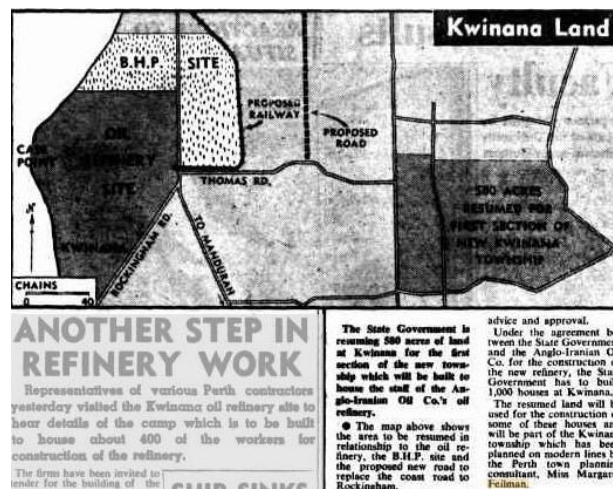


Margaret with her mother Ethel, shortly after returning from England to WA in 1950

(*Western Mail*, 24 August 1950, p.28)

At first Margaret experienced difficulty in finding employment that would suitably utilise her newly-acquired (and preferred to architecture) town planning skills. The Planning Institute of WA, sporadically active in the first half of the twentieth century, invited Margaret to lecture on the post-war state of town planning in the United Kingdom. Demand for her services as a guest speaker subsequently grew, allowing Margaret to further promote the importance of town planning to State and local government authorities in WA.

Herb Feilman had retired in 1947, and was living with Ethel at Mountjoy Road Nedlands in the late 1940s, before passing away at Shenton Park in May 1951, just before Margaret's thirtieth birthday. It was around this time Margaret took the bold step of opening her own practice, the only one of its kind operating in Western Australia at the time. As the first fully-qualified town planning consultant in the State and, as a qualified architect as well, she was at the forefront of her profession and set an example for the emergence, post-war, of young women seeking careers in Western Australia's development.



Kwinana Land (*The West Australian*, 13 December 1952, p.15)

In 1952, Margaret continued her association with the State Housing Commission, which had approached her for help to improve the use of land in its subdivisions following the Second World War (1939-1945). She was appointed to lead the planning for the new town of Kwinana, on land south of Perth adjacent to a new port and industrial facility on Cockburn Sound, to support and house 25,000 local workers. Kwinana embodied not only what she had learned in Britain but also incorporated her strongly-held cultural values through aesthetic, social, and environmental themes.

SHC PLANS TO BUILD NEW UNIT PROJECT Maniana Homes

In October the State Housing Commission plans to commence building 323 home units at Queen's Park.

This new housing estate will be called Maniana (aboriginal for "tomorrow morning").

So fast is the planned building schedule that in about 8 months the whole project will be completed.

Housing Minister H. E. Graham said yesterday that as a result of analyses of applications for rental homes and the trend of current rentals the Commission decided to proceed with this combined single and multi-unit housing venture with each unit self-contained.

Final details will be considered by Cabinet tomorrow.

He also said it was necessary to ensure that future rentals were in keeping with people's ability to pay and yet allow for livable homes in pleasing surroundings.

Miss M. A. Feilman, consulting planner and architect, was engaged to plan the scheme with SHC architects and development officers and Health and Water Supply Depts. This group had, after careful research, produced the plan and the type of cottage.

In planning of homes

and locality a number of new ideas in construction and lay-out were introduced.

Mr. Graham considered the planning was sound and effective as witnessed by the approval of the local authority, Public Health Dept. and Town Planning Board.

Estimated rentals of £2/8/6 a week for larger units for a 7-unit family, and £2/6 for smaller units for a 5-unit family will be about 15 a week and public transport services than current rentals.

Horseshoe Road

Plan is based on a horseshoe-shaped road on which carriage ways will be built, adequate for buses. Off this route are cul-de-sacs, courts and turned roads on which the majority of the homes will be built.

By controlled clearing the SHC will endeavor to preserve trees and native shrubs.

On completion of building in July 1954, a landscape plan will provide further trees and grassing. None of the homes will have front fences. Backs will be fenced.

Mr. Graham said that through the excellent co-operation of Canning Rd. Board there would be considerable savings in site

for homes capable of accommodating equivalent numbers of people.

Mr. Graham emphasised that it was only by initiating schemes such as this that the Govt. could make an impression on the backlog of 5 years of outstanding applications.

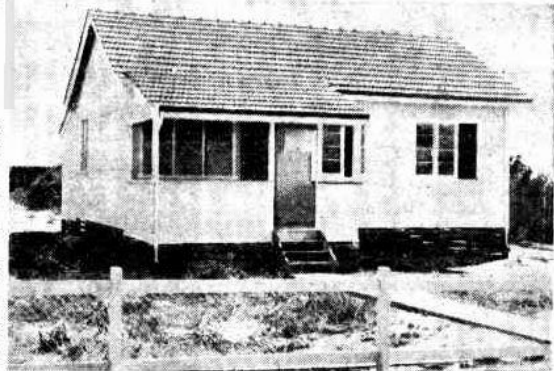
Site is 55 acres between Wharf and Regin-aid-sts., Queen's Park, near the growing Industrial area at Welshpool and public transport services.

Planned are a small shopping centre site, Education Dept. has been informed so that nearby schools can be expanded. Ample recreational area is allowed.

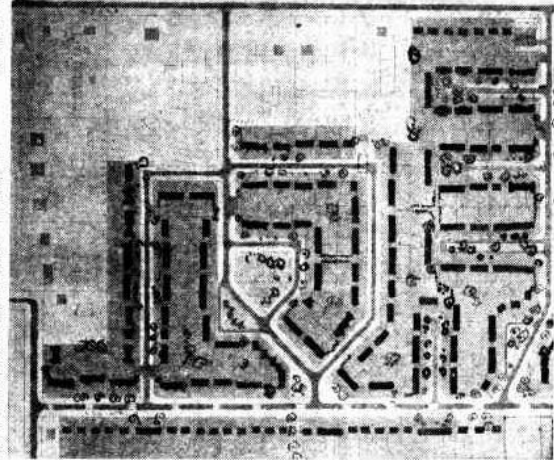
To achieve lower rentals it has been necessary to effect economies, but generally construction and finish follow present practice for timber-frame rental homes, except in roof and floor construction.

To economise in time and cost all units will have a light timber truss roof built to recommendations of the Commonwealth Experimental Building Station. An alternative to T & G floors is a special 7-ply jarrah flooring sheet.

Alternatives



This is one type of house that will be built at Maniana (See story).



Scene of the Maniana building project. Welshpool road is near the north-east corner of the plan.

An example of Feilman's work – a project at Queen's Park for the State Housing Commission
(*Sunday Times*, 13 September 1953, p.3)

One suburban architectural project of note was undertaken in 1954 when Margaret was joint architect with Fred McCardell for a new supermarket on the corner of Berwick Street and Canning Highway in South Perth (Victoria Park). Unfortunately the digitisation of Western Australian newspapers for the National Library of Australia's 'Trove' archive is currently stalled at 1954, and remote analysis of Feilman's work is less possible without simpler access to these sources from that time onward. However, within the Margaret Feilman papers held at the State Library of WA are her early study drawings, Architects Board examination drawings of 1945, British study drawings of 1949-1950, and a great number of documents that would allow a very detailed analysis of her WA town planning work and achievements.

Following her retirement from practice in 1984, Margaret was invited to become Chairman of the Town Planning Board in WA. She served in this position for

over two years. She had always been heavily involved in voluntary community work. She was instrumental in establishing the National Trust of Australia (WA) and served on the Council and Executive of the Trust from 1959 to 1976. In 1973 she carried out a major part of the Trust's contribution to the Federal Government initiated Hope Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate. In 1976 she was invited by the Federal Government to join the Australian Heritage Commission and served for five years.

In 1981 Margaret was awarded the OBE for community service in the conservation field. From 1981 to 1990 she was Chairman of Council of the National Trust of Australia (WA), and in 1989, UWA bestowed on her an honorary doctorate in Architecture for service to the community in heritage and environment. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects conferred on Margaret the honour of Life Fellow.

Dr Margaret Feilman died at Crawley 24 September 2013, aged 92 years. As cited in Jenny Ethell's wide-ranging eulogy, Feilman is recognised as a pioneer of town planning consultancy in Western Australia, as a trailblazer in her professional life and, coupled with her passion for the environment, the arts and making a difference for future generations, "her contribution to Western Australia has been truly enormous". Celebrating its sixtieth anniversary in 2019, the National Trust of Western Australia continued the award of the Margaret Feilman Medal.



Margaret Feilman at work (*The West Australian*, 29 October 2013, p.67), and in later years
(*Wikipedia*)

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- 'Mainly About People', *Daily News*, 7 December 1916, p.3 (marriage of parents).
- 'Town Planning, Institute Formed', *The West Australian*, 13 June 1931, p.12 (notes that the voluntarily disbanded Town Planning Association was formed 14 years previous).
- 'Today's Country Teachers' Conference', *Daily News*, 9 May 1933, p.5 (photo Herb Feilman).
- 'Scholarship Awards', *The West Australian*, 7 July 1948, p.3.
- 'Interest in Lecture by Woman Town Planner', *The West Australian*, 23 August 1950, p.7.
- 'Council Scholar', *Western Mail*, 24 August 1950, p.28.
- 'Super Mart Nearly Built', *The West Australian*, 12 June 1954, p.15 (joint architect with F. McCardell for supermarket corner Berwick Street and Canning Highway, South Perth).
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- Jenny Ethell, 'Margaret Feilman', <http://www.nationaltrust.org.au/wa/MargaretFeilman> accessed 29 October 2013.
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