

Prospectors Messrs Leslie Robert Menzie and John McDonald were the first to take up a lease at Menzies in October 1894. The name of the lease was "Lady Shenton". It was a rich gold find and the Mining Warden for the area recommended a townsite be declared in 1895, referring to the place as "Menzies" after the prospector. Menzies was an American born prospector who had sought gold in America, Africa and New Zealand and came to Australia on behalf of a syndicate in August 1894.

Menzie and McDonald in company with Jimmy, an Aboriginal tracker and Cumbra, an Afghan camel driver, were prospecting for a Perth syndicate headed by Sir George Shenton. Menzie met Brown at the Ninety Mile and agreed to inspect his find, with a view to purchase if it proved suitable. Whilst there he ran short of water and journeyed to a rock soak 18 miles east of the Ninety Mile to replenish his supply. When returning he kept too far to the west and went past Brown's camp. It was at this point that he stumbled on a rich alluvial deposit.

Menzies and McDonald followed the line of the reef to the tip of a rise where they found many very rich nuggets and quartz specimens studded with gold. They packed as much as they could in their saddle bags and hurried back to Coolgardie, the nearest mining centre with a Registrar's Office, leaving Jimmy and Cumbra to guard the find. On the way they ordered tools, a forge, dynamite and groceries at the Ninety Mile. On the 1st October 1894 the claim was registered, Lease No. 1380- in the name of LR Menzie and Sir George Shenton and Lease No. 1381 for LR Menzie and RF Scholl. These leases became the Lady Shenton and Florence mines and place Menzies.

Whilst the two were in Coolgardie, rumours of a rich find abounded and several parties started for Ninety Mile to find the location. However, many were forced to return because of lack of water.

When Menzie and McDonald arrived back at Ninety Mile dozens of eager prospectors were waiting, determined to follow them to the find. Next morning saw them on the track with a crowd of men carrying water bags eagerly tramping after them. The party travelled across a lake and off into the bush until they came to the Eighty Mile (from Menzies) where they camped the night. They arrived a Pioneer Hill, two miles south of Menzies, about 10 o'clock next morning. A man by the name of Billy Ivory climbed the hill but could see only scrub. The party camped to the right of the present Golden Age shaft, from which position they tried to locate Menzie's lease. An Afghan employed by Brown, Kirby and Jackman came up with some quartz saying he had found the strike. The whole crowd made a rush in the direction from which the Afghan had come, and soon all hands started out to peg alluvial claims.

The news of a strike this big spread rapidly and soon the area was crowded with prospectors hoping for similar good luck. A string of mines including the Alpha, Florence, Nada, Friday, Wedderburn, Crusoe and Lady Sherry were developed.

Over the years that followed the discovery of the rich Lady Shenton reef, 1895 must surely have been one of the most vigorous and eventful. During this time Warden Gill marked out the Townsite and issued licences for business and residential areas. Stores, hotels and public buildings were erected and a Progress Committee was formed. Mr Hugh Mahon published the first newspaper, and by December the first land sale saw 78 blocks of land realise an aggregate of £25,555.

Menzies was proclaimed a municipality on 20 December 1895 and the first Council was elected on 20 January 1896 with H Gregory elected as Chairman. Substantial municipal chambers of brick and

stone were built in Shenton Street in 1900 at a cost of £3,000. These comprised a suite of offices, council chambers, public reading room and a circulating library, with a large hall at the rear. Today the municipal chambers, adjoining offices and hall continue to be used for the purpose it was built.

According to the writings of Warden Owen, it was estimated that in 1896 the population of Menzies was 10,000 half of whom resided in the town and the other half in the surrounding land. In common with many of the towns in the North Coolgardie Goldfields, these early residents had to endure heat, flies, lack of water, poor diets and limited transportation, often for little or no reward. Sickness and disease plagued the early inhabitants, claiming many lives, especially amongst the young. The materials used to build the early buildings were an extreme fire hazard, and fires took a heavy toll.

Despite all these hardships, the people strived to make Menzies a pleasant and profitable place to live. Water from salt lakes was condensed and carted to the town and in 1897 a Government dam was built and in 1901 this supplied water to the residences. The railway line between Kalgoorlie and Menzies was officially opened on 22 March 1898. The local Fire Brigade was formed to combat the damages caused by fire and a Council By-Law making it compulsory for at least one wall of business premises to be made of brick helped to prevent the spread of many fires. Improved sanitation and a 50 bed hospital helped control the spread of disease.

Menzies at this time boasted 13 hotels, 3 banks, its own breweries and cordial factories, a Post office with a staff of 25, a school with 205 pupils, a public library (in 1904) and 4 churches. However, this prosperity was not to last. The gold which had made Menzies a town of major importance at the turn of the century was becoming more elusive a decade later. Figures show that production fell from 35,000 ounces in 1905 to 2,787 ounces in 1909. The population by 1910 had fallen below 1,000 and the decline of Menzies had begun. World War 1 hastened the decline, as many men who were drawn from the town were loath to return to the rigours of the goldfields after the hardships they had suffered overseas.

In the late 1890's and early 1900's Menzies was the administration centre of the North Coolgardie Goldfields. There were some 20 small towns in this area. Davyhurst, Mulline, Mt Ida, Kookynie, Niagara, Yarri, Yerilla, Yundaga and Edjudina to name a few. From around 1905 the gold mining industry experienced a downturn and most of these towns literally disappeared. Menzies has survived but is just a shadow of its former self, and the Grand Hotel at Kookynie is the only reminder of a once thriving community there.

The general revival of gold mining during the Depression Years was reflected in Menzies by the renewed interest in the Lady Shenton group and the discovery of the First Hit mine. The pastoral industry, the railway line and the nickel boom have all contributed at various times to keeping the little township alive. The 1980's and the 1990's saw another gold mining revival in Western Australia, and the future was looking a little brighter.