

JAN JAMES — TRIBUTE

Statement by Member for Central Wheatbelt

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [12.53 pm]: I rise to acknowledge the passing of Mrs Jan James of Northam, who was laid to rest in the Toodyay cemetery on Monday surrounded by friends and family. Jan was a remarkable woman, well known in the Avon Valley. She was a forthright and passionate person with a strong sense of justice and a heart of gold when it came to helping those in need. She was well known for her work in collating the social and cultural history of the Avon Valley, making a life-long study of the region's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. She produced fourteen books and compiled a significant reference library that made her the go-to person for many families seeking to trace their own family history. This was particularly the case for Noongar families from the region, and Wongi in the goldfields, many of whom were part of the stolen generation and had no knowledge of their own family history. For this, she was recognized by local Noongar people as *kabarli* or grandmother, only the second non-Aboriginal person so honoured. She was so proud of this and genuinely loved the connection she formed with so many families as she traced their history, and this love was reciprocated.

In a career spanning 40 years, she was a councillor for the town of Northam, curator at Northam cemetery, author, historian, genealogist, social worker and family consultant. Her eight years at Northam cemetery included developing extensive records on the many unmarked graves and establishing many memorials, including those for babies who had been stillborn and buried without acknowledgement. She also served on many community, government, historical and genealogical bodies, and was Northam's citizen of the year in 2004.

On a personal note, it was a privilege to have known Jan. She was a ferocious and great intellect, and had a heart of gold. Hon Max Trenorden, who spoke at her funeral, said, "She had the ability to pat you on the head while giving you a kick in the shins", and I was always glad she was on my side of the argument as a local member!