



Her Story



**A celebration of Wagga's women
from early settlement to today**

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Written and compiled by Michelle A. Maddison.

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Two Sites, Countless Stories
Civic Centre
243 Baylis St, Wagga Wagga
+612 6926 9655

Willans Hill
127 Lord Baden Powell Drive
Willans Hill, Wagga Wagga
+612 6926 9650

museum@wagga.nsw.gov.au
www.museumriverina.com.au

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From the dawn of Australia's inhabitation, the women were there with the men.

Aboriginal women played vital roles within their society, providing food, nurturing children, caring for health and wellbeing and leading women's religion and ritual. They assisted a number of European explorers, and later, assisted the wives and daughters of pioneers in the spheres of medicine and childbirth.

In the early days of European settlement, many women, in addition to child-rearing and domestic duties, worked alongside their menfolk, building yards, fences and living quarters. As villages and towns grew and cities were established, some women took on roles previously held by men, forging futures for themselves and their children.

There are numerous accounts of the contributions made by women to the development of Wagga, but very few have been formally documented in the pages of history. Some made names for themselves in the fields of medicine, the arts and in public service. Others served their country in times of war. There were teachers, performers, wives, politicians and adventurers.

These are not only their extraordinary stories, but also those of the women that followed, and are making a difference to the Wagga of today.

**For most history,
anonymous
was a woman.**

Virginia Woolf





Susannah Brown

1806 – 1883

Susannah Brown was a woman ahead of her time, and one who greatly impacted Wagga during her lifetime.

Born Susannah Eleanor Seymour in Reading, England, she was the second youngest of 12 children born to Richard and Elizabeth Seymour. Little is known of her life in England. Two of her brothers, George and John had moved to London, and when George was found with forged banknotes, he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation. By 1833, Susannah had also moved to London. That same year, the London Emigration Committee had been formed, with a view to sending single female migrants to Sydney, where they were said to be in high demand. So, on Friday 16 August 1833, Susannah (along with approximately 300 other women) boarded the 513 ton sailing ship 'Layton', for the four month voyage to Sydney Town. The conditions on board were appalling, with each woman allotted less space and rations than those transported as convicts!

Once in Sydney, Susannah would have been known as a 'Latonian', named for the vessel on which she had travelled. When they arrived in Australia, these women, rather than getting the well-paid positions they had been promised, were looked down upon, and simply left to fend for themselves.

Even though her brother George was living in Windsor, Susannah remained in Sydney Town. There, she met and fell in love with her employer, the exotically named Augustus

Caesar, for whom she kept house. Augustus, a 'gentleman of colour' was of African descent, had lived in the colony for over twenty years, and was already married.

Susannah eventually reunited with her brother George in Windsor in early 1840, having moved there with Augustus. George had been running a butchery and coach business then in financial strife. Susannah took over running them and staved off her brother's insolvency. Soon after, Susannah left Augustus, and in 1841, she met and married former convict William 'Tinker' Brown at Paterson in the Hunter Valley.

In 1848 Susannah bore Tinker a son, William Charles Thurlow Brown. A year later, the family settled in North Wagga. There, husband and wife established a slab and bark store and in 1852 finished building a large and spacious two-storey stone house from which they ran the New Ferry Hotel. They also opened their own punt (the second in Wagga), which most importantly, brought their patrons across the river to their hotel.

Susannah managed the store and hotel almost single-handedly as Tinker had other interests, in particular, his circus complete with tents, horses and wagons. A natural born showman, he toured the Royal Circus throughout the region, to the great delight of many townspeople. Sadly, whilst performing at Beechworth in November 1855, Tinker died suddenly, aged forty.

Susannah had his body brought back to Wagga in a coffin made from a dug-out gum tree, and he was buried in the old Wagga cemetery.

The most interesting story left behind by her husband was that to attract publicity for his circus Tinker had his favourite horse Jorrocks shod with two gold horseshoes made by a working jeweller, and weighing nine ounces each.

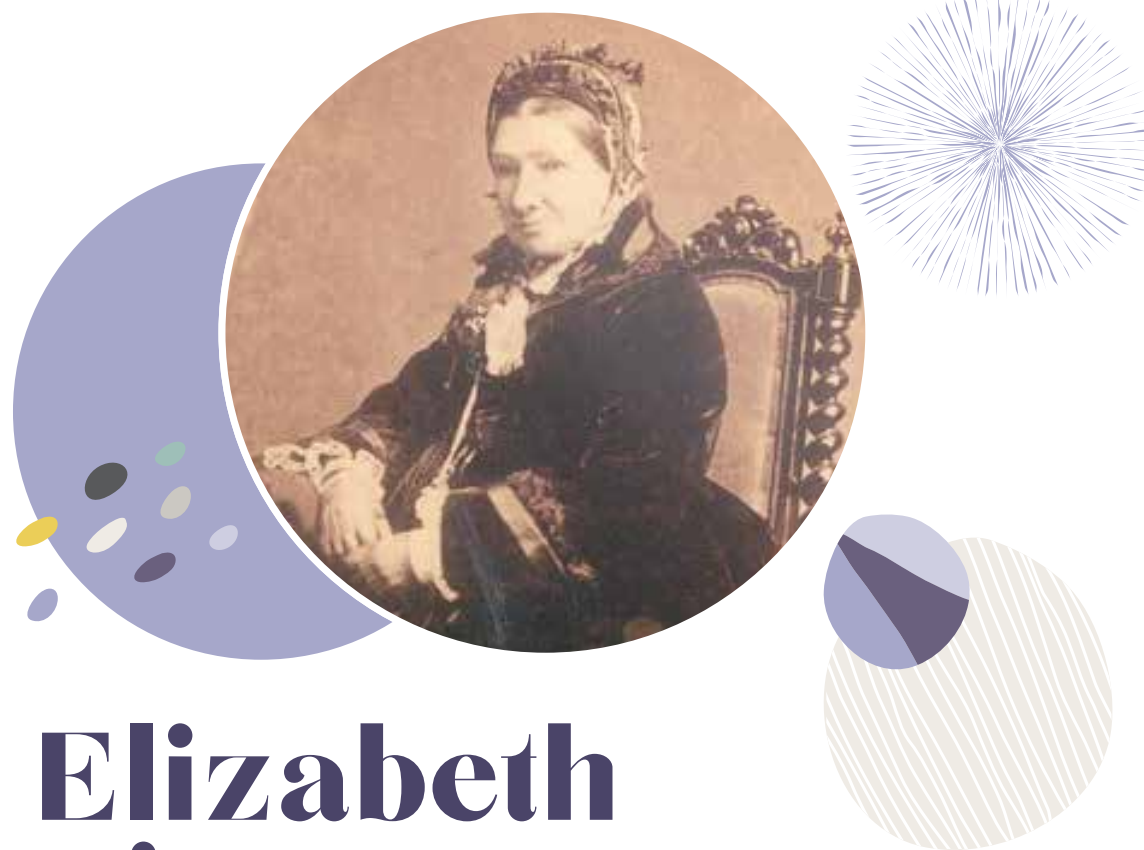
After his death, it is said that Susannah had these golden horseshoes hidden away inside a specially constructed door mat at the New Ferry Hotel, delighted in the fact that her patrons would unknowingly walk across them every day! In about 1891, the shoes (which had lost one and three quarter ounces by being worn) were retrieved from their hiding spot and taken to the Mint, where they were melted down for sovereigns, realising £96/16/.

During their marriage, Susannah and Tinker acquired property throughout Wagga, but after the death of her husband, Susannah built her own considerable portfolio including a boarding house and numerous cottages which she leased. In old age, Susannah resided on Urana Road and was commonly seen around town in her buggy collecting rents.

She contributed greatly to the development of Wagga, and held shares in a number of businesses, including the Wagga Wagga Bridge Company which built the first bridge across the Murrumbidgee River.

Perhaps the biggest clue to Susannah's forward thinking, even feminist spirit, can be found in her last will and testament. Within, she stipulated that the inheritance she left to daughter Hannah Susannah, by then married to businessman Henry Moxham 'would not be subject to the debts, control or intermeddling of the current or any future husband...' This was an unusual move for the time when a wife's property automatically became her husband's.

Dying in June 1883, Susannah lived to the ripe old age of 76, leaving behind an estate worth £5,400. Sadly, her daughter died just six months later.



Elizabeth Vincent

1806 – 1886

Elizabeth Vincent was a brave and enterprising woman.

On 9 October 1838 she sailed with her husband Isaac as unassisted immigrants from London aboard the 435 ton barque 'Bardaster'. Accompanied by their four children, Sarah (aged 9), Emma (8), Isaac (4) and Demas (2), the family spent five months at sea, traversing the Atlantic, and braving the infamous Cape Horn.

Shortly after arriving in Sydney on 3 March 1839, they settled in the Riverina, first, at Mundarlo (51km from Wagga). There, they established a public house, the Travellers' Rest, where Isaac held the licence from 1840 – 1846. After giving up the hotel, they settled Mittagong Station (formerly known as Muttgang) at Yerong Creek (57km from Wagga).

In Australia, Elizabeth gave birth to four more children – Amelia (b. 1840), Jonathan (b. 1842), James (b. 1845) and William (b. 1846). Sadly, her life changed dramatically in 1847.

Just eight short years after their arrival in Australia, her husband Isaac died, at the age of forty-one. Elizabeth took over the running of Mittagong until her son Isaac, then aged just twelve, was able to take over.

Elizabeth was an astute businesswoman. In addition to building the original homestead at Mittagong and retaining control of the property, she also acquired property in the region.

In November 1856 she paid cash for the purchase of 350 acres (costing £1 an acre). This transaction is credited with being the first sale of Crown Land in the area.

That same year, Elizabeth diversified her business interests. She moved to Lake Albert, where she established Rock Cottage Vineyard. Elizabeth grew her vineyard from rooted plants in preference to cuttings, and by 1868, she was producing six main varieties of wine – Shiraz, Muscat Noir, Cabernet, Verdelho, Aucarot and Riesling.

When a party of distinguished gentlemen, including the Reverend Mr Holland and businessman George Forsyth, visited the vineyard in May 1871, they reported that her vintage for that year was the best she had produced. Elizabeth's six acres of established vines had yielded 2,600 gallons. After sampling wine from her well-stocked cellar, Mr Holland was so delighted with her magnificent Shiraz, that he enthusiastically christened it 'Ambrosia'.

In addition to her vines, Elizabeth had also sown a good crop of Planters' Friend (a type of sugar cane), and intended to try her hand at making sugar. From Rock Cottage, she produced prunes and raisins that were reputedly equal, if not superior, to the dried fruits found in the shops. That same year, three of her wines – her full-bodied red Shiraz, a full-bodied white Ancarot and her 1868 vintage red Shiraz took out first place at the annual Wagga Show.

Further proof of her success in the wine industry is found in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* of March 1872. There, Elizabeth is listed as one of only thirty-one vigneronns across NSW (and only four in Wagga) who were licensed to distil brandy from wine by the Chief Inspector of Distilleries.

Sadly, Elizabeth's personal life was not as happy as her professional one, when she outlived four of her eight children. Emma died aged 38, most probably in childbirth. Isaac and Demas both died in horse accidents, they were 38 and 26 years old respectively. James also died aged 26, from congestion of the brain.

When Elizabeth died in 1886, she left an estate of £11,117, a large fortune in those days when the average yearly wage was £40. She had lucrative shares in the Wagga Wagga Bridge Company, and owned many Wagga properties including the Farmer's Home Hotel, shops in Baylis Street and five allotments of land in Newtown, in addition to Rock Cottage and other parcels of land.

Today Elizabeth is remembered through Vincent Road, Lake Albert, which was named in her honour in 1958.



Mary Ann Bryant (Tichborne)

1844 – 1926

When the Tichborne Trials (1871 – 1874) launched the small town of Wagga onto the international stage, they made Tom Castro (the Tichborne Claimant) a celebrity. Whilst much was recorded of Castro, his wife Mary Ann Bryant, was eclipsed by her charismatic and flamboyant husband, so remains an enigmatic and shadowy figure.

When the Claimant died in 1898, the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* ran a lengthy article in which old residents of the town freely provided their recollections of not only Tom, but also his wife. Of Mary, Wagga pioneer Dick Heydon rather unkindly remembered her as a ‘big lump of a girl’, whom locals commonly addressed as ‘Long Mary Ann.’

Born in Goulburn in 1844, Mary moved to Wagga with her family - her mother, also called Mary Ann, stepfather James Payne and older sister Eliza in 1864.

Before settling in Wagga, Mary had been employed as a domestic servant by Mrs Deborah Simpson, an hotelier in the Goulburn district. It was an occupation she continued in Wagga, where she became a housemaid for the Wallace family of Eunonyhareenyha Station. Other accounts place her as a domestic working at the Black Swan Hotel in North Wagga, where Tom was a regular. Nineteen years old, Mary was illiterate, and most contemporary sources suggest that she was rather common. One fact that history did record of Mary is that when she met Tom, she was pregnant.

Mary’s daughter, Annie, was born on 18 March 1864, and Tom doted on the child as if she were his own. By Christmas, Mary and Tom were engaged. Despite both being Roman Catholics,

the couple was married by the Rev. Frederick Brentnall, the town’s first Wesleyan minister on 29 January 1865.

After the wedding, Tom took his bride to live in their new abode – a slab and bark hut set in the paddocks between Baylis Street and the river, which he christened ‘Villa Castro.’ For three years this ramshackle construction was Mary’s home, and it was here that she gave birth to her second daughter, Mary Agnes Teresa in 1866.

That same year, Tom made his first step towards claiming the inheritance that he swore was his birthright, the Tichborne estates in Hampshire, England.

That first step was marriage. Once again, Tom and Mary stood before a minister, this time Roman Catholic, in Mary’s hometown of Goulburn. There, the groom’s ‘true’ name was revealed, and the pair was joined in the eyes of God as Sir Roger Charles Doughty and Lady Tichborne.

In September 1866, Mary, Tom and their two daughters set sail for Britain, never to see Australia again.

When Tom’s meeting with the Dowager Lady Tichborne was successful, and he was accepted into her home as Sir Roger, her long-lost son, Mary’s life changed dramatically. She gave birth to three more children – Roger Joseph Doughty Tichborne (b. 1867), James Francis Tichborne (b. 1868) and Henrietta Felicity Tichborne (b. 1869/70), named for her paternal ‘grandmother.’

Following the sudden death of the Dowager Lady Tichborne in March 1868, the family’s fortunes deteriorated, especially after Tom’s imprisonment in 1874. It was a particularly precarious situation for Mary, who suddenly found herself in a foreign country devoid of a husband, home and financial security.

After her husband’s incarceration, Mary settled in a district called St Denys (Southampton). There, her only means of maintenance was a meagre allowance from an organised fund raised by some of the Claimant’s sympathisers. In the 1881 census conducted for Hampshire, she was listed as Mary A. Tichborne, aged 34, and had no occupation. In November 1882 an article titled ‘Lady Tichborne in the Workhouse’ appeared in newspapers across the globe. This coincided with two major events in her life. Mary’s circumstances had worsened to the point that she was admitted to the South Stoneham Workhouse in Hampshire as an inmate. She was not alone, but accompanied by two illegitimate children (a third was supported by the father).

Unfortunately for Mary, her infidelity led to the second event, the withdrawal of support from her benefactors.

In 1885 Mary applied for admission for herself and two illegitimate children (aged 8 and 3 years) to the Greenwich Union Workhouse. By 1891 she was back living at Stonehouse, and in 1907 an English newspaper reported that ‘the wife of the Tichborne Claimant’ had been appointed wards woman for the hospital at the South Stoneham Workhouse. For carrying out this role, Mary received a small weekly remuneration. It was relayed that “Mrs Tichborne” as she insisted upon being called, refused to see any visitors, or converse upon the subject of the great trial, or speak of her own antecedents.’

While her husband tried his hand at a number of money-making ventures on his release from prison in 1884 Mary remained in the workhouse. For over thirty years it was her home, and was where she died in November 1926 aged 77. On 11 November she was buried at Southampton in a coffin bearing the name ‘Mary Tichborne’, which was also entered in the Poor-law guardian’s record.

Until the end, she insisted that she was the real Lady Tichborne, and would answer to no other name.



Selina Searle

1850 – 1915

In 1895 the Borough of Wagga boasted thirty-four hotels, thirteen of which were operated by female publicans. One member of this group was Selina Searle, who had become Licensee of the Racecourse Hotel three years earlier.

Selina was the fourth child born to former convicts Thomas Stockton and Elizabeth ‘Betsy’ Tomeny, who had moved from the Bong Bong District in the Southern Highlands of NSW to Wagga in 1848. She was their first child born in Wagga on 13 April 1850. In her new hometown, Betsy gave birth to four more children, before dying in 1861 at the age of only thirty-seven.

Three years after her mother’s death, on 16 July 1864, fourteen year old Selina married William Henry Searle in Wagga, with the marriage witnessed by her father and elder sister Mary Anne. William was twenty-nine, and a sawyer by occupation.

Not long after their union, the newlyweds moved to Gobbagombalin (now a suburb of Wagga), where William had purchased 48 acres bordering Long Water Hole Lagoon. There, he made a living as both a sawyer (someone who saws wood) and a farmer.

Between 1865 and 1875 Selina gave birth to seven children – Flora (b. 1865), William (b. 1867), Henry (b. 1869), Mary Anne (b. 1871), Thomas (b. 1873) and Frederick (b. 1875). Her last child, Selina, was born in 1877, after the family had moved from their farm, and settled in the township of Wagga.

Having moved his family to Wagga, William built the Racecourse Inn on the corner of Kincaid and Beckwith Streets (later the Racecourse Hotel and now the Sportsmen’s Club Hotel). In August that same year, he was granted the publican’s license.

Hotels at the time were not only watering holes for men to socialise with a drink, but were also places of accommodation where a hot meal could be enjoyed. Until the 1960s, the publican was required to live in the premises. As many had families, this brought the occupation into the domestic sphere, as places that allowed women to raise their families whilst working alongside their husbands in the hotel. Perhaps it was thought that women would be less likely to drink the profits, or maybe they set better standards of good behaviour amongst patrons, but whatever the case, women publicans became a common fixture in Australian pubs.

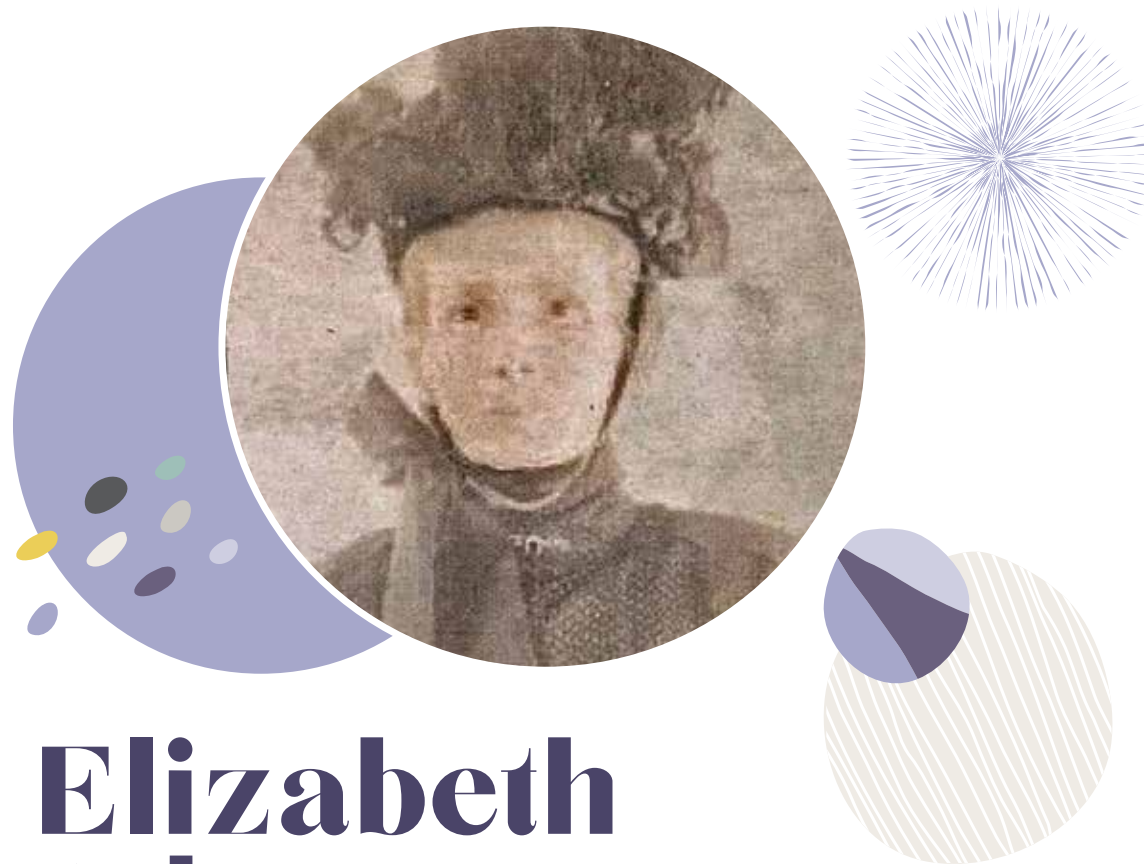
It followed that if these same wives became widows, it was natural for them to carry on the business. Hotels were not only their means of survival, they were their homes.

William died of a heart attack in the Racecourse Hotel in November 1892, leaving Selina to run the business single-handedly, perhaps with the assistance of their daughters.

Selina successfully operated the hotel between 1893 and 1896, 1899 and 1901 and 1903 to 1913. For a year (1897 – 1898) her nephew John McLean took over as Licensee, and in 1902, Robert Black took the reins. In total, she was connected to the Hotel for thirty-one years.

In 1913, following a breast operation, Selina retired as publican. Two years later, on 30 September 1915 she died at the age of 64. The cause of death was listed as exhaustion, uraemia (kidney disease) and a malignant gland in her neck and throat.

Selina’s eldest daughter Flora carried on her mother’s legacy. Her husband Alexander Collier took over the license of the Racecourse Hotel in 1917, and a year later, Flora became Licensee, a position she held until 1920. After Alexander’s death, Flora was publican of the Golden Fleece Hotel (until it was de-licensed in 1921). Like her mother, she had stayed in the hospitality industry, being well known in Wagga and district, Little Billabong and Katoomba where she kept hotels until her death in 1942.



Elizabeth Adams

1854 - 1929

Elizabeth Adams is not famous or well-known. She did not invent anything or rise to a position of power. Her story is, however, one of resilience in the face of hardship and heartbreak. Slight in stature and weighing around six stone (38 kg), her size belied an iron will, and a stoic and brave character. Today she stands a testament to the strength and resilience of Australia's early women.

Growing up in Bowden, an inner suburb of Adelaide, she was one of ten children born to John and Elizabeth, who had migrated from London in 1848.

At the age of seventeen, Elizabeth married William Henry Adams at Deniliquin. William was a drover, so the couple's existence was transitory, moving around the country and settling wherever there was work.

In about 1890, the family, now including eleven children, settled in Alfredtown, on the outskirts of Wagga. Their residence was a crude hut with a bark roof and slab walls. *The Daily Advertiser* of 9 May 1891 described the house as being 'of little value... so badly put together that between most of the walls the wind easily penetrates.'

Their home was featured in the paper because in late April 1891, the Adams family suffered great personal tragedy when an extremely dangerous outbreak of diphtheria occurred in their household. The most feared of childhood diseases, prior to the 1920s, survival was uncommon.

With Elizabeth's entire family afflicted, a nearby neighbour, Mrs Wright from Kyeamba Creek, volunteered to nurse the family. By Friday 1 May, 72 year old Mrs Wright, along with five of the children – Annie (aged 19), Emma (14), Jessie (9), John (8) and Alfred (5) – had all succumbed to the disease.

Eleven year old Frances succumbed on Saturday 2 May and was buried in the Monumental Cemetery that same afternoon. Eldest son, fifteen year old William was the last to die on Saturday 9 May.

The rest of the family recovered, but the tragedy had left an indelible mark. *The Great Southern Advocate* of 8 May 1891 reported that Elizabeth 'feels the loss of six of her family very much.' Not surprising that in addition to losing seven of their children, they also lost their home, when it was demolished by the authorities.

In response to their heartbreaking plight, the people of Wagga rallied. A relief fund was established. Spearheaded by John Nash, publican of the Union Club Hotel. By 2 June the tally reached £107 8s.

The people of Wagga built the family a new home at Alfredtown, where they were still living in 1893 when tragedy struck again. Eliza, aged 19 years, was filling up a kettle on the fire, when she was distracted. Turning around, her clothes caught fire. Three weeks after the accident, poor Eliza passed away. Shortly afterwards the family settled at Laurel Hill near Tumbarumba, on a property they called 'Beulah Farm' where Elizabeth bore William four more children – Thomas, Elsie, Albert and Esther.

Like many young men, Albert eagerly enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) during WWI. Still underage at 19, Albert required his parents' permission to join up. He was killed in action in October 1916.

Today, little is known of what Elizabeth was like, but great-great granddaughter Susan Margraff can't help but admire her. Susan's grandmother was not fond of Elizabeth, but remembered her as a very hardworking woman. At 'Beulah Farm', Elizabeth had a beautiful garden, and grew all her own vegetables. Susan's grandmother remembers that when she was fourteen, she was able to place both hands around her tiny grandmother's waist.

Between 1871 and 1900 Elizabeth gave birth to seventeen children. Of these, ten pre-deceased her, so if Elizabeth had a hard exterior, it is understandable.

Elizabeth died in Tumbarumba Hospital on 18 September 1929, at the age of 75. Her husband William, 79, followed less than forty-eight hours later.

Elizabeth's prized possession (and one of the few things kept from their Alfredtown home when it was destroyed) was a gold brooch featuring a horseshoe filled with seed pearls. Since 1929 it has been passed down to the eldest daughter of each generation, all of whom, like Elizabeth have faced their own family tragedies, and persevered.



Anne Thompson

1803 - 1877

Matilda Cruickshank

1861 - 1963



Many Australian women in the 19th and early 20th centuries had large families, averaging six to eight children, but sometimes more. Childbirth was a risky endeavour anywhere, but particularly in regional and remote areas, where doctors were often in short supply. As a result, midwives played an integral role in the culture of childbirth, and were valued and well-respected figures within the community, particularly to wives and mothers.

In the early days of Australian settlement, in towns including Wagga, indigenous women often fulfilled the role of midwife. In *More Recollections*, Dame Mary Gilmore wrote about a local Aboriginal midwife called Polly, whom Gilmore described as 'the right hand of the first doctor.' Many early settlers were nursed and saved by the Aboriginal people, not just in childbirth.

One of the earliest European midwives in the Wagga district was Anne Thompson (née Edwards).

Born in London in 1803, Anne married Joseph Donisthorpe Thompson in her hometown when she was twenty years old (1824). Together, they had three children, all born in London. In November 1852, the Thompson family left Liverpool on the appropriately

named 'El Dorado'. As unassisted passengers, they migrated to Australia, bound for the gold fields of Bendigo.

It is not known how long the family remained in Victoria, but by the late 1850s, they had settled in Wagga. In January 1859, Anne was advertising her business as nurse and midwife in the *Wagga Wagga Express* and *Murrumbidgee District Advertiser*, as Mrs J.D. Thompson. Her residence, where patients had their 'lying in' was situated on the south end of Fitzmaurice Street, directly opposite Byrnes' Hotel. In the 1870s, Anne's son, Joseph Donisthorpe Junior had established a business as a coachbuilder and carpenter, and served two terms as an Alderman.

Anne's most exciting encounter as a midwife occurred in 1867. The incident has been passed down through family lore, but also immortalised by Rolf Boldrewood in his Australian classic *Robbery Under Arms* (1888).

It was in 1867, when Anne was ministering to Alexander Browne's wife, Margaret at Bundidgere Station near Narrandera. Whilst Alexander was transporting Anne from Wagga to Bundidgere in his buggy, they were held up and robbed by the bushranger Bluecap and his gang. No outcome is recorded, but both were very lucky to have survived the encounter.

Anne died on 8 April 1877 in Wagga, aged seventy-three, and is buried in the Methodist portion of the Monumental Cemetery.

Another well-known Wagga midwife was Matilda Cruickshank, who was probably one of the earliest Australian-born midwives in the district. Born Matilda Glover on Boxing Day 1861 at Gumly Gumly, she married James Cruickshank in 1878, when she was just sixteen years old. The couple made their home, Gilgai, at Lake Albert, which at that time, was an isolated agricultural community of scattered farms. It was to the women of this area that Matilda attended to.

Matilda's starting point for becoming a midwife may have been her own childbirths, which would no doubt have given her plenty of experience to help other women through their own labour. Between 1879 and 1903 Matilda gave birth to eleven children – Rose (1879), Mary (1881), John (1883), James (1885), Susan (1887), Ann (1889), Jessie (1891), Stephen (1894), Emma (1896), Timothy (1900) and Ellen (1903).

She delivered many babies, a great number of them in her own family. Her second daughter Mary, who had married John Hamilton in 1901, settled in Lake Albert, close to her mother. Matilda delivered eleven of Mary's twelve children, but the youngest, a boy, was delivered at the maternity ward of the Wagga Base Hospital, which had been built in 1938.

As was the case with Anne, Matilda was untrained, having never undertaken nursing studies nor formal training in obstetrics. Rather, both women learned their craft on the job and developed greater skills through experience, with the passing of time.

While Anne and Matilda plied their trade as married women, some took up midwifery as a means of supporting themselves when they were widowed. Midwives often passed their skills onto their daughters, as in the case of the aforementioned Polly, who took over her mother's role when she died. Like her mother, Polly continued nursing until she was an old woman.

It is not recorded when Matilda retired as a midwife, however she may have continued on in an advisory role, assisting with local births at least. Matilda died in 1963 at the grand old age of 101. In one of the last photographs taken of her, she sits, still dressed in her regulation black, proudly holding her twin great-grandsons, a fitting tribute to the lady whose life revolved around babies.



Margaret 'Ma' Carmody

1871 - 1941

Margaret Carmody, known affectionately as 'Ma', is a name that was closely linked to the Wagga hotel industry for many years in the first half of the 20th century.

One of nine children born to grazier Patrick and Catherine Carmody of Omeo, East Gippsland, Margaret was their eldest daughter. In her youth, she was a keen sportswoman, and one of Victoria's most accomplished equestriennes.

In 1893 she married Michael Bernard Carmody (no relation), and together, they had eight children - four daughters and four sons.

Ma and Michael ran hotels throughout Victoria. In 1908, they lived in Sale where in addition to the hotel, Michael worked as a butcher and coach proprietor. Shortly after, the family relocated to NSW, where they took possession of the Junction Hotel at Hillas Creek near Gundagai.

In February 1914 forty-six year old Michael died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Despite having had a lingering illness, his death came as a shock to Ma and her children. Like many widows, she found herself left alone with a family to rear. In her favour, Ma knew how to run a pub and for the next twenty-one years was a successful hotelier.

In 1916, Ma took over the license of the Royal George Hotel. Wagga's *Daily Express* described it as 'one of the historic places of Wagga' and was very fashionable hotel as the

'first in and first out' house on Tarcutta Road (Edward street). It also enjoyed patronage from drovers and teamsters due to the good camping grounds that surrounded the establishment. Unfortunately, early in the morning of Saturday 29 May 1926, the hotel burned to the ground. Luckily, the residents had vacated the building a few days previously, along with much of the furniture, and Ma had the hotel insured for £2,000.

At the same time Ma transferred the license of the Royal George in 1917, she was granted the license of the All Nations' Hotel on Baylis Street, which she transferred in September 1921. This was another 'lucky escape' for Ma, as two months later, the All Nations' was one of eight hotels in Wagga that was de-licensed by the Licenses Reduction Board. The action was described by the *Daily Advertiser* as 'a tremendous slaughter.'

The last hotel owned by Ma, and the one which many locals still remember fondly was Carmody's Royal. Standing on the corner of Baylis and Forsyth Streets in the city's centre, Ma acquired the hotel's freehold in 1921.

Carmody's Royal was typical of Australian pubs of the day, with two storeys and a wraparound balcony, traditional, if not a little old-fashioned. It retained this appearance for the next seventeen years. In 1938, the year Australia celebrated its Sesquicentenary, the old Carmody's Royal building was demolished to make way for what the *Burrowa News* called a 'beautiful modern' structure and Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* lauded as being 'one of the most modern country pubs in NSW.'

Ma, always the perfect hostess, was exacting in her plans for the new Royal. It had running hot and cold water to the bathrooms, laundry and bar, and at least ten bedrooms. Construction of the new, Art Deco style Carmody's Royal Hotel cost an estimated £16,500.

Sadly, Ma did not have long to enjoy her beautiful hotel. Just two years later, on 31 March 1941, she died of congestive heart failure. Aged seventy years, she had been unwell for some time before her death.

When Ma died, Carmody's Royal stood as a monument to her life. Admired and enjoyed by patrons, and boasting the best counter meals in town, the hotel was demolished in 1979 to make way for the Sturt Mall complex.

Beyond hotels, Ma was remembered for her enterprising spirit and the care and attention that she lavished on her patrons. She was a staunch churchgoer, and generous supporter of charitable causes. Leaving behind eight children, it was her sons that kept the Carmody name in the hotel industry. Among them, they either built or managed The Tourist Hotel on Fitzmaurice Street, The Sportsmen's Club Hotel (built by William Searle as The Racecourse Hotel), the Turvey Tavern and the Victoria Hotel on Baylis Street.

As Ma had spent a total of forty-four years in the hotel business, her sons learned everything they knew from their mother, which was perhaps her true legacy.



Mary McNaughton Cameron RRC (First Class)

1878 – 1948

More than 3,000 Australian women served as nurses during World War I. Approximately 550 of their New Zealand counterparts also served overseas as members of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service. Today, very few of their names are known, and even fewer of their stories have been told.

Mary McNaughton Cameron, known as 'Marie' may have been one of those whose story was lost to time, had she not been involved in one of the most controversial maritime disasters of the Great War.

Born in Wagga in 1878, Marie gained her nursing certificate in 1902. At the outbreak of World War I, Marie was Matron in charge of St. Helen's Hospital in Christchurch, the State Maternity Home.

Marie enlisted with the New Zealand Forces in May 1915 and was appointed Matron of the 1st New Zealand Stationary Hospital (No. 1 NZSH), arriving in Egypt in around August. By the beginning of October the hospital had 5,000 patients being cared for by 36 nurses.

On 14 October the hospital was packed onto 23 trucks and transported to Alexandria, before being loaded onto the HMTS 'Marquette', bound for Salonika, Greece.

The ship was carrying 741 passengers in total, including the nurses of the NZ Army Nursing Service and staff from the NZ Medical Corps. Also on board were some 500 officers and troops of the British 29th Divisional Ammunition Column with their equipment and mules.

At 9 a.m. on 23 October, the 'Marquette' was about to enter the Gulf of Salonika, when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat. The ship took just seven and a half minutes to sink. Marie was on the starboard side of the vessel and was critically injured when her right arm was crushed between the ship and a lifeboat. As the ship listed, she was thrown into the sea.

Marie and many survivors spent seven hours in the intense cold as the ships that passed took no notice of the wreckage. One of the crew swam up to her with a piece of board to which she was able to cling, before the pair made their way to a submerged boat which had turned turtle.

For the remaining hours in the water, the group with the boat clambered onto the upturned hull every five minutes. Marie watched hopelessly as her rescuer drowned from cramp and exhaustion. Of this, she recounted 'I was sorry I could do nothing for him'.

Many died from exposure and exhaustion, others went mad. Ten of the 36 nurses aboard died in the disaster. In total, there were 197 fatalities.

Marie never recovered from the injuries she sustained, and her hair turned white almost overnight. In addition to her crushed arm and severe shock, Marie was seriously ill with broncho-pneumonia and had sustained a cerebral haemorrhage (a bleed on the brain) and hemiplegia (paralysis) of her left side. She never nursed again.

In early November, she was admitted to the 19th British General Hospital at Alexandria. Marie remained in Egypt for two years, being too ill to travel. In 1916, King George V bestowed upon her the Royal Red Cross (first class) for devotion to duty.

Marie returned to Sydney in 1918 and was admitted to Randwick Hospital. There, she was described by one newspaper as being 'Another Randwick War Wreck' (*Smith's Weekly*, 19 February 1924). Marie was described as 'a white-haired woman whose face carries the lines of endured agony and premature age... (who has) borne eight years of physical torture under which most men would have wilted and died'.

In May 1919, thousands of Sydneysiders and returned servicemen and women jostled for a position around Sydney Town Hall, where a special ANZAC memorial service was being held. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

'...Four soldiers came in, carefully carrying a lady in the uniform of the Army Nursing Service – a lady with a strong, quiet, serene face, on whose tunic was pinned that coveted medal, the Royal Red Cross. She was Matron Cameron... There was silence for a moment after the matron appeared – and then the 'Diggers', like one man, sprang up and cheered and cheered. The smile with which the stricken lady greeted the men in khaki told of that bond of mutual devotion between Australian soldiers and Australian nurses, forged in the sufferings of war, which the prosaic days of peace will never weaken'.

Marie was almost devoid of speech, and walked with a cane, as her left side was paralysed. In the days before nursing homes, many war wounded were left to live out their days in hospitals. Eventually, Marie moved back to the town of her birth to be near family. In 1945, she was a patient at Welwyn Private Hospital, but then moved into the Wagga District Hospital, where she was given a private room. It was there that she died in November 1948, at 70 years.

Today, her memory is kept alive in the Nurses' Memorial Chapel in Christchurch, where her medals are displayed.



Ethel Forrest

1887 - 1977

Although 'Ethel Forrest' is a well-known name in Wagga, the woman behind the name remains an enigma.

The third of four children born to Edward and Annie Eliza, Ethel was their only child to survive infancy. Her sisters Jessie (b. 1877) and Sophia (b. 1879) died before Ethel was born, and her brother, Edward, died of inflammation of the lungs in 1897 (aged seven).

Ethel's father was a successful businessman, a practical hair cutter and tobacconist, who operated from premises on Fitzmaurice Street, directly beneath the Criterion Hotel. He also acquired considerable property throughout Wagga, which allowed him to live a life of comfortable retirement for many years before his death in 1918.

Ethel and her parents were regular churchgoers, and were involved with local fundraising efforts.

In November 1898, eleven year old Ethel was one of five girls who organised a bazaar at the Criterion. Attended by a large number of children, the aim of the event was to obtain new books for the library of St. John's Anglican Church. A week after the bazaar, Ethel and her friends presented Reverend Carver with thirty new volumes with which to replenish his library.

Two years later, Ethel and four friends collected 25 shillings' worth of pennies in aid of the N.S.W. Women's Patriotic Fund.

When Ethel died, a family friend remembered her as just an ordinary girl – pretty, and full of fun. When her mother Annie died in 1932, Ethel was left with no family in Wagga. This, combined with the privations and stress of World War II (WWII), is said to have altered Ethel's character somewhat.

Like her father, Ethel was a shrewd investor. Immediately following WWII, when land and property was inexpensive, Ethel purchased the bulk of her properties. She furnished them with cheap items bought at local auctions, where she was a regular customer.

Despite her wealth, Ethel was scruffy in appearance. In later years, she became a recluse, and was a common sight around town, dressed in a shabby coat, battered hat and men's lace up boots. Sometimes she could be seen trawling through bins, with her ever present large black bag in which she collected the rent from her tenants.

Although loathe to spend money on herself, she was generous with others. A regular donor to a boy's home in Sydney, she also supported the local Boy Scouts. Sometimes, Ethel would purchase a large second hand pram, and fill it with groceries which she would then distribute to the needy.

Ethel lived above the Windmill Café on Gurwood Street. Her residence was Spartan, with broken windows, stacks of newspapers piled high throughout, and a rubbish strewn backyard. There, Ethel spent her later years, and there she died on 21 June 1977, at the age of ninety.

Inside her dwelling, approximately £10,000 in pre-decimal currency was discovered interleaved in newspapers and hidden in tins and paper bags. Ethel also left behind a considerable portfolio of holdings, including sixteen houses, apartments and shops throughout Wagga's CBD, in addition to a number of vacant blocks of land and a three bedroom Bluestone unit in Fitzroy, Victoria.

Ethel's true legacy however, was revealed in her will. Her final wish was that the bulk of her estate (in total \$574,000) would be used by the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn to establish a hospital-like facility for the people of Wagga.

In 1985 her dream became a reality, with the construction of The Forrest Centre, a 60 bed nursing home, assessment and rehabilitation centre, which today employs more than 250 staff, comprises two residential aged care facilities (the Mary Potter Nursing Home and Loreto Home of Compassion) and provides at-home care to over 550 clients throughout the region.

Her name lives on.



Mabel Maude Chambers

1890 - 1972

One frame of sepia portraits in the hallway of Wagga's Historic Council Chambers commemorates those elected to the Wagga Municipal Council in 1944. In a sea of male faces, is a solitary lady of distinguished appearance. Her name was Mabel Maude Chambers.

Maude, as she preferred to be called, was born in Cooma, NSW, to Joseph and Johanna Shepherd. In 1907, at the age of seventeen, she married Maurice Geddes Chambers, and together they had ten children – Lyall (b. 1908), Maurice (1909), John (1910), Trevor (1913), Valma (1915), Kenneth (1917), Marjory (1921), Irene (1924), Bernice (1926) and Mabel (1928).

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, the Chambers family moved from Cobargo to Wagga.

While Maurice worked as night foreman at the *Daily Advertiser*, a position he held for almost forty years, Maude kept herself busy. She was not only a mother, but a successful business woman.

In May 1938 Maude purchased the Wagga Coffee Palace. It was described in the *Daily Advertiser* as an 'extraordinary guest house proposition' boasting seventeen bedrooms, a large dining room, spacious kitchen five new lockup garages and two new stables with a feed room.

Under Maude's management, the Wagga Coffee Palace accommodated a steady stream of both permanent and casual guests. According to family legend, Maude's generosity was broadcast down at the Hampden Bridge, where graffiti written under the bridge told of her kindness towards those wanting a hot meal (and perhaps even a bed for the night).

Maude operated the Coffee Palace until 1942, when, owing to her husband's health, she reluctantly sold the business. Between 1938 and 1945, Maude also operated the Blue Moon Café (next to the Plaza Theatre on Baylis Street) and the Ritz Milk Bar and Dining Room.

In addition to her commercial enterprises, Maude was incredibly civic minded. A lifelong and active member of the Labor Party, she not only attended their meetings, but also hosted them at the Coffee Palace and the Blue Moon Café.

When Labor's Edgar 'Eddie' Graham was elected as Member for Wagga in 1941, Maude worked as his campaign director, a position in which she continued until his death in office sixteen years later.

Throughout World War II, Maude was appointed as the honorary organiser of Wagga's war savings stamps campaign (as part of the Wagga War Loan Committee). She inspired Wagga's citizens to support the national campaign, and had raised over £250 by November 1942.

In 1944 Maude had the distinction of being elected as the first female Alderman of Wagga City Council (or Municipal Council as it was then known) and the first female Alderman elected in the Riverina. By 1944, she had spent thirty-one years in Wagga, and believed that there were many Council matters in which a woman's point of view was valuable. Her constituents agreed.

Maude served as an Alderman until late 1946, in charge of the health committee. In this role, she was also president of the Wagga Anti-TB Committee. When her husband's health didn't improve, Maude resigned as Alderman, and the couple left Wagga.

After leaving, Maurice and Maude lived in Canberra and then Sydney. Following her husband's death in 1951, Maude returned home to Wagga, where she was easily recognisable driving around in her black Austin. For a time, she held the position of Matron at the 2WG Old Peoples' Home (now known as The Haven).

Today, Maude is remembered as being a pioneer for women in local government. When she resigned as Alderman in 1946, many in the community clamoured for women to run for election and take her place on council. Maude had paved the way for those women who followed including Ethel Geoghegan, Errella Heard, Helen Frisby, Patricia Clark, Mary Kidson, Ann Sky, Jean Lashbrook, Kay Hull, Julie Hoy (Elphick), Diana Simpson, Yvonne Gilchrist, Karen Wright (Vidler), Jan Hay, Donna Argus, Yvonne Braid and Vanessa Keenan.



Janet Shearer

1891 - 1908

Saturday 22 September 1906 was a good day for sailing. Friends Harry Headley (aged 20), his brother Awdry (14), Richard Fosbery (17) and Arthur Lloyd (14), took their homemade skiff for a trial on Lake Albert. Things changed drastically at 4 o'clock when a strong squall came up, and the vessel capsized, throwing its occupants overboard.

After half an hour in the water, the boys, weighed down by their clothes, were seized with cramps and numb with cold. Just as the grim reality of their situation became apparent, they saw a small boat ploughing through the waves towards them. To their surprise, at the oars was a young girl.

Fifteen year old Janet Euphemia Shearer was born at Rochester, Victoria, and settled at Lake Albert with her family in 1900. After attending Lake Albert Public School, Janet became a housemaid in the home of Mr and Mrs Caldwell, proprietors of the Lake Albert Vineyard.

On seeing the boys' predicament, Janet ran down to the Lake and pushed off in a small boat, despite never having sailed by herself. After rowing more than 1 km into the wind, she reached the craft in time to take the two younger boys aboard.

The lads, who had been treated to warm drinks and supplied with warm clothing by Mrs Caldwell, freely admit that only for the timely arrival of Miss Shearer, they must have been drowned, as owing to the cold they were unable to swim, and could not have held on to the skiff much longer.

On her return to shore, a gentleman called Mr Cunningham had secured a boat and returned to rescue Harry and Richard, who were still clinging to the upturned hull.

Contemporary accounts of Janet's brave rescue recorded that only for her timely arrival, the boys would have drowned.

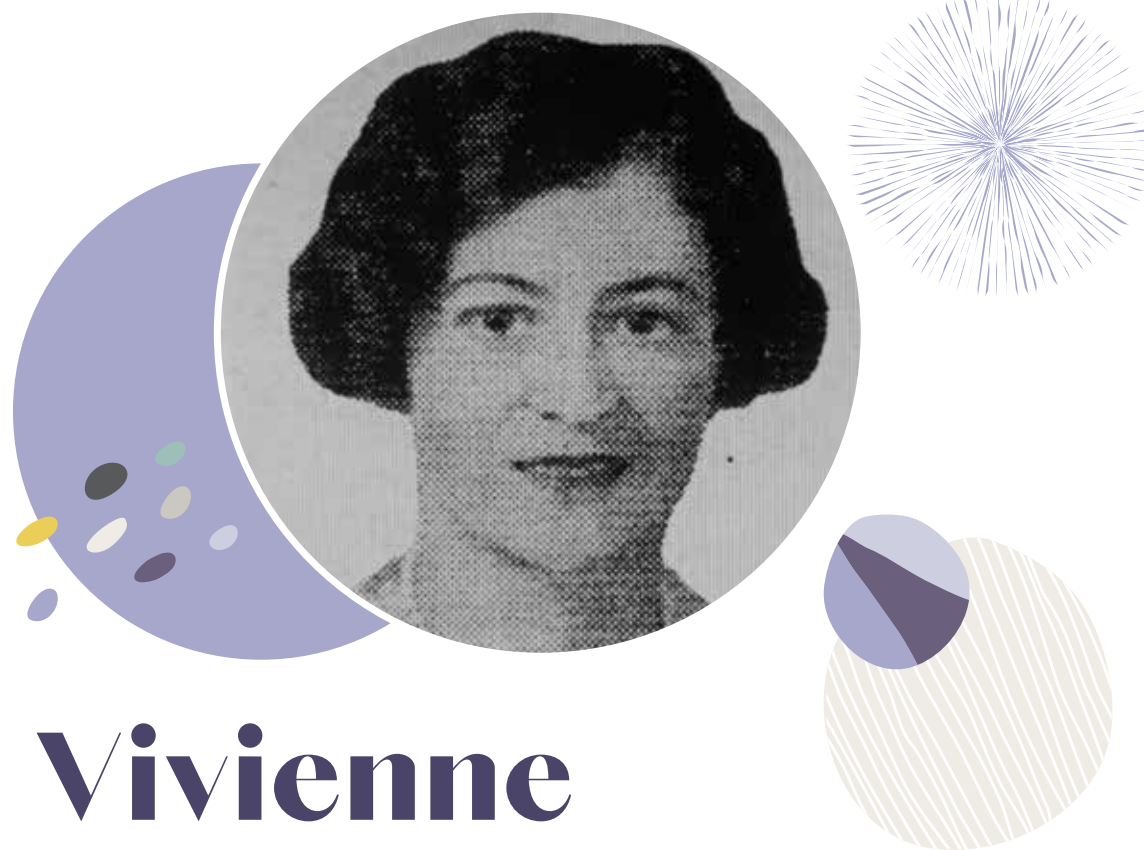
Janet became an overnight sensation.

Hailed as a 'Grace Darling' of Australia, she was awarded the Royal Shipwreck and Humane Society of NSW Silver Medal for her bravery, in addition to a presentation made on behalf of the people of Wagga.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 6 February 1939, her sister remembered:

She was a shy little girl who had never been to the city, and it was a great thrill for her and a proud moment for our parents to have the Silver Medal and Framed Certificate presented to her in the Sydney Town Hall.

Shortly after her heroics, Janet moved to Tasmania. There, on 10 December 1908, she died from an attack of meningitis at Launceston Hospital. She was just 17 years old.



Vivienne Newson

1891 - 1973

In July 1938, Vivienne Newson was the guest at a luncheon given by the United Associations of Women (UAW) in Sydney. About to leave Australia on an overseas trip, she was interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and imparted the following farewell message: be proud to be a feminist.

Born in Goulburn, Vivienne, known as 'Viv', was the eldest child of Agnes May Fleming and Thomas Dobney, a commercial traveller. The family moved to Wagga in 1900, where Thomas made a name for himself, establishing T. Dobney & Co., a department store on Fitzmaurice Street. Thomas also spent sixteen years on Council as an Alderman and served as Mayor of Wagga in 1910 and 1911.

After leaving school, Viv worked as a clerk. Sometime prior to the outbreak of World War I, she met Basil Newson, who had been posted to Wagga in January 1911 as a teller with the Bank of N.S.W.

On 17 August 1914, Basil enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces, and was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in the 2nd Battalion. Shortly after landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, Basil was shot through the jaw by a sniper, and was repatriated home that August.

Two months later, on the evening of Wednesday 27 October 1915, Viv and Basil married at St. John's Anglican Church, Wagga. While Basil re-enlisted and spent the duration of the

war in Europe, Viv settled in Woollahra (Sydney) and worked as a typist. After Armistice, the couple made their home in Sydney, and Basil resumed his employment with the Bank.

In 1929 Viv unleashed her adventurous spirit, and set sail for Europe. From London, Viv travelled to Bruges, Belgium, from where she traversed the continent, carrying her luggage, comprising a dinner frock, pair of shoes, change of underclothes and her toiletries, in a knapsack on her shoulder! She trekked through Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and into Spain. Returning to Scotland, Viv set out with a party of tourists aboard the yacht Prins Olav, bound for the Arctic. On this trip, the skipper sailed the craft further north than any other tourist yacht had previously been.

Returning to Australia in March 1931, Viv's travel tales were featured in national publications including *Truth* and the *Daily Pictorial*. Once home and perhaps inspired by her adventures abroad, Viv threw herself into fighting for Australian women's rights. In 1935 and 1936 she was secretary of the Australian Open Door Council, an organisation pressing for equal economic opportunities for women.

Her causes for the next two decades can be traced through letters published in national newspapers. Viv vehemently opposed capital punishment and the "Marriage Tax" of 1941 (where the income of a husband and wife were counted as one). She believed that women were entitled to equal pay, were eligible to not only sit on juries, but also be employed as lady warders in gaols.

Already regarded as one of Australia's leading feminists, by 1938, she was a leading light in the UAW, speaking at conferences and becoming editor of the UAW publication *Australian Women's Digest* (1944 - 1947).

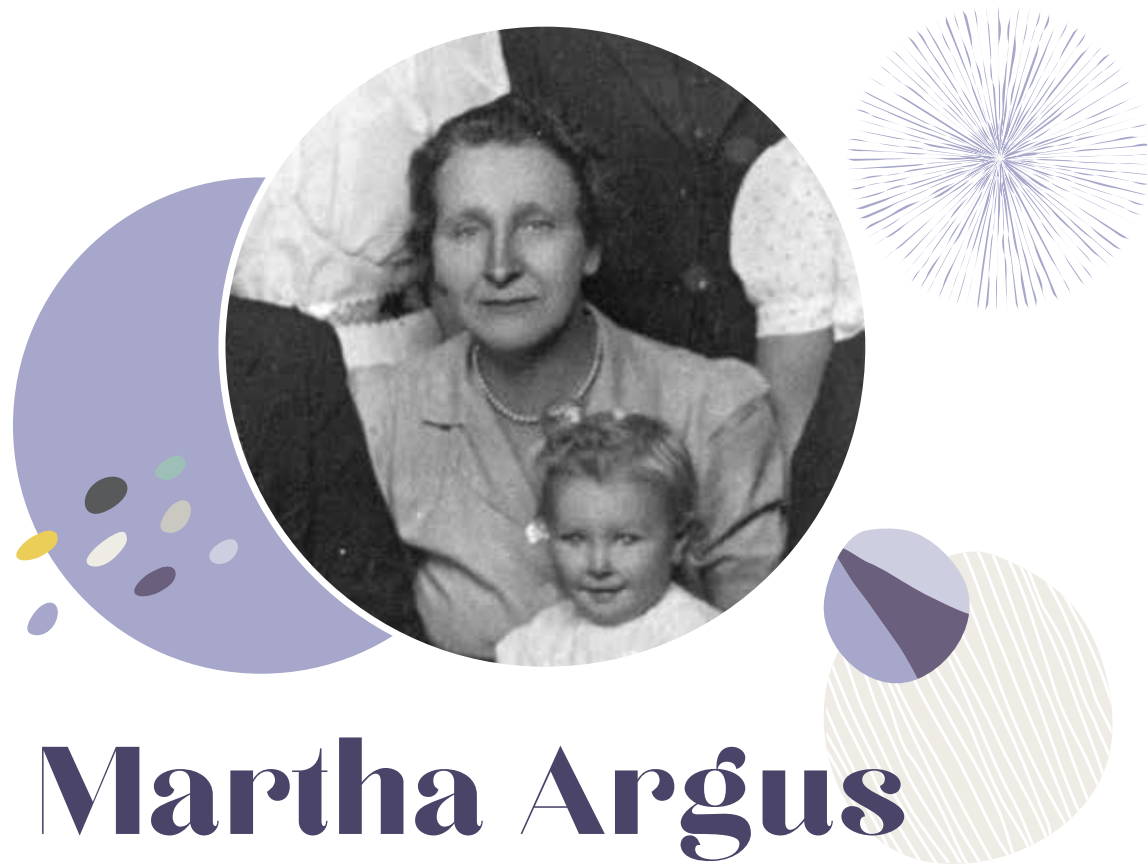
In 1938 Basil retired from the Bank, and with Viv, embarked on an extended world tour, which was unfortunately interrupted by the outbreak of World War II.

Nevertheless, between 1938 and 1941, the couple experienced the delights of Burma, China, Java, Penang, India (where they saw the sunrise over Mt. Everest and viewed the Taj Mahal by moonlight), Scotland, England, France and Switzerland. Today, we can follow their trip, through the wonderfully expressive accounts written by Viv under the pseudonym *The Wandering Wagga-ite*, which were duly printed by *The Daily Advertiser*.

From 1945 Viv single-handedly produced a monthly News Sheet, which kept her female readers informed on all aspects of the women's movement. In 1952, having been refused a passport to attend a peace conference in Beijing, Viv sailed one month later bound for a peace conference in Vienna, and returned home via the Soviet Union and China.

In 1970, she attended the inaugural meeting of Women's Liberation and Revolution, the same year she learned to drive! Diagnosed as suffering from lung cancer shortly afterwards, Viv made one final trip overseas, to Singapore.

This trailblazer of Australian feminism died on 16 August 1973 in Mosman. She continued producing her News Sheet until the year before she died. Her name lives on in her personal papers and publications, which have been kept for posterity in the collections of the National Library of Australia.



Martha Argus JP

1900 – 1984

In June 1951, *The Australian Women's Weekly* published a two-page feature titled 'The Water Comes to Gumly Gumly'. At the top of the article is a photograph of Mrs Martha Argus, her husband Alec, and eight children, standing outside the tin hut they called home when first moving to the settlement.

The surname Argus is, even today, almost sixty years later inextricably linked with the suburb of Gumly Gumly.

Born at Pulletop in the south eastern part of the Riverina, Martha's early life was filled with hardship, a fact which undoubtedly stood her in good stead for her life ahead. When Martha lost her mother (also called Martha Ann) at the age of eleven she was left to raise her siblings, including baby brother David, whom she came to love like her own son. Like many children of the day, young Martha worked to support her family, employed by old Mrs Carter at Mangoplah. Her day began at 5 a.m., and finished around 10 p.m., which included the horse ride across 18km between. Although she didn't realise it at the time, Martha was raised to stand up and fight for what she believed in.

Martha met her husband to be, Alexander 'Alec' Argus when they were employed at the WC & IC Cannery at Leeton. The couple married in Wagga in 1921 and made their home there when Alec got a job as a 'trouble hunter' for the telephone department. He lost his job along with thousands of others during the Great Depression (1929 – 1934).

When the family lost their home, they had no choice but to move to Tent Town, an itinerate settlement that had sprung up in Wagga as unemployment numbers rose and housing became expensive. At Tent Town, the Argus family home was made from flattened kerosene tins, and hessian bags strung on poles. Bedrooms were created by stringing hessian bags from the roof. The exterior bags were painted with a mixture of lime and milk which stopped the draughts coming through the walls. It was here that Martha, Alec and their first seven children – Alexander (b. 1921), John (1922), Daisy (1925), Lawrence (1927), Clifford (1930), Martha (1932) and Laura (1933) lived for approximately two years.

In order to alleviate some of the city's housing stress, the Rotary Club of Wagga suggested to the Matt Kilpatrick, the parliamentary member for Wagga that the crown land of Gumly Common be opened up for subdivision. Forty-one blocks were created, ranging in size from 5 to 16 acres, and a ballot was drawn up.

The Argus family were lucky; Alec drew Block 208. Their new home had no roads, fences or infrastructure, just paddocks full of Horehound weed, an extremely hardy plant commonly found in neglected places with poor soil. Alec, Martha and their children were the first family to move in, but others soon followed.

The residents became like one large family, helping each other erect fences and make their blocks habitable. Lanterns were hung on the fence posts, allowing work to continue into the night. Martha made her family as comfortable as possible. Once again, the family found themselves in a tin hut with a dirt floor. In later years, the children affectionately referred to this as 'The Old Shack'.

Later, the government offered all residents basic building materials to construct better homes. Martha refused, wanting her house to be built of concrete. Alec hand mixed and poured the blocks for the home, painstakingly using a shovel and bucket.

The Argus family planted willows around their home and named it 'Willow Vale'. Initially, they kept two cows, several ducks and chickens, and planted a small vegetable garden. All of their water was carted from the river on a slide, pulled by their faithful little mare Silver. Martha gave birth to five more children at Gumly – Russell (b. 1935), twins Esther and Mary (16 April – 18 April 1937), Reginald (1939) and Rosene (1943).

When she left Tent Town, Martha was seven months pregnant with her eighth child, Russ. This did not stop her planning to acquire facilities for her new home. As Gumly had no school, all children living there had to attend the one at Forest Hill. Never afraid to pursue a cause, heavily pregnant Martha rode her pushbike all over the settlement with a petition appealing to Mr Kilpatrick, Wagga's MP for their own school. The petition was successful, and by World War II, there were over 70 students enrolled at the school.

In addition to getting a school for Gumly, Martha was also instrumental in the construction of a tennis court, church, recreation ground and even secured money to build a cricket pitch. Martha dreamed of a hall for Gumly, but was outvoted, and an open-air dance floor with toilets and a big stage was built in its place.

In 1935 Martha became a justice of the peace (JP). She was a natural nurse, having had to tend her siblings when a child herself. As the nearest doctor was in Wagga, many Gumly residents appreciated her skill as a 'bush nurse', calling her 'Nanna Argus'. She became like a mother to many of the children at Gumly and was actively involved with the Gumleigh Boys' Home.

As time passed, Martha fought for everything that Gumly needed, including water and electricity. She wrote many letters to members of Parliament. They took notice of her, because she was pretty strong. It is fitting that today, Gumly boasts an Argus Avenue, named in honour of the woman who did so much for the settlement that became her home.



Dr. Violet 'Vi' White

1900 - 1992

Violet White was born at her grandmother's house in Surrey Hills, Victoria, on 28 May 1900, two years after the first Australian woman graduated from university with a medical degree (MD). Forty-six years later, Vi, as she preferred to be called, would also be a trailblazer, becoming the first female doctor in private practice in Wagga.

Vi's father, Robert Fullerton, was a general practitioner who ran his practice from the family home. It was there that Vi experienced her father's profession first-hand. It was Vi's mother Lily, who encouraged her to follow in her father's footsteps and pursue a degree in medicine. While Robert did not feel that it was a suitable vocation for a woman, her parents supported her financially when she enrolled at the University of Melbourne in March 1919.

Vi successfully completed all her exams up until her fourth year in 1922, but then a personal tragedy interrupted her studies. At the beginning of Vi's final year, her only sister Olga, formerly a concert pianist, contracted pneumonia and died. Olga had still lived at home, and Robert requested that Vi leave her studies and return home to be with her mother.

Robert envisioned a life of domesticity for Vi. As she was engaged to be married, it was expected that she would not need to have a career or require an income, as that would be provided by her husband Douglas.

On 3 July 1926, Vi married Douglas, and dedicated herself to raising her family. When World War II was declared, Douglas left his job with the Department of Main Roads and enlisted. It was only then that Vi considered returning to university to complete her degree, partly due to a shortage of doctors, and partly because she would need a means of supporting her family if Douglas did not return home from the war.

Vi resumed her studies at the University of Melbourne in 1941. The following year, she finally completed her fifth year, and was awarded her MD in March 1943. After graduating, Vi joined the Queen Victoria Hospital as a junior resident, a position she held for three years.

In 1946, the White family moved to Wagga, when Douglas had secured a position as Divisional Engineer with the Department of Main Roads (DMR). Arriving in Wagga, they rented a house in Freer Street, and it was there that Vi first set up her practice. Her surgery sign on the front of the house read 'Dr Violet White – Women and Children'.

Doctors working in general practice in the 1940s and 1950s dealt with everything from delivering babies, surgical procedures and anaesthetics to providing emergency care. Unlike her male peers, Vi focussed more on obstetrics, and less on surgery. She also accepted patients requiring gynaecological procedures that were referred to her from other doctors.

Another component of Vi's job (and apparently one she disliked due to overly competitive mothers) was to judge baby shows. In December 1946, *The Daily Advertiser* reported that Vi had been busy, not only judging three baby shows in a month, but also delivering a total of 58 babies that same month at the Wagga Base Hospital alone!

In addition to her private practice, Vi is also credited with holding the first female Visiting Medical Officer (VMO) appointments at both Wagga Base and Lewisham (Calvary) Hospitals. Although mostly running a solo practice, she had, at times, taken on partners (mostly women). In 1953, she joined forces with Dr John Tunley (until 1954), also working in partnership alongside Dr Helen Flynn and others.

Vi worked as a general practitioner in Wagga until 1955, when her husband resigned from the DMR. Vi closed her practice and left Wagga. Together, Vi and Douglas purchased a farm at Torquay near Geelong and enjoyed their retirement.

A letter written by Molly Eldershaw (of Wagga) to *The Daily Advertiser* in 1954 sums up how much Vi was appreciated, stating 'Dr. White has been more than a physician to most women, young and old, who brought not only their physical ills, but their worries and anxieties to her, and few, I think, ever left her surgery unbenefited.'

Today, not only two of Vi's granddaughters work in the health industry, but also four of her granddaughters, ensuring that her legacy continues.



Amy Hurd

MBE

1901 - 1989

Amy Isabella Hurd was born in Redfern, Sydney in 1901, the third daughter of Frank and Mary Jane Harpham. Her junior schooling was at Bourke Street Public School in Surry Hills. In January 1914, she was one of 4,000 children across the Sydney metropolitan area who passed their qualifying certificate examination, after which she went on to receive a high school scholarship. Her senior years were spent at Cleveland Street High School, where she became an honours student.

On leaving school, Amy worked as a typist and stenographer in charge of an office in Sydney.

In 1927 she married surveyor/electrical engineer William Lewis 'Bill' Hurd, who, in 1924 was appointed as the Shire Engineer for Lockhart. The newlyweds made Lockhart their home, until they moved to Wagga in 1946.

Between 1928 and 1935 Amy gave birth to three children Elaine, Frank and Beverley. Soon after her birth, Amy and Bill realised Beverly had an intellectual disability. For five years they looked after her but in 1940, enrolled her at the Sunshine Institute at Gore Hill, Sydney (later renamed the Laura Hodgkinson Sunshine Home).

For their daughter, they chose a place that operated on principles that were directly opposed to government policy of the day and against the social norms of hiding people away in mental institutions. Established in 1924 by Lorna Hodgkinson (the first woman

to receive a doctorate from Harvard University), the Sunshine Institute was a place where people with an intellectual disability were supported to learn and lead meaningful lives.

Beverley's disability, and the example set by the Sunshine Institution, were two things that directly impacted Amy's life and inspired her to act on behalf of parents living with disabled children.

Up until the late 1950s, there was little support for parents whose children were labelled as 'backward', 'sub-normal' or 'retarded'. In 1956, when Reverend Peter Rudge joined the staff of Wagga's Anglican Parish, he set about remedying this. Two of the first people he contacted for assistance were Amy and Bill.

Between 1958 and 1970, Amy was formally involved with the organisation that was to become Kurrajong Waratah (KW), and it is in this role that she is remembered by many today. In June 1957, she took charge of KW, a minding centre, based in the Girl Guide Hall on Johnston Street. Operating for one to two days a week, the centre was staffed by volunteers who all knew how to look after children. Students were taught life skills including grooming, dressing, etiquette, money handling and counting, physical education, handicrafts, rhythm and music. Specialist teacher Louise Blackett also taught the students speech therapy.

In November 1958, work began on the building of *Kurrajong Waratah School for the Retarded*, on Willans Hill. Officially opened on 27 May 1961, Amy and Bill dedicated themselves to the the Kurrajong children. Between 1961 and 1980, KW was informally referred to as the *Hurds' School*.

Amy ran the school and by 1965, thirty-two were enrolled at the school, ranging from five years old to men in their thirties. Amy relentlessly learned more about education and employment of people with intellectual disabilities. She often spent the school holidays seeking new ideas and meeting other professionals. In 1961, when touring England and Holland, she made a point of visiting special schools and sheltered workshops also attending the European Congress on the Education, Training and Employment of the Mentally Handicapped at The Hague.

As Kurrajong's reputation spread more parents were eager for their children (particularly those living in country areas) to attend the school. This highlighted the need for a hostel in which to house junior and senior students. After much fundraising, Kurrajong Home was opened in January 1967, followed soon after by The Boy's Cottage in 1972. Lastly, in 1979, the Bill Hurd Centre (later renamed Wattle House) was opened to accommodate forty adults.

Amy's dream of creating a safe world for her 'children' continued to grow. Today, KW, standing proudly on Willans Hill, remains as a permanent testament to Amy's outstanding service to the hidden members of Wagga's community, and the love that she held for them.

Amy was awarded an MBE for services to the community of Wagga in the Queen's Honours List for 1974, and in 1979 she was made a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow. Amy passed away in 1989, but today, is remembered by the Amy Hurd Centre named in her honour by Wagga City Council.



Sylvia MacDonald

1913 - 1980

Over time, Wagga has been home to many creative and talented people, and one of the best singers the city produced was surely soprano Sylvia Macdonald, who was born there in 1913.

Sylvia first took up singing as a student at Mt. Erin Convent, where she had private lessons for one hour each week with Sister Philippa. She further honed her craft on the Eisteddfod circuit, competing throughout the Riverina in the 1930s and early 1940s. Performing in Wagga, Albury, Canberra and Tumut, Sylvia won many prizes, including Ladies Vocal Champion at Tumut (1939) and Wagga (1942).

As one of five children, Sylvia's parents could not afford to let her study music full-time. After completing her schooling at Mt. Erin, she attended the Wagga Commercial College, where she studied shorthand, typing and book keeping. These skills paved her way to work in the offices of a number of local businesses including the Wagga Motor Garage and stock and station agents AML&F Company, John Graham & Co. and Dalgety's.

However, singing remained Sylvia's passion. In addition to her eisteddfod turns, Sylvia was also a regular performer at tea meetings, concerts, socials and on stage. She was a member of the Methodist Choir and the local Gilbert & Sullivan Operatic Society. She was also in great demand to sing at weddings, usually accompanying the signing of the register.

In the opening years of World War II, Sylvia worked tirelessly to support many patriotic and charitable fundraisers and events. In 1941 she entered the Mayor's Patriotic and War

Committee Competition, running as Commerce Queen, and on the evening of Friday 22 August, Sylvia was crowned Patriotic Queen and overall winner, before a wildly enthusiastic crowd of approximately 400 people who had gathered at a grand ball held in the Cocoonut Grove and Wonderland Theatre.

Riding high on her success, Sylvia moved to Sydney soon afterwards. There, she began to turn her passion into a career. Sylvia appeared in shows at suburban theatres, performed on Sydney Ferry Limited's Show Boat and also made appearances on radio station 2KY.

In June 1943, she enlisted with the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), and worked as both a stenographer and entertainer for the duration of the war. Although initially stationed in Sydney, Sylvia was one of fifty AWAS who travelled across almost 5000 km of hot and dry terrain by train and truck, to Darwin, in February 1944.

There, she joined the Australian Army Educational Services troupe, and in addition to her clerical duties, also appeared in concerts, entertaining Allied troops in Darwin, Adelaide River, Melville and outlying areas. After the war, Sylvia remained in the Army, and was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in February 1946. She received her discharge from the AWAS on 28 October 1946, having spent the previous eight months in the Entertainment Unit, singing at War Loan Rallies in Sydney, Manly and Wollongong. Returning to life as a civilian, Sylvia remained in Sydney, where she continued to study singing with the National Opera Company (NOC), while working as a welfare officer for the RSL, and later, for the NSW Supreme Court.

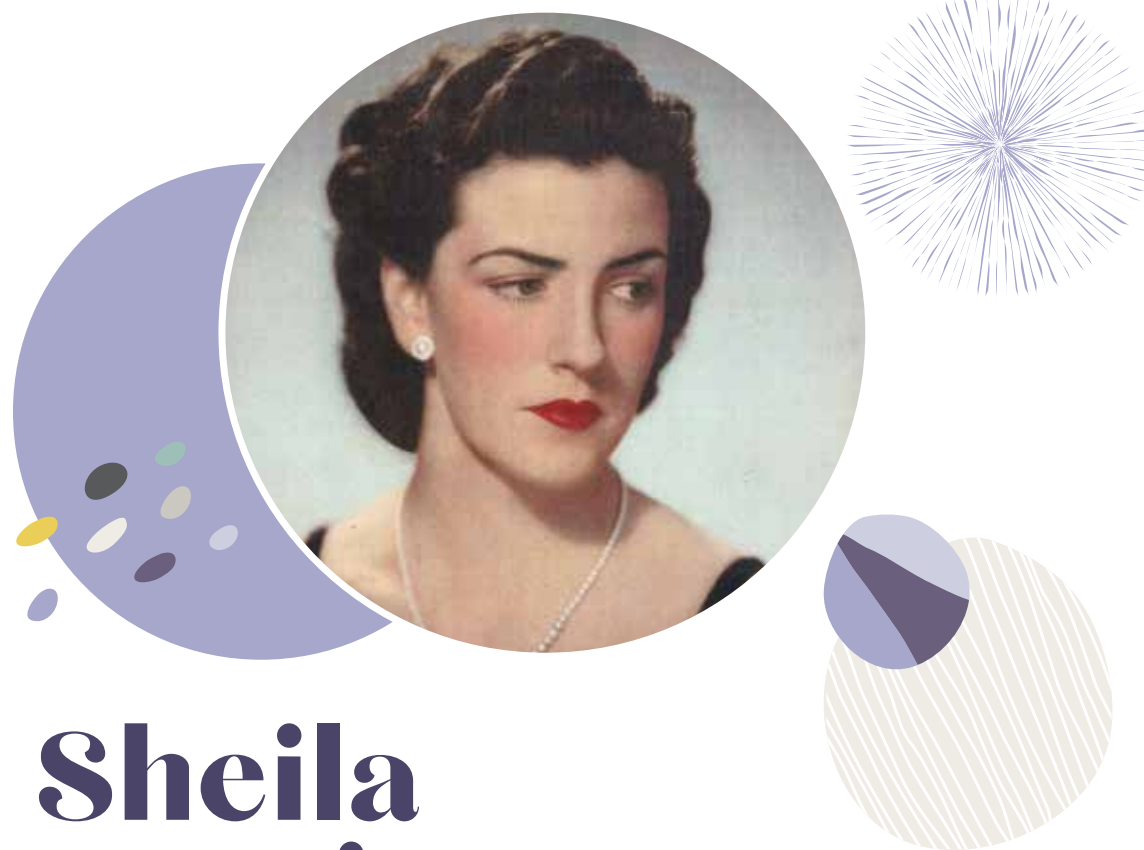
In 1952 Sylvia left Australia, having decided to pursue further studies overseas. In England, she obtained a job with the BBC. On 2 November 1953 she was invited to perform for Queen Elizabeth at the Royal Command Performance in aid of the Variety Artists' Benevolent Fund. She also auditioned for Sadlers' Wells Theatre in Clerkenwell and for Convent Garden.

Perhaps fate intervened at this point, as Sylvia, assuming that she had been unsuccessful in her auditions, sailed for America to visit old Wagga friend Sybil Serong. Despite being invited back for the next round of auditions by both companies, Sylvia decided to remain in America.

In America, Sylvia's skills eased her transition into her new home. As a soprano with the NOC, Sylvia had gained a fair working knowledge of German, Italian, French and Greek. This, coupled with her experience working in welfare, secured her a position as a liaison officer with the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration, based in New York. Based at Idlewild Airport (now JFK), Sylvia was responsible for facilitating the migrants' entry into the U.S. With each plane carrying 74 migrants, Sylvia sometimes met up to five planes a day, and was on call 24 hours a day.

In 1963 her hard work paid off, and she finally realised her dream of a singing career. For the next three years, she sang professionally in theatre productions staged in Pennsylvania, including *Guys and Dolls*, *The Music Man*, *My Fair Lady*, *Brigadoon*, *The Sound of Music* and others.

Reviewers praised her 'rich, enormously powerful voice' as one 'all too rarely heard on the concert platform'. Sylvia died in New York on Anzac Day 1980, the timing perhaps appropriate for a lady that, to the end of her days, remained proud of her Australian roots.



Sheila Martin

1916 - 1996

In 1937, she was known as Australia's Luckiest Girl. Born to one of Wagga's most celebrated doctors, Sheila Martin was not only beautiful, but talented, having an impressive scholastic, recreational and sporting background.

Educated at the Wagga Grammar School until the age of thirteen, Sylvia attended the Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) at Pymble, Sydney for her senior years. There, she excelled at sports, gaining her colours in hockey, swimming and tennis. She was Sports' Captain of the school in her final year, Prefect and Secretary of the Pymble League of Nations Branch. Sheila also enjoyed theatre, being involved with the school's dramatic arts society and performing her first role at fourteen.

After matriculating, Sheila enrolled at the University of Sydney to study science. At university, she was a member of SUDS (the Sydney University Dramatic Society), and also a member of the Sydney University swimming team. A year and a half after enrolling, Sheila returned home to Wagga.

Sheila's greatest personal accomplishment came at the age of twenty-one, when she entered the Miss Australia competition. Unlike the earlier contests, Miss Australia 1937 had a far broader judging criteria and was not based on beauty alone.

The 1937 competition had a specific aim, to find a suitable young lady to represent Australia at the Coronation of King Edward VIII.'

Sponsored by *Smith's Weekly* magazine, the winner would be a young woman demonstrating 'perfect health, personality, carriage, capacity to wear clothes well (without being a mannequin), good education (but not necessarily 'high brow') and a proficiency in some sport (but not necessarily a champion).

Sheila was crowned Miss Australia and was given a tumultuous reception when introduced to the public at Sydney's State Theatre. So began a whirlwind tour of engagements across NSW, where many towns hosted civic receptions.

On Friday 12 March she was received at Government House by Governor General Sir Phillip Street, and spent the next week attending receptions and functions. She was showered with hundreds of gifts from well-wishers, as she toured the streets in her Pontiac car with Miss Australia pennants flying. On one occasion on Pitt Street, it was necessary for police escorts to clear the crowds away!

Three weeks after her crowning, Sheila sailed on a first-class travel world tour, chaperoned by Miss Jean Cheriton, headmistress of the Doone finishing school for girls. Their destination was London (via Malta) for the Coronation, then on to Canada and the United States of America, before returning to Australia via Hawaii and New Zealand.

Londoners called her the *Cinderella Girl*. Her popularity there is indicated by the famous fashion thoroughfare Bond Street, which for the first time in history, presented her with the *Freedom of the Street*. During her visit, Sheila rubbed shoulders with the upper echelons of British and Commonwealth society. She attended a large, private ball in Mayfair described by the *Tumut and Adelong Times* as being 'marked by pre-war splendour.' There, she shook hands with the Queen and Queen Mary, and was introduced to most of the royal family.

The highlight of her trip, however, was the King's Coronation at Westminster Abbey. As the representative of 'Australian girlhood', Sheila had a seat in a prime position to view the dazzling spectacle. Whilst in London, Sheila also had a private audience with the Queen (later the Queen Mother), during which she presented her with a gift from the people of Wagga – two possum skin rugs, for daughters Margaret and Elizabeth.

In July 1937 Sheila was welcomed home to Wagga by a large and enthusiastic crowd at the Town Hall (now the Historic Council Chambers), and was presented with an engraved gold flapjack powder compact by Mayor McDonough, on behalf of the people of Wagga.

During World War II, Sheila moved to Melbourne and worked for the Department of Defence. In 1942 she married engineer Theo Scales, and they had two sons. She retired to the seaside town of Portsea, Victoria, where she died in 1996 at the age of eighty.



Beryl Daley

1916 - 2007

Beryl Daley is still remembered by many in Wagga today, although not only by this name. Some remember her by her maiden name, Beryl Speirs, and others by her original married name Beryl Stevenson.

Her father, George Speirs was an optometrist and jeweller in Griffith, one of the well-known Speirs family, whose brother JJ operated an identical business in Wagga.

Advanced for her years Beryl sat for her Intermediate Certificate at the age of twelve and graduated with her Leaving Certificate aged fourteen.

After leaving school, Beryl attended the Wagga Commercial College. The foundress and proprietor, Augusta Joyes, decided to sell the business in 1931, she offered it to Beryl, who had joined the college staff soon after becoming a pupil. Beryl's father lent her the money and she became the new proprietor and co-principle with Augusta,

In 1939 Betty enrolled at Pitman's College in London to study shorthand in English and German. With war declared shortly after her arrival Beryl's plans altered dramatically. She took a job as private secretary to an underwriter at Lloyd's of London, and also took courses in first aid, ambulance driving and nursing.

Beryl met Drysdale Stevenson, a Scot in a Manchester Regiment based in Singapore. Just

two short later they married at sea. A ship's engineer forged her wedding ring from oxidised steel cut from the ship's engine, and the Captain offered the happy couple one of the ship's lifeboats for their honeymoon!

After the voyage, Stevenson returned to his post in Singapore, and Beryl to Australia. Where she travelled home to Wagga, only reuniting with her husband overseas when he was stationed in Poona, India for six weeks. The newlyweds then travelled to Singapore. There, Beryl was introduced to Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief of the Far East, who was in need of a secretary. With her references and 160 wpm shorthand, Beryl won herself not only a job, but the right to remain in Singapore.

Less than a year later in February 1941, Singapore fell to the Japanese, and John and Beryl were separated again. As the Japanese flooded the area she was evacuated to Java and from there she flew on the last civilian plane, the Qantas 'Circe' from Tjilatjap to Broome. The 'Circe' was shot down on the return journey.

Beryl worked as a private secretary to Lieutenant General George Brett, Commander of the Allied Air Forces in the SW Pacific attached to the American forces. She then worked for Brett's successor Lieutenant General George Churchill Kenney.

In 1943, General Douglas MacArthur wanted Beryl to fly to Port Moresby with him. As Australian women were not allowed in active combat zones (with the exception of nurses), Beryl was commissioned into the American Women's Army Corps, becoming Major Beryl Stevenson, the first WAAC in Australia.

Beryl then worked with the American Air Force in New Guinea. Later she was stationed in the Philippines and Japan. Following the Japanese surrender Beryl was not only on the first U.S. aircraft to land in Japan but the first woman and first Australian to land in Japan after the surrender.

At the end of the war, Beryl was decorated with the Legion of Merit, USA rank of Legionnaire for 'outstanding service'. She is one of only two Australians to have received this award, the other being Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey.

Beryl returned to Wagga after the war and divorced Steve who was a Japanese POW. She resumed her duties at the Wagga Commercial College, and in 1948, married stock and station agent Jim Daley. In 1959, Beryl established the Women's Session, a radio program broadcast from Wagga on 2CO, ABC Riverina and NE Victoria Service. She also managed her rice farm at Griffith, and bore five children.

Beryl moved her family to Sydney in 1967. There, she undertook tertiary education at Macquarie University, graduating with a BA (Hons) in English Literature. Beryl taught Australian and English literature at the University of NSW, in addition to shorthand to cadet reporters at News Limited. In the mid-1970s she convened the Alternative Publishing Cooperative, and became a director of the Falls Community, Port Macquarie, where 'permaculture' farming was practiced.

Beryl died in 1992, having squeezed at least three lifetimes into one.



Edna Busse

OAM

1918 – 2018

Known in her prime as the ‘pocketsize’ ballerina, Edna Busse stood just five feet tall and wore a size 1 ballet shoe. Her diminutive size however concealed a steely determination to succeed as a ballerina.

And succeed she did.

As a child, Melbourne-born Edna trained in a wide range of dance styles including tap, Highland fling and others associated with musical comedy. She first attended Jennie Brenan’s school, which trained dancers for J.C. Williamson Ltd., before joining Williamson’s troupe. She then moved onto Marjorie Bray’s school where Eunice Weston taught a classical ballet class.

It was there that Edna found her medium, becoming Weston’s junior assistant. It was Weston who introduced Edna to Edouard Borovansky, an act which was to change her life.

After touring with Anna Pavlova’s company in 1938-39, Edouard (known as ‘Boro’) and Xenia Borovansky remained in Australia, where they founded the (Australian) Borovansky Ballet in Melbourne (1939). Edna began studying with the Borovanskys, becoming their first student. For four years, she worked morning, noon and night, determined to fulfil her dream of becoming a ballerina.

In July 1944 *The Sun* newspaper reported that having completed her studies, Edna was now a ballet star. Remarkably, she had only seen her first ballet in 1938, and had not begun studying until the following year, at the comparatively old age of 20.

Edna danced her first leading role in Xenia’s *Pas Classique* in 1940 and in 1944 danced the role of Odette in Act II of *Swan Lake*. By 1946 she was prima ballerina with Borovansky Ballet and had earned the mantle of being the first wholly Australian-trained ballerina in the country to reach the rank of principal. As Edna began to make a name in the ballet world, journalists often referred to her as ‘Australian maid!’ With the company, she starred as Swanhilda (*Coppélia*), Princess Aurora (*The Sleeping Beauty*), and Giselle.

In 1951 Edna danced the titular role in *The Black Swan*, Boro’s second Australian ballet. The following year, Edna danced in *The Sleeping Princess*, Borovansky’s take on the story of Sleeping Beauty. Of Edna, Adelaide newspaper *The Mail* said ‘As Princess Aurora, Edna Busse, petite and charming, danced, with grace and vitality, expressing the naivete of the youthful princess...’

Shortly after that performance, Edna suffered a foot injury that required surgery followed by strict rest. Undeterred, she boarded the RMS ‘Maloja’ bound for London where she hoped to further her studies and career. On arrival, Edna attended classes at the Russian School of Ballet in London.

She spent most of her two years abroad in London, where she was principal at the Palladium, performing in the Christmas pantomime *Cinderella* in 1953. Former prima ballerina of the Russian Imperial Theatre, Princess Mathilde Kschessinska also invited Edna to her school in Paris, where she received private tutoring, and attained her Diploma of Russian Ballet. A European career beckoned, but in February 1955, Edna had to return to Australia when her mother fell ill.

Back home, Edna was given a contract by Harry Wren. She continued to perform until early 1956, when her career as a dancer ended abruptly, when she suffered a knee injury during an engagement at Melbourne’s Tivoli Theatre.

Having retired from the stage, Edna taught ballet for ten years alongside Xenia back in Melbourne. In 1967 she moved to Wagga, where she took over the thriving Shephard School of Dancing, at the invitation of its founders Adele Whitford and her brother John Shephard.

In 1968, Edna realised her dream of bringing professional ballet training to inland Australia, whilst giving the people of Wagga their own ballet company. With the support of a consortium, Edna established The Inland Ballet, and was appointed Artistic Director of the new company. As Miss Busse, Edna offered full classical training from beginners to professionals, with special classes for males, teaching out of the Masonic Building on Tarcutta Street. She also designed and made the company’s costumes.

Her school in Wagga gave an annual performance, which increased in scope and complexity as her dancers developed greater expertise. Edna choreographed both classics and new works for the company, with performances including *Coppelia*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*. In 1986, the company’s annual performance was *An Autumn Day Long Ago*, a piece choreographed by Edna to the music of Chopin, Schubert, Mozart and Tchaikovsky.

Edna drew upon experts in the field to give her students the best possible education. To ensure that Inland Ballet remained a part of the local community, Edna welcomed character actors. These included Ken McKenzie (lecturer from RMIHE), Colin Anderson (Senior Lecturer in Drama, RMIHE) and actress Nancy Blacklow who assisted with *Cinderella*. In 1984 the company partnered with the Victorian College of the Arts, and for the first time, toured outside of Wagga. That same year, their performance of *Coppelia* was broadcast in full on Wagga’s RVN-2.

Edna became one of the pioneers of ballet in Australia. This was recognised in 1987 when she received an OAM for service to ballet. Wagga became Edna’s home, and she spent the remaining 52 years of her life there. She passed away on 2 January 2019 at the Wagga Base Hospital, shortly after turning 100.



Betty Docker

RRH, QHNS

1920 - 2001

Betty Bristow Docker, known to her family as 'Boo', was the only child born to John and Ellen Docker.

Betty had an adventurous streak, which evolved during her childhood spent at Marree, her family's property on the outskirts of Wagga. This sense of adventure was a trait that served Betty well throughout her life.

On the same day that World War II was declared in September 1939, Betty enrolled in nursing at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. When she completed her training in 1942, Betty became a staff nurse at the Alfred, a position she held until February 1944, when she joined the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) as a Sister.

Stationed in Townsville, Betty was primarily engaged in the air evacuation of sick Army and RAAF personnel from the Islands. As medical evacuation RAAF sister, her role was to aid, soothe and comfort the evacuee patients on their flight from Townsville to Brisbane. Betty left Townsville in 1946, and for the next three years was stationed down south as Sister at Heidelberg Military Hospital (Victoria), Laverton (Victoria) and Mallala (South Australia).

Betty joined the British Allied Occupation Force on 1 August 1949 and was appointed to the 77th RAAF Hospital at Iwakuni, Japan, situated just 30 miles from Hiroshima. In letters home, Betty wrote that Hiroshima's recovery was amazing, with the city being well

built over and cultivated. Betty remained in Japan until May 1950, before travelling back to Wagga, to take up a position at the RAAF Hospital at Forest Hill.

In June 1950, with the outbreak of the Korean War, RAAF nurses were engaged in almost daily air evacuation duties, as Australia was responsible for the air evacuation of all British Commonwealth casualties from Korea to Japan.

Betty returned to Japan in 1953 when she was appointed as Sister-in-Charge of a RAAF hospital there, and is believed to have served aboard a helicopter picking up a serviceman from close to the border between North and South Korea.

In February 1958 Betty was featured in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, when she was chosen to accompany the Queen Mother on her Australian tour. The following year, she was one of six crew selected by Minister for Air, Mr Osborne, to accompany Princess Alexandra during her visit Down Under. Ten years later, Betty, by then Group Officer was appointed Honorary Nursing Sister to the Queen.

Betty was selected as the RAAF's first nursing sister to undertake an exchange with the Royal Air Force (RAF) in June 1963. Shortly afterwards, she left Australian shores once again, to undertake a two year tour of duty at the RAF Hospital at Wroughton, west of London.

Between 1967 and 1969 Betty supervised the flight nursing staff in and out of Vietnam. Following a string of promotions she went on to serve as Matron of the No. 4 RAAF Hospital in Butterworth, Malaysia. Her official rank was then Wing Officer. In February 1969 she was appointed to the top post of Matron-in-Chief of the RAAF nursing service.

Betty's career in the RAAFNS spanned twenty-eight years in total. During her time in service, Betty left a great legacy for those who followed. A tenacious woman, she fought for change so that married women could continue on as nurses, also petitioning for women's rights to reach the highest ranks, something that was not previously allowed.

Betty was also highly decorated, being awarded the Royal Red Cross (2nd class) Medal in 1968, the Royal Red Cross Medal in 1970, the Florence Nightingale Medal for distinguished service in 1971 and the National Medal in 1977.

The Florence Nightingale Medal is the highest international distinction a nurse can attain. Instituted in 1912 by the International Committee of the Red Cross, it is awarded to nurses or nursing aides for 'exceptional courage and devotion to the wounded, sick or disabled or to civilian victims of a conflict or disaster.'

When Betty died in 2001, her funeral service held at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, was overflowing with family and friends. Despite the lofty heights that she achieved in her career, her funeral notice closed with two simple words 'Farewell Boo.'



Wendy Kelsall

1926 - 2002

From a young age, Wendy Kelsall dreamed of flying.

In January 1949 she flew a Tiger Moth plane from Forest Hill to her home, Broughton Brook, situated twenty-four kilometres from Wagga. Perhaps this does not sound like a great feat, but the fact that Wendy only completed eight hours fifteen minutes dual instruction, was enough to create a Riverina record!

Wendy learned to fly under the instruction of ex-RAAF pilot Flight Lieutenant Eric Condon, who was the proprietor and chief flying instructor of the Wagga Flying School. Because Wendy lived so far away from Forest Hill, where the school was located, Eric developed a special Tiger Moth 'home delivery' service for her. A suitable paddock was chosen on the family property that could be used as a satellite airstrip. Eric would then land there and pick up Wendy, flying her to Forest Hill for her lessons, and drop her home at their conclusion.

A keen (and adept) pupil, she was determined in her lessons, and in November 1949, her doggedness paid off, when she became the first woman in Wagga to earn her 'wings', an 'A' Class pilot's licence. Her achievement was reported in newspapers from Melbourne to Queensland, and local journalist Kathleen Higgins of *The Daily Advertiser* (writing under the nom-de-plume Dianthus) wrote that Wendy's success would appeal to those who admire a spirit of adventure.

Having gained her licence, Wendy became an inaugural member of the Australian Women's Pilots' Association founded by aviatrix Nancy Bird, and a member of the Royal Aero Club of NSW.

Wendy was the youngest daughter of Riverina grazier Thomas Kelsall and his wife Dorothy. She enjoyed a happy childhood on the family property, Broughton Brook, with sisters Dorothy and Margot, and brothers John, Tom and Ken.

At the age of twelve, Wendy became a boarder at Frensham School in Mittagong. There, she discovered a passion for hockey and cricket, excelled in creative arts and received an Iris (the highest award given at the school) for weaving.

After leaving school, Wendy moved to Sydney, and joined the Red Cross Society. Between 1945 and 1948 she worked full time in their Handicrafts Section, and was an enthusiastic volunteer. Through the Society, she completed a Handcraft Instructor's Training course, the first of its kind in Australia. During this period, she also developed a correspondence course in handicrafts and taught craft to TPI (totally and permanently incapacitated) patients in their homes, through the 113th Australian General Hospital at Concord.

Wendy was an incredibly talented, creative and resourceful woman. As an adult, she discovered many new interests and hobbies, and this passion never waned, even in old age. Her pastimes included writing poetry, wood carving, sewing, leatherwork and lead lighting. She was an avid reader and a detailed and methodical record keeper who chronicled her personal family history. In Sydney, she joined the Sydney Swords Club to learn the art of fencing with a foil and studied sculpture at the Sydney Technical College, personally inspired by the works of the famed English sculptor Barbara Hepworth. After returning to Wagga in later life, she met future friend Joyce Jenkins, president of the Wagga Art Society, at a yoga class. Joyce not only taught Wendy painting, but also encouraged her to pursue her other untapped talents.

In her life, Wendy worked many different jobs. In Wagga, she picked apples (to fund her flying lessons), and worked in retail at Castles Hardware. In Sydney, she manufactured and sold artist's easels and worked at Playways Toyshop between 1955 and 1958. Her knowledge of cars was phenomenal. She was a driver for a dealership, a private chauffeur for the Mayo family of Rose Bay, and while living in Mittagong, she worked as a taxi driver.

While living at Avalon in Sydney's northern beaches, Wendy acquired a new skill, construction, when she built a retaining wall at her home. In 1972, she purchased a house at Mittagong in the Southern Highlands. For the next two years, three months, she worked on her home every day, single-handedly completing extensive renovations.

This house heralded the beginning of her building 'career'. Over the next thirty years, Wendy renovated homes in Sydney, Burradoo, Wagga, Batlow and Oura. She also drafted her own building plans and built extensions from the ground up.

Wendy's last home was in Oura. Appropriately named Swansong, it was there that she passed away, surrounded by her family, on 25 July 2002, having definitely made the most of her seventy-six years on Earth.



Wendy Hucker

1928 - 2015

Wendy Hucker was a true champion of women's history.

The path that Wendy followed during her life has ensured a much richer Australian domestic history. As a result, the stories of ordinary women in NSW and the domestic objects they used in daily life have been chronicled and collected for posterity.

Wendy was born at Danbury Park, her family's farm near Birchip, Victoria. Her father, Charlie O'Donnell's parents migrated to country Victoria from Ireland in 1841, and her mother, Hylde Adelsköld's parents, migrated to Melbourne from Sweden. Wendy was the youngest of nine children, although baby Charlie died at two years of age. Just a year after Wendy's birth, her father died suddenly from pneumonia.

Hylde had eight children to rear ranging from eighteen months to sixteen years – and the burden of responsibilities associated with running a pastoral property during the Great Depression. She lost the farm and resettled in Swan Hill with her children

In order to ease some of Hylde's burden, her sister Nan (also known as Annie) offered to adopt baby Wendy. In what must have been a heartbreaking decision, Hylde agreed, and Wendy began a new life separate from her mother and siblings, although they always remained in touch.

Wendy settled in Wagga, with her new parents, Nan and Eric Roberts who had been school teachers in Narrandera. In 1932, Eric and Nan founded radio station 2WG, broadcasting from the brick building overlooking Wollundry Lagoon that still bears its name today. Five years later, Nan, better known by her radio moniker 'Auntie Nan', launched the 2WG *Women's Club*, a radio program designed especially for country women and children.

At 16 years of age after completing her schooling in Wagga and Sydney, Wendy studied anthropology at the University of Sydney. When she successfully completed her degree, Wendy became one of the University's youngest graduates, and put her skills to use working in Papua New Guinea for a short time.

In 1957, Wendy married radio announcer Walter Hucker. They had four children, Kirsty, Kate, Beth and Geoffrey. Having a shared background in broadcasting, they began making radio serials, but with the advent of television soon afterwards, they switched. Forming their own production company Air Programs International, they became pioneers of animated film in Australia, and won many awards.

As one of few female producers in Australia, in 1977, Wendy produced what is believed to be the first film to present the views of Aboriginal children using their own stories and paintings. Titled *This is Our Land – Aboriginal Children's History of Australia*.

In the late 1970s (following the breakdown of her marriage), Wendy moved to Horse Creek Station near Rosewood and Tumbarumba. It was during this period that Wendy discovered her lifelong passion for domestic history.

She found (to her horror) that families were commonly discarding items of great value to social history. These included old homemade kitchen utensils, wagga rugs made of fabric scraps and sugar bag aprons. These items which documented the fabric of Australia's history, including difficult periods (e.g. the Great Depression) were in danger of being lost forever. Wendy decided to do something about it.

Wendy and others established the Pioneer Women's Hut (PWH) at Glenroy, near Rosewood. Opening in 1986 this modest museum is a treasure trove of stories of rural women and an historically valuable collection of artefacts. This museum reflects Wendy's credo that 'history is often seen as belonging to the rich and famous but in the end history is not about great events and famous people. It is about ordinary people and their everyday lives. This is what makes us Australians.' She believed that the privileged and educated people who documented history were usually men telling 'his-story'. She wanted to create opportunities for the often silent voices of women to be heard.

In 2001, a second project emerged from the PWH, the National Quilt Register which documented more than 1,100 quilts made by Australian women between 1850 and 1965 from the decorative to the functional.

It is difficult to pinpoint just one valuable contribution made to society by Wendy but it would have to be the exhaustive work that she carried out in the field of social history. Lovingly documenting and safeguarding the previously hidden and undervalued histories of Australian women. This could remain her greatest legacy.



Erica Condon

1929 - 2017

Erica Condon loved listening to the radio. In 2014 she wrote in the *Reader's Digest*, recalling 'the silky voices of the announcers served as a constant companion who brought life, music and hopes galore to a nine-year-old only child in the late 1930s.'

The greatest dream of this little girl from The Rock was to become a radio announcer. In a time when female announcers were rarely heard on the airwaves, it was Erica's move to Wagga with her family in 1938 that helped her reach this goal.

Erica was the daughter of Eric and Dorothy 'Veronica' Condon. Eric was an aviation pioneer, a pre-war civilian pilot and wartime military flying instructor who established the Wagga Flying School after World War II.

In Wagga, Erica attended Mt. Erin Convent where she enjoyed dances, joined the Wagga School of Arts and produced a number of productions.

However, radio was still her passion. She polished her voice performing on 2WG's weekly children's program, in the Festival of the Arts and as regular competitor at the annual Wagga Eisteddfod. Having discovered that typing, researching and copywriting skills were also desirable for anyone wanting to work in radio, Erica enrolled in a year-long course at the Wagga Commercial College.

After graduating in 1945, sixteen year old Erica contacted local radio station 2WG, and informed them of her suitability as a radio announcer. Much to her surprise, she was given an interview the following day!

Erica earned herself a job with the copy chief. She worked six days a week from nine to five and the pay was pitiful, but she was thrilled. On quiet Friday evenings, one of the announcers became her mentor. She learned how to operate the controls at the desk, put the records on the turntable, cut in the relayed news and other tricks of the trade.

Nine months after starting at 2WG, fate stepped in and gave Erica her big chance. When one of the evening announcers collapsed and was rushed to hospital, Erica was alone in the station. Remembering her training, she entered the soundproof studio, sat in the announcer's chair, and as scheduled, went straight into reading the livestock report! She competently played the commercials, ran the nightly serial, and brought in the news time relay effortlessly.

So began Erica's radio career. She stayed at 2WG for six years, securing an afternoon program 'Music of the Masters'. She loved her work at the station, and the joy that she felt when she was 'on air' was unparalleled. Following her success, the manager hired more women, and Erica viewed herself as a pioneer of country radio, paving the way for more female announcers.

Erica left her beloved radio job in 1951, when she married Lesley Partridge. The marriage, while producing a child, Vivienne, was not happy and ended in divorce. Under the difficult terms of the divorce, Lesley gained custody of their daughter, but soon thereafter gave her up for adoption.

To make a living, Erica worked for a time as a pharmaceutical sales representative in London. On her return to Australia, she based herself in Sydney and became an advertising copywriter, a job undertaken by very few women at the time.

Erica married for a second time in 1960. Clinton Smith was a stage hand working at ABC Television when Erica met him, but after encouraging him to pursue work as an advertising copywriter, he too, landed a job in the field and went on to a successful career. Sadly for Erica, her second marriage did not last, and she became a single parent to another two daughters Shale and Darien.

Erica then became a freelance writer and was published in magazines and newspapers including *Woman's Day*, *New Idea*, *the Australian Women's Weekly*, *the New Zealand Women's Weekly*, *Majellan*, *People*, *Prediction*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Reader's Digest*, *the Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun Herald*. She also wrote for *POL*, a magazine established in the late 1960s, which is considered to have played an important role in raising the awareness of the status of women, while establishing new standards in terms of content, design and photography.

Despite her career moves, Erica never lost her love of listening to the radio and kept a transistor in every room.

Daughters Shale and Darien remember Erica as a woman who often took the road less travelled in her personal and professional life and was ahead of her time, not always in step with the traditional expectations of women.

Whenever her daughters were scared as children, Erica would exclaim 'Don't worry, I am as strong as ten thousand lions!' When she died, it was this saying that the girls had engraved on a memorial plaque, which embodied Erica's spirit of courage, determination and resilience.



Auntie Yvonne Gilchrist

1930-2011

Auntie Yvonne Gilchrist was born at Condobolin, or as she called it, the dead heart of NSW. One of eleven children born to Frank and Sophia Vincent, her childhood was spent in Euabalong, a small town in western NSW on the Lachlan River.

Sometime after completing her schooling in the public school at Euabalong, Auntie Yvonne sat for her Nurse's Entrance Certificate, today's equivalent of the Higher School Certificate (HSC). For thirteen years, Auntie Yvonne worked as the Food Services Supervisor at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney.

In 1952 Auntie Yvonne married Kevin Gilchrist, who worked as a kettle hand in the textiles industry. The couple settled at the Herne Bay housing settlement, which had been part of the US Army's 118 General Hospital during WWII, but had been taken over by the NSW Housing Commission after the war. Situated just 18km south of Sydney's CBD, the suburb's name was changed to Riverwood in 1957.

Auntie Yvonne and Kevin had nine children – Shirley, Carmel, Jenny, Kevin, Marlene, Terrence, Neil, Suzanne and Laura. In 1981, the family of eleven moved to Wagga. There, Auntie Yvonne began to make her mark on the community.

Auntie Yvonne loved learning, and in 1983 she participated in the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) course at TAFE Riverina. Like Auntie Yvonne, many of the women who enrolled in NOW had withdrawn from the workforce for long periods to raise children.

The course was aimed at women over twenty-five who had limited education or outdated vocational qualifications who wanted to either undertake further education/training and/or re-enter the workforce. NOW re-ignited Auntie Yvonne's passion for learning, a passion that would continue the rest of her life.

The following year, she joined the Wagga branch of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), a group developed to assure access and opportunities in education for Aboriginal people and their communities.

Auntie Yvonne gained a Diploma of Education from the University of New South Wales at the age of sixty-one. This allowed her to work as an Aboriginal Educational Assistant at Mt. Austin High School, a position she held between 1990 and 1997. According to former Principal Dennis Bishop, in this role, her generosity, compassion and drive earned universal respect from all students. In the year of her retirement from Mt. Austin High, the school honoured her by establishing their Yvonne Gilchrist Bush Tucker Garden. Later, her contribution to the school was further acknowledged with the naming of the Yvonne Gilchrist Resource Room.

Alongside her work at Mt. Austin High, Auntie Yvonne also worked as a Senior Youth Worker for six years at the Riverina Remand Centre (now the Juvenile Justice Centre, Wagga).

In 1994, Auntie Yvonne's contribution to the community was acknowledged when she was awarded a NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) award for services to Aboriginal Education. That same year, she was also named NAIDOC Aboriginal Elder of the Year.

Four years later, Auntie Yvonne was named Wagga Aboriginal NAIDOC Person of the Year. She was also one of the ten inaugural Wagga Wagga Walk of Honour recipients, receiving a plaque on Baylis Street outside Zacharia Naumann Optometrists.

With Auntie Yvonne's desire to make her community a better place, and passion for local activism, it is perhaps unsurprising that she was drawn to running for election as a councillor. In 1999, she became the first Indigenous councillor on Wagga Wagga City Council and to this date, is still the only Indigenous representative to have served, which she did until 2003.

In 2007 Auntie Yvonne wrote her story. Titled *The old place: reminiscences of Vonnie Gilchrist née Vincent*. Today, the manuscript is held in the National Library of Australia collection in Canberra.

After thirty years of working tirelessly within the community, Auntie Yvonne passed away at the Mary Potter Nursing Home at the age of 81. Her funeral, held at St. Michael's Cathedral, was attended by hundreds of mourners.

She left behind seven children, twenty-four grandchildren and twenty great-grandchildren.

On 3 November 2011, the day after her funeral, *The Daily Advertiser* published an article about Auntie Yvonne. Reporter Jade Martin perfectly captured her legacy, describing her as a woman who was never afraid to dream out loud. Besides dreaming, Auntie Yvonne put those dreams into action, inspiring all those whose lives she touched.



Sister Noela Fox

PhD PBVM

Born 1929

Sister Noela Fox has lived a life filled with the joy of beautiful things, a thirst for knowledge and a mind always open to learning.

Following schooling in her hometown Urana, Noela became a boarder at Mount Erin Convent in Wagga. In addition to fostering her academic interests, the sisters there so inspired her that 18 year old Noela decided to join the Presentation Congregation.

Becoming a teacher, she taught students of all ages, from infants through to secondary, in subjects including maths, science, English, history, religious education, even teaching piano. Soon after leaving the novitiate in 1953, Noela was posted to the first Catholic school in the Como-Oyster Bay-Jannali area. She later returned there as Principal.

I first taught infants at the first Catholic School in the Como-Oyster Bay-Jannali area which was at that time in magnificent bush-land where the school ground was bordered by rock orchids, grevilleas, flannel flowers, magnificent gums, and waterfalls from the rocks above. What a wonderful chorus of birds we could hear each day.

I'll never forget its beauty which has now all gone as the population has expanded. Sister Stephen and I were the pioneer Sisters (I was just out of novitiate training) when we began the school in January 1953 and I remained there for a couple of years, returning later as Principal.

Sister Noela Fox, interview 2018

Noela also spent 10 years at the Ballarat Campus of the Australian Catholic University, where she lectured in several history subjects and in religious curriculum. Her next 10 years were spent as a tutor at the Junee Correctional Centre. There, she tutored mainly Aboriginal inmates, and learnt much after her sheltered academic life.

In addition to her teaching degree, Noela also acquired a library degree, a BA (majoring in history and English), a Master of Arts (Hons), a Master of Literature (History), a Graduate Diploma in Religious Studies and a PhD in Cultural History, in which she graduated in 1999 at the age of 70. She has gained certificates from TAFE in Furniture Restoration, Oil Painting and also became a JP. All of these experiences were pure joy.

Despite having published a number of history books, Noela dreamed of writing a novel. At 85 years old, Noela realised her dream, with the publication of *A Dream Unfolds*. It was chosen from countless novels submitted to a worldwide competition to write about the life of Presentation Congregation founder Nano Nagle. Noela flew to Dublin for the launch, as part of the tercentenary celebrations commemorating Nano's birth.

Noela is a lady who exemplifies that age is just a number. With a twinkle in her eye, she states that one thing is sure, "I will continue to wonder and ask why, which for almost 90 years has continued to frustrate many people!"



Mary Kidson

Born 1938

Mary Kidson is a Wagga institution.

Wagga was first home to Mary between 1960 and 1970, when her husband Guy was posted there with the RAAF. During that time, four of their five children were born. The family briefly moved away from Wagga between 1970 and 1972, but afterwards, settled in Wagga permanently.

Mary's new home was a growing regional centre of approximately 30,000 residents, and times were rapidly changing. More women were entering the workforce, challenging the previously held view of them as simply wives and mothers.

In 1977 Mary and Guy established Kidsons Cycles on Fitzmaurice Street, one of the earliest specialty bicycle stores in the Riverina. It was very rare for a woman to own a bicycle shop, especially in the country. The Kidsons sold their business in 1988, but 42 years later in 2018, the business still operates under their well-known name.

In addition to running the family business, Mary believed that she could also contribute to the community, and make Wagga a better place. Following her involvement in a number of local groups and organisations, Mary campaigned for election to Council. This involved an extensive doorknocking campaign, letter writing and her attendance at AGMs and Council meetings where she learned about the city's facilities.

If women don't put themselves forward of course there's no hope of better gender diversity.

Mary Kidson, *The Daily Advertiser*, 5 August 2016

In 1975, Mary was part of a small sub-committee of local women who set about planning the creation of a Family Day Care (FDC) service for Wagga. Before year's end, Wagga Wagga Family Day Care (WWFDC) began operations under a pilot program. In 2018, WWFDC is the second oldest childcare scheme in the state.

With great support from the Women's Electoral Lobby, Mary was first elected to Wagga Wagga City Council in 1977, and went on to become the longest serving elected female representative, serving until 1999. In 1983, she was given the further honour of being elected Deputy Mayor, the first female in Wagga to hold that position.

As a Councillor, Mary was passionate about many causes, but in particular town planning, library services, the arts and childcare. Throughout her time on Council she continued to provide advocacy and support for Family Day Care (FDC) Services across the Local Government Area. Her significant contribution to FDC was recognised through her appointment as Patron of the service in 2000, and in 2018, she was honoured when the Family Day Care's play session space in Wagga Botanic Gardens was named the Mary Kidson Play Session Hall.

Upon reflection, Mary is proud to have been a part of a Council which was, in her view, the combination of a united and progressive team of staff and elected members.

For the future women of Wagga, I would hope to see that women and their contribution to life in this city see that it can be rewarding to get actively involved, also I would hope that the community sees the need for a more even and balanced representation of women in all aspects of life and politics.

Mary Kidson, interview 2018



Louise Blackett

Born 1941

In the world of Wagga theatre, there are few names as renowned or respected as that of Louise Blackett.

Louise learned her craft from the age of 3 ½, when enrolled at Miss Tess Hudson's private pre-school on Kincaid Street, Wagga. There, Louise was tutored in singing and elocution, but also eventually discovered a desire to not only perform, but teach.

On leaving school, Louise enrolled as a student at the St. Martin's Theatre school in South Yarra, studying under the remarkable Irene Mitchell MBE, a chain-smoking force of nature. Teenage Louise gained her first role in a major production, cast opposite the legendary Frank Thring (a former pupil of Irene's) in the thriller *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

This was a busy time in Louise's life. In addition to performing, she undertook a three year course at the Melbourne Conservatorium to study speech and drama.

When I was a little girl I was always going to be an actress. I was really guided to think along those lines. My mother loved the Arts and felt that I could use the talent she thought I had in that way. I thank my mother so much for that guidance as I have had a wonderful profession all my working days.

Louise Blackett, interview 2018

In 1961, Louise graduated with an Associate Diploma. Returning home to Wagga, she established a speech and drama school, which she ran from her parent's home. A great highlight of Louise's career came with the opening of the Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre on 29 June 1963. At this gala event, an act from *The Teahouse of the August Moon* was performed, featuring Louise as Lotus Blossom, and her boyfriend Dennis as Captain Fisby.

Two years later, Louise and Dennis married, and sailed for England, where Louise intended to further her studies, enrolling at Trinity College London. In July 1967 she was awarded her Licentiate Teacher's Diploma, one of the highest attainments in Speech and Drama. At graduation, Louise was presented her degree by the iconic actor Sir Ralph Richardson, an eccentric man who rode his old motorbike to the occasion!

After two years, the Blacketts returned home, travelling overland from Britain through Europe, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. At the beginning of 1968 Louise opened her new Speech and Drama School at the couple's home in Morrow Street, directly opposite the Civic Theatre. Louise focussed on encouraging children in a non-competitive way, hoping to equip them with the tools to build lifelong confidence.

In 1973, with assistance from Mayoress Shirley Gorman, Louise established The Children's Theatre Workshop. Still operating more than four decades later, hundreds of children have passed through its doors. Many wonderful classics have been performed in various venues throughout the city – from the Civic Theatre to outdoor productions and in settings throughout the Riverina. Louise continues to inspire Wagga's children, while teaching them about all aspects of the theatre, and will continue to conduct her School as long as she has the drive and enthusiasm that has always shaped her life.

Wagga is very close to my heart.

Louise Blackett, interview 2018



Yvonne O'Connor

Born 1947

Yvonne O'Connor has been dancing for more than sixty years.

After moving to Wagga at the age of eighteen months, Yvonne took up ballet two years later, on the recommendation of the family's doctor, to rectify ligament problems with her legs. Initially, she couldn't stand with her feet straight, let alone turn them out, so dancing was not a pastime she enjoyed then.

Little Yvonne's first teacher was the renowned Miss Madge Wallace. Under her care and skilful tutelage, Yvonne began to delight in dance, especially as she became able to perform the required moves. Thus began a passion for dancing that would last a lifetime, and inspire her future career.

On leaving school Yvonne became a full-time ballet student, and professional dancer in Sydney. When the school offered her the chance to become a student teacher, she jumped at the opportunity. After completing her training, Yvonne returned home to Wagga, and in 1968, she established the Yvonne O'Connor School of Dance.

From the beginning, Yvonne taught the pupils herself. With a view to producing well-rounded dancers, her students learnt a range of dance styles including tap, jazz, hip hop, contemporary, national character, Scottish, Irish and Yvonne's favourite, classical ballet.

Over the years, many of Yvonne's students have gone on to their own dance careers.

With an average of 130 students a year for the past 50 years means more than 6000 people have been taught by Yvonne O'Connor since she opened her studio.

The Daily Advertiser, 9 December 2017

These include Sam Moran, who became the Yellow Wiggle, Renee Saville who established Canberra's Sparkle Dance Studio and Alicia McDonald who danced professionally on cruise ships in the Caribbean. Felicity Mandile is now the Director of Strategy and Global Engagement at Queensland Ballet and Conny Mathot is now Executive Director at California Dance Classics. Katrina O'Connor was accepted into the Australian Ballet School and The Dancer's Company. She now owns and operates two pilates studios 'Aligned For Life' in Melbourne.

Isabella Klemke began ballet lessons with Yvonne at the age of three. In August 2017, she was accepted into a three-year study program at the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London. Her application was one of just 50 that were successful.

I had no plans for my studio to be still operating 50 years on – I just kept doing what I loved and all of a sudden it was the 50th year and 50th concert!

Yvonne O'Connor, interview 2018

In December 2017 Yvonne's school celebrated its 50th anniversary. In that time, Yvonne has seen more than 6000 students pass through her doors and many have remained lifelong friends. At the age of 70, Yvonne has no plans to stop doing what she loves. She will continue to teach, prepare classes, choreograph solos and design costumes and showcase her dancers in the annual dance school concert for years to come.

My favourite part of my job is seeing the children enjoying themselves and their excitement at getting dressed up and performing at our annual concert.

Yvonne O'Connor, interview 2018



Joan Saboisky

Born 1950

Joan Saboisky is a quiet achiever with a big heart, whose name is closely linked with Wagga's migration history. In 2016, her tireless community work was publicly acknowledged when then NSW Premier Mike Baird awarded her the Multicultural Community Regional Communities Medal.

Growing up on her family's farm near Young, Joan had a childhood that was both safe and secure, but realised at an early age that not all people enjoyed this luxury.

When she married Peter Saboisky, this realisation was brought closer to home. During WWII, Peter's parents had spent 10 years in the forced labour camps of Nazi Germany. In 1949 they left Europe, and joined the more than 300,000 migrants who passed through the Bonegilla Migrant Camp hoping to begin a new life in Australia.

Hearing their experience opened Joan's eyes to the challenges facing those who came from a different culture, spoke little English, and had suffered great hardships. For Joan, this began a lifelong pursuit to better the lives of the migrants and refugees settling in Wagga, while promoting peace and harmony within the community.

Since Joan moved to Wagga in 1969, the city has continued to diversify and grow, with emerging cultures and faiths.

In the mid-1970s, Joan and Peter were deeply affected by the images of Vietnamese boat people which began to flood the media. Together with other residents of their San Isidore neighbourhood, they established the San Isidore Refugee Committee. With the financial backing of Wagga's Catholic diocese, one of the Committee's major outcomes was the creation of three cottages designed to house refugee families. Over a 20 year period, they were home to over 150 refugees from 8 countries.

Joan has also sought to help the marginalised and poor of Wagga. Between 1980 and 2000 she volunteered at the Edel Quinn Shelter for homeless men. There, she discovered that when many of the residents died, they left no-one behind to mourn their passing. Joan strongly believed it was important that their names be remembered, and as a way of honouring their memory, she produced a ceramic mural so they would not be forgotten.

In 2008 Joan became involved with a small group of Christians and Muslims interested in interfaith dialogue, and the group Our Common Word (OCW) was born. Recently, they hosted a public sharing of traditions with Indigenous, Buddhist and Hindu representatives.

With 112 nations of origin now represented here, Joan believes that Wagga has gained more colour, vibrancy and richness because of its growing multiculturalism. Joan continues to promote peace and harmony in a city which she believes has matured into a very special place.

I don't recall having strong dreams of what I wanted to be as a child. I just lived in the moment, enjoying the farm life, although travel to other places was a dream when I heard people talking about experiences in other countries. I did get to travel, but it's ironic how other cultures came to me. One of my Vietnamese refugee friends, years after coming to San Isidore took me to her country. 'I'll show you my country', she announced, and arranged everything. That was special.

Joan Saboisky, interview 2018



Diana Gibbs

Born 1951

Diana Gibbs had the sort of exotic childhood that many only dream of. Although born in the UK, she spent her first five years of life travelling between London, Paris and Switzerland, having an English father, a French mother and a Swiss nanny! The family then moved to Jamaica, where Diana attended primary school in Kingston. At the age of ten, she was sent to school in England, before progressing onto London University.

Initially enrolled to study agriculture, Diana switched to resource economics when she became fascinated in how decisions were made as to the use of scarce resources such as land and water, capital and labour.

After leaving university, Diana travelled through Africa and Asia on a working holiday. She found herself in Australia in 1975, and it was in Sydney that she ran out of money. There, Diana got her first full-time job as a research assistant with an international firm of management consultants. After a year, she was promoted to the position of economic consultant.

In the late 1970s, Diana began working on projects associated with the emerging resources boom. During this time, she was also elected to the Council of the Australian Conservation Foundation. There, she became interested in issues relating to sustainability, which led to her undertaking a Master's Degree in Environmental Studies at Macquarie University, from which she graduated in 1986.

Diana settled in the Riverina thirty years ago, when she married farmer Bernard Whyte. Together, they ran a mixed farming enterprise at Juneefree, producing wool and prime lamb, as well as cereals and canola. Four years ago, they 'downsized' and moved to Wagga, where they operate a cattle-fattening enterprise on the outskirts of the city.

Living in the Riverina, having been born and raised elsewhere, is such a privilege. Perhaps it is because I see the land with fresh eyes that it is all so very special for me.

Diana Gibbs, interview 2018

To date, Diana's most challenging professional role was the four and a half years she spent as Director of the Murray Darling Basin Authority (October 2011 – February 2016). Appointed shortly before the Draft Plan was released, she immediately embarked upon a very steep learning curve, where she had to deal with heightened emotions and strong community backlash.

In 2000 she was awarded the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation Rural Women's Award for NSW-ACT, and ten years later, her high-achieving career as businesswoman, economist, cattle farmer and industry leader earned her a place on the 100 Women of Australian Agribusiness list.

Today in 2018, Diana continues to operate her consulting practice, and is Executive Director of Riverina Wool Growers, a grower-owned company manufacturing pure wool fashion accessories under the Diana Gibbs label. She is also a Director of the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, and of the Riverina Local Land Services.

I am eternally optimistic about the next generation of women. They have the benefits of so much technology that enables a little effort to go such a long way. Opportunities are endless – now it is 'normal' to travel the world, work in a number of different sectors, and be financially independent. All such advantages for girls! Women in Wagga can widen their horizons in ways that were unthinkable even 30 years ago, and so I would hope that the future women of Wagga can see the world as their oyster, no longer be limited to certain pre-determined roles, and achieve their dreams – no-one can tell you 'you can't'.

Diana Gibbs, interview 2018



Kay Hull

AM

Born 1954

Kay Hull first became interested in politics in 1990. A small business owner, she believed that she could be a passionate and strong voice for Riverina residents. Her background as a tow truck driver with the family business Graeme Hull Smash Repairs undoubtedly set her up well for the often cutthroat political arena!

Elected to Wagga Wagga City Council in 1991, with four years as Deputy Mayor, her political career took off soon after, with Ministerial appointments and then Kay being elected to the House of Representatives in 1998. In 2006 she was appointed as Chief Whip for the Nationals, a position she held until her retirement in 2010. A woman of passion and principle, Kay achieved many positive outcomes.

In 2002, Kay successfully won her campaign to secure the future of RAAF Base Wagga, ensuring its place as the first line training facility for recruits across the Australian Defence Industry, along with playing a key role in establishing Regional Express Airlines (REX). She lists these as two of her proudest achievements. 2005 saw her take the 'gut wrenching move' of being the only coalition MP to cross the floor of Parliament in protest against the partial sale of Telstra. The following year, she led the push to block the sale of the iconic Snowy-Hydro Scheme.

I was overwhelmed at being awarded an AM on the Queen's Birthday Honours. To know that several applications were made on my behalf was indeed humbling, it did not make me feel important rather, it seemed to consolidate my connection to Riverina communities, as the most important thing to me in politics is that I may be remembered as being a good local member who genuinely cared about the people. I am forever grateful to have worked with the most amazing people in the best electorate in the whole of Australia.

Kay Hull, interview 2018

Since her retirement from politics, Kay continues to be actively involved in the region. She is Chair for a number of organisations, including the Australian Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs (the first female to hold the position), AgriFutures Australia and the Calvary Palliative Enhancement Council.

Kay's years of loyalty to the region and tireless campaigning at both local and national levels has helped ensure Wagga's future as a strong regional centre. Throughout the Riverina, her contributions are acknowledged in a number of ways. She was awarded the Freedom of the City of Wagga Wagga in 2011, Charles Sturt University's South Campus boasts The Kay Hull Veterinary Teaching Hospital, the Australian Airline Pilot Academy is home to the Kay Hull Conference Room, the Kay Hull Bridge is on the Sturt Highway and the Kay Hull Community Centre is in Hay.

Probably the most appropriate recognition comes in the form of her caricature on the side of a REX aircraft. For a politician who genuinely cared about the people in her electorate, it is perhaps fitting that she has been immortalised alongside the REX motto 'Our Heart is in the Country', as she has shown time and again that hers is too.

I hope that the future women of Wagga will never question 'am I good enough?', that they will just stand up and say 'I can, I will' and never be afraid to fall. Everyone makes mistakes, and we must learn quickly and get on with it. Their efforts will give our children the opportunities to live, work and thrive in our great city, now that is really worth fighting for.

Kay Hull, interview 2018



Dr. Catherine Harding

Born 1958

Catherine Harding never doubted her career path would be in medicine. Growing up in a rural medical family, she was influenced both by her maternal grandmother, Dr Vi White and her father Dr Bruce Harding, who moved to Wagga in general practice in the 1950s.

The fact that her grandmother had practiced medicine meant that Catherine had no idea it was unusual for a woman to do so, despite being the only female in her year at Wagga High who wanted to study medicine. In 1977, having completed her schooling, Catherine left Wagga to study medicine at the University of NSW.

In 1982 she worked as an intern at St. Vincent's Hospital which as a sister hospital of Wagga Base, meant Catherine was able to train in Wagga. Over the next few years, she completed a Master's Degree in medical education and joined the general practice training program, before returning home to settle in Wagga.

Back home, Catherine worked first as a locum before joining a general practice, and working in community health. As a GP she was involved with young doctors training

for general practice and teaching was a role she enjoyed. When the University of NSW opened the first Rural Clinical School in Wagga in 2001, Catherine jumped at the chance to be actively involved, teaching both general practice and public health there until 2009. Catherine then became involved with the establishment of the Wagga Campus of The University of Notre Dame Australia's Rural Clinical School which opened two years later.

In 2003, Catherine began PhD research through Charles Sturt University, deciding to focus on the history of early women practitioners in the region. She became certain that this was a history that needed to be documented, when early in her research, a number of older medical practitioners and hospital staff told her that there had been no women doctors working in Wagga!

Furthermore, one of the women she interviewed said of women in medicine, they were 'in the school of Mother Theresa not Einstein,' meaning that there was a general expectation that women in medicine should take on the caring role, and men the intellectual role. Catherine strongly believes that while women entering medicine have made it a more caring profession, good doctors should be able to fulfil both roles regardless of gender.

Catherine left general practice in 2016, to devote more time to her role as Associate Professor and Head of Notre Dame-Calvary Rural Clinical School in Wagga. It is easy to imagine that her beloved grandmother, would be immensely proud that her granddaughter did so much with her legacy.

I think the opportunities for young women in Wagga who want to pursue medicine are better at the moment than they have been in the past, through the support of rural clinical schools and emergence of strong female mentors in medicine.

Dr. Catherine Harding, interview 2018



Annette St Clair

Born 1961

Annette St Clair's daughter Amie had attitude. Born and bred in Wagga, she was strong-willed, popular, sporty and loved life. With a particular passion for softball, Amie and her parents travelled extensively within Australia, with Amie playing on many representative sides.

At the age of just 20, Amie was diagnosed with melanoma, and over the next three years, Amie fought for her life, undergoing numerous treatments. Amie hated hospitals, so, supported by family and friends, she was nursed at home by her mother. The day after her 23rd birthday, on 9 November 2009, Amie succumbed to her illness.

To honour her daughter, Annette and her family established the Amie St Clair Melanoma Trust. The purpose of the charity is straightforward – to increase awareness of melanoma, and educate schools and workplaces on its prevention. The Trust also supports those with melanoma and their families in the Wagga region, whilst actively supporting medical research.

Most importantly, the Trust provides a free melanoma care nurse to rural patients. When Amie was ill, no such support was available to the St Clair family. The nurse provides a service that makes a big difference to those affected. She is the go-between for patients in rural areas, doctors, additional services and the Melanoma Institute Australia. She also provides advice on clinical trials and offers invaluable support, expertise and reassurance.

2017 saw Annette receive a well-deserved accolade, when she was named Wagga Local Woman of the Year. The following year, the Rotary Club of Wagga honoured her with a Paul Harris Fellow.

In Annette's own words, 'out of a negative has to come a positive.' While Amie's loss is at times unbearable, the Trust has given the St Clair family a positive focus, and strength in the knowledge that they are continuing Amie's legacy in spreading the word about melanoma.

To date, the Trust has raised almost one million dollars in the fight against skin cancer. Annette, her family and their team of hard working volunteers can also be proud that people are becoming more aware of the dangers of melanoma, and as a result, are having regular skin checks.

When Amie was unwell, I was also caring for my mum and dad. I lost all three within 16 months, a very hard period of time. We were extremely lucky to have the support of family, friends and the community. Without this support I would not have been able to get through this terrible time. I see the Trust as the opportunity to give back to the wonderful community. Whatever we do, it is too late to save Amie or bring her back. Her death has left a void in our life, and the Amie St Clair Melanoma Trust will not fill that void, or replace Amie. But if we can spread the word, educate young people about this deadly disease, if we can save others' lives, then it is worth it, because we have reduced other families going through the pain that we have.

Annette St Clair, interview 2018



Bishop Genieve Blackwell

Born 1962

It could be said that Genieve Blackwell followed her father into the ‘family business.’

The daughter of a Methodist Minister, Genieve was always a church-goer. Spending her formative years in Wagga, as a child, she aspired to be a teacher. As a university student and young adult working in the public service she attended an Anglican church in Sydney, which led her to applying for ordination in the Anglican Church, while studying theology at Moore Theological College.

Genieve’s first appointment was as an assistant minister in Sydney. On being priested, she valued her role leading a congregation, as well as continuing to enjoy not only preaching and teaching, but cherishing the opportunity to become involved in the lives of her parishioners. Her first two appointments as a priest were to Gulgong and Grenfell. Her third appointment was to the parish of Yass, where she also served as Archdeacon for Goulburn and Rural Ministry between 2007 and 2011.

In 2012, she returned home, taking up the position as Rector of St. Paul’s Turvey Park (Wagga). At this time, Genieve also served as Regional Bishop. This entailed assisting the Diocesan Bishop, and overseeing the then 15 parishes in the region. She was also an episcopal presence for the four Anglican agencies in Wagga – The Riverina Anglican College, St. Martin’s College at Charles Sturt University, Anglicare and The Forrest Centre (in partnership with the Little Company of Mary).

It is a great thing that the gifts of women are being recognised and confirmed as being able to be used in Christ’s service.

Bishop Genieve Blackwell, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 2012

With her consecration in March 2012, Genieve became the first woman bishop in NSW, and the third in Australia. Leaving her hometown once again, she was appointed Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Melbourne from June 2015. Today, she is Bishop of Melbourne’s Marmingatha Episcopate.

As a woman in a previously male-dominated vocation, Genieve openly embodies her beliefs.

Bishop Genieve Blackwell said she would also push the church to reconnect with a community facing questions over the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and sexual minorities.

The Age, 19 December 2014

Since moving to Melbourne, she has become a passionate advocate for violence against women, becoming actively involved with the Anglicans Helping To Prevent Violence Against Women program. It is her belief that churches and related organisations are in a position to reach and influence many people, and that they should not act as a barrier to the prevention, disclosure or recovery from family violence.

Genieve hopes that the future women of Wagga have the opportunity to live out their vocation in whatever sphere of life they choose, and that they will live lives free of gender-based violence or discrimination.

I am a woman and a bishop in the Church of God, so I’m a sign of where the Church is heading.

The Australian Women’s Weekly, 30 November 2017



Jennie Meiklejohn

Born 1966

Jennie Meiklejohn loves everything about markets. The smells and sounds, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the hum of the crowd. The colour and movement. The anticipation of walking into a market not knowing what treasures may be discovered. Most of all, she loves how markets bring people together.

When living in Sydney, Paddington Market was Jennie's local hangout, and one she missed dreadfully after moving to Wagga.

Jennie's chance to fulfil her dream of creating an immersive handmade experience for the Riverina came about unexpectedly, following the closure of a former Wagga market.

After rebranding and building on the existing foundations, the River & Wren Market was born. Built on the ethos of handmade, homemade and home-grown, 'River' symbolises the mighty Murrumbidgee and 'Wren' one of Jennie's favourite birds, but also a childhood nickname.

With a background in administration, Jennie knew that she could combine her love of markets with her expertise as a manager. Yet learning the fundamentals of establishing a business was a steep learning curve, and all done from her kitchen table!

River & Wren, initially something for Jennie to do in her spare time, has become a full time job. However, it is more than a job, it is a passion, and she is hard pressed to pick just one favourite part of her work. From the thrill of curating the market and introducing new and exciting stalls and products to the people of Wagga, to the satisfaction of knowing she is providing artisans with a means of supporting themselves and their families.

Probably her greatest joy is watching market day itself – the market coming to life as the stalls are set up and styled, and the satisfied visitors leaving with their bags overflowing with the beautiful handmade products on offer.

Jennie now stands at the helm of one of the most successful market ventures in the Riverina. The market boasts anywhere from 110 market stalls to around 140 prior to Christmas, with approximately 30,000 people passing through the doors each year.

In addition to running River & Wren, in 2018, Jennie returned to working in the political arena. When, on 8 September 2018, Dr Joe McGirr was elected into NSW State Parliament as the Independent Member for Wagga Wagga, Jennie was offered the role as his Senior Electorate Officer.

I love the support that women give to women in Wagga. I am a member of Women in Business in Wagga which provides an opportunity to network with other women who are in business in our region. Markets are generally dominated by women, though I'm loving that more and more men are joining the market, and I feel that a lovely 'tribe' of market women has developed over the years. I love watching that tribe support and help each other both on market day and on social media through collaborations.

Jennie Meiklejohn, interview 2018



Dr. Faye McMillan

Born 1971

In 2001, Dr. Faye McMillan made history when she graduated from Charles Sturt University's (CSU) Bachelor of Pharmacy. Not only was she part of the inaugural intake of students (enrolling in 1997), she also became the first tertiary qualified registered Aboriginal pharmacist in Australia. As a proud Wiradjuri woman, Faye joined a small number of women who contributed to pharmacology in Wagga, and can be seen as trailblazers in their field.

Faye's journey to pharmacy began many years ago when she returned to her hometown of Trangie, NSW, and took a job in the local chemist. Initially employed in front of house, it wasn't long before pharmacy owner Peter Dixon asked Faye if she was interested in doing a dispensary course. For the next four years, she helped Peter dispense medication.

After moving to Cowra, Faye made enquiries with TAFE about undertaking a science course, when fate intervened. In the process of enrolling at TAFE, she called CSU to seek guidance on subject selection. Professor Mark Burton, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science answered the phone, and it was a chance encounter that would change the course of Faye's life.

On hearing that Faye was considering pursuing science studies at TAFE, Professor Burton asked if she would be interested in finding out about the soon to be offered pharmacy program at the university. Faye travelled to Wagga, toured the campus and facilities, and on her arrival home, discovered that she had been offered a place to begin the course the next week! The rest, as they say, is history.

It was not an easy road. Faye had not studied science at school and was put on academic probation in the first six months... 'Faye found the course both scary and supportive – "a lot of bright young intelligent people that scared the crap out of me".' (CSU News, 27 May 2019).

After graduating, Faye worked in local pharmacies in Wagga and then with the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission. An opportunity to work in the Northern Territory came up and Faye moved North to Darwin and the Tiwi Islands, later working at The University of Wollongong. Over the years, she became involved in the fields of Indigenous and mental health, a progression that was not a conscious decision, but a natural one to Faye given her background, and passion for the totality of health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. For Faye, the connections between her professional discipline of pharmacy and working in the area of mental health were obvious.

Her move into the world of academia was also organic. When Faye began her studies, the Indigenous Health component of the course was delivered by an academic from New Zealand who was not Maori. Thinking this was odd, she realised as time passed, that there was a distinct under representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics within the tertiary sector. This was something that she could see a need for, not only to create diversity within the institution at a staffing level, but also for the benefit of the student experience.

Faye was a founding member of Indigenous Allied Health Australia, which has been bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals from a variety of health backgrounds together since 2010.

Faye's list of achievements is considerable. In 2014 she was recognised in the Australian Financial Review and Westpac 100 Women of Influence. Three years later, she was included in the Who's Who of Australian Women. In 2018 Faye was a finalist in the NSW Woman of the Year Awards in two categories (Regional Businesswoman of the Year and Aboriginal Woman of the Year). 2019 was a big year. In addition to being named NSW Aboriginal Woman of the Year, an honour that humbled her, she was also awarded a Senior Atlantic Fellow, having been inaugural Atlantic Fellow for Social Equity.

As well as her Bachelor of Pharmacy, Faye holds a Master of Indigenous Health Studies and a Doctor of Health Science. She also earned a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Governance from the University of Arizona (USA) and Wiradjuri Language Culture and Heritage at CSU, as well as a Graduate Certificate in Education (University of Melbourne), and is a Senior Fellow with Advance Higher Education.

In April 2011 Faye took up the position of Director of the Djirruwang Program and Associate Professor in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health at CSU Wagga. *Djirruwang* means *light* in the NSW south coast Indigenous Tharawal language. Currently in its 27th year, the program offers Indigenous students a Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) over three years. It is a unique program that supports the growing demand for highly skilled and qualified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people within the mental health workforce.

CSU co-designed *Djirruwang* as part of fulfilling their social justice commitment for public good, while also ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are valued, welcomed and included in the fabric of CSU and the communities in which they live, work and are part of.

Faye hopes that the Indigenous women of the future will be represented in all facets and aspects of society... "That our voices carry to future generations to give them light and hope for their futures as the fearless Indigenous women that have gone before us have done for this generation of women'.



Simone Jolliffe

Born 1975

Historically, dairy farms were family-run operations, and women were often central to their survival. They were suited, but not limited to, nurturing type roles such as milking, calf rearing and stock movement. Simone's Nan, Ena Keen, was one such lady.

The Australian dairy industry is today, filled with women, with a significant number of females in leadership positions, being vital to the industry's success.

With a childhood spent on her family's beef farm, it is perhaps unsurprising that Simone Jolliffe pursued tertiary studies in agriculture on leaving school. After graduating with a Bachelor of Rural Science from UNE (Armidale), she took a job with the Department of Primary Industries in Wagga, working on a ruminant research project through Charles Sturt University.

Simone's career in dairy farming was assured when halfway through university she met future husband Neil. After marrying, the couple became sharefarmers on Neil's parent's dairy farm. Simone took up farming full-time in July 2000, and a year later, her son Macaleb was born. Daughters Annalise and Caitlin followed soon after in 2003 and 2005 respectively.

In 2015, Simone became the first female President of Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), an advocacy body whose primary role is to provide collective representation for dairy farmers in Australia.

Women have contributed significantly to our industry for a very long time on an equal footing as a result of being so integral in our sector. Occasionally you still hear a woman refer that the new sales rep asks where her husband is, only to be told by said husband 'you need to speak to my wife about that!'

Simone Jolliffe, interview 2018

With a passion for learning, Simone is an active opportunist when it comes to improving her business. In 2018, Neil and Simone left their farm for 10 days and travelled to Canada and the U.S. There, they experienced first-hand the technologies and practices that are being implemented overseas, with a view to reassessing and improving their own business.

From their herd of Holsteins, the Jolliffes produce more than two million litres of milk annually on their 360ha property at Euberta near Wagga. In addition to supplying milk to the local Riverina Fresh processing plant, they are also proud to supply their milk to Riverina business Coolamon Cheese.

As a drink I prefer my milk in a latte. My favourite dairy product though is cheese. I can happily enjoy a cheese platter as a meal almost any time of the day! My love of cheese is just another reason we love supplying our product to Coolamon Cheese. This venture started from big ideas, passion and commitment of a few, but has been delivered with the support of a community which has gained so much as a result.

Simone Jolliffe, interview 2018

Today, in addition to raising her three children, Simone is a Director on the ADF and DataGene boards and remains actively involved in a number of community organisations.



Simone Eyles

Born 1976

Shortly after launching her business 365cups in 2011, Simone Eyles was featured on *60 Minutes*, enjoying a coffee in her adopted hometown of Wagga. In the interview, veteran journalist Charles Wooley described her as an *appreneur*, one of the new generation of up and coming app designing entrepreneurs making a name for themselves in the business world.

Since then, Simone has well and truly settled in the business world, with her app now an award-winning mobile ordering platform.

365cups was born out of a casual conversation between two friends, Simone and Mariusz Stankiewicz, wondering whether there was an easier way to order their daily coffee (and skip the queue). The free app allows customers to pre-order their brew, so that when they arrive at their favourite café, it's ready to pick up. Cafés using the app pay a start-up fee and a monthly subscription to receive orders either on their screens or print them to a thermal printer.

When we started I would sit in the café all morning and hang out with the owners and customers, get their feedback, go back and overnight make tweaks and changes, imagine doing that in a Sydney café!

Simone Eyles, interview 2018

Simone and Mariusz were the first in their families to graduate with university qualifications, Simone in graphic design and Mariusz in information technology. The pair became business partners, an ideal combination, as the world of app design was something new to Simone.

Together, Simone and Mariusz threw themselves into researching how they could make their idea a reality. Within two days of approaching local café Premium Coffee Roasters, the app was off and running. The rest, as they say, is history.

In April 2013 Simone was invited to Silicon Valley as one of twenty-five start-up businesses selected to participate in an Advance Innovation Summit. There, she networked with players in the hospitality sector, and gained invaluable advice.

Simone realised how big her business had become when 365cups scooped more than one award at the Australian Mobile Awards in 2012. Within two years of its launch, 365cups was being used by more than 50 cafés across Australia and New Zealand. In 2018, customers have placed more than two million orders on 365cups, which equates to over ten million dollars in revenue for clients.

The business partnership of Simone and Mariusz has evolved and grown. From their small beginning, they now also make bespoke apps for other clients within the hospitality industry, from cafés to burger bars.

Simone looks back on her journey so far and believes that her success story is a true example of the fact that women in regional towns can achieve just as much as those in the big city. Now juggling her burgeoning career with raising her two children, it will be interesting to see where Simone's imagination takes her next.

Wagga is a great place to live and work, there are lots of opportunities, we have so many amazing women doing incredible things and I hope to see more of it.

Simone Eyles, interview 2018



Holly Conroy

Born 1978

For the first thirty seven years of her existence, Holly Conroy lived a double life.

Until February 2016 Holly was known as David, a motorbike riding construction worker who loved his footy and practiced mixed martial arts. Emotionally, it was a hard existence for Holly, who, despite being born male, identified as female.

She first attempted to transition at the age of 27, but was talked out of it by her family and friends. When ten years passed, she could no longer live a lie. Hitting rock-bottom emotionally, Holly suffered from depression and, as a coping mechanism, smoked marijuana.

One day on Facebook, David dropped a bombshell, announcing that he was going to become Holly. It was a brave step to take. Holly had no idea what people's reactions would be to her post, and worried about the repercussions. To her delight, there was not one negative response.

I decided that I was going to live life on my terms.

Holly Conroy, ABC News, 25 September 2017

Over the past two years Holly has received tremendous support. She works full-time, has a full social life with amazing friends and doesn't get hassled in the street.

In October 2017 Holly travelled to Thailand to undergo gender reassignment surgery, supported by her mother who took the trip with her. Lying in her hospital bed waiting for her life-changing surgery, Holly was both scared and excited. Holly returned to Wagga as a new woman, to focus on her recovery. There, she has enjoyed re-discovering her hometown as a woman.

In 2017 Holly joined women's soccer team Wagga United. Well-received and supported by both teammates and opposition, in May that year, local newspaper *The Daily Advertiser* wrote a story about her experiences in the club. They also courted controversy, by running a poll asking 'Do you find it concerning that Holly is allowed to play women's soccer?' the move caused consternation in the wider community and led to some negative responses.

A positive outcome of the story was that Holly spearheaded a transgender inclusion round in the last week of the local soccer competition, believed to be an Australian first.

Publicly, and personally, Holly has gone from strength to strength. Her story has featured on the SBS current affairs program *The Feed*, and in 2018 she is the subject of a fly-on-the-wall film *Trans Mission*, produced by Mint Pictures. The film will follow Holly's story as she negotiates life as a transgender woman, and works tirelessly towards making Wagga Wagga's first Mardi Gras a reality.

Holly stands as an inspiration to us all – when she decided to live life on her own terms, she reminded us that you only get one life, so why not live it how you feel you should?

Life has become so amazing. I just consider myself extremely lucky and privileged to be able to live the life I'm now living.

Holly Conroy, ABC News, 25 September 2017



Meredith West

Born 1982

Meredith West is a self-styled Cookie Queen.

In July 2016 she launched the Dough Re Mi Cookie Co. at a market day in Wagga, in partnership with her university friend Jessie McCabe.

As a child, Meredith didn't dream of becoming a hairdresser, ballerina or teacher. She wanted to be a coroner, which led her to studying a degree in Environmental Science at CSU. When she realised that working in a laboratory wasn't for her, Meredith moved to Sydney, where she met her husband David.

The couple returned to Wagga with their young family in December 2015. There, Meredith re-connected with Jessie, as both now had young children that attended the same playgroup. When the pair were asked to help with a fundraising BBQ for the group, they decided that they would rather plan a bake sale than sell snags.

During the short car trip home, Meredith and Jessie discussed this idea in greater detail. Quickly, the conversation changed tack, as they discussed the possibility of creating their own biscuit business. Within two weeks, they had registered an ABN and Meredith had designed the logo and branding. All that remained was a name, and Dough Re Mi came to Jessie in a dream!

The business was well-received within the community, and underwent rapid growth. After a year of operation, Jessie made the difficult decision to leave the business to care for her growing family, and Meredith took full charge.

Today, Meredith and four staff (coincidentally, all women) hand bake and decorate unique creations for private customers, markets and corporate clients.

It is a happy coincidence that all staff at Dough Re Mi are female. I put a call out for staff and all the applicants were female. It's such a wonderful thing being in a team of strong women.

Meredith West, interview 2018

Wagga is an ideal base for Meredith, as much of the company's business is done online. Many clients are in Sydney, Melbourne, Mudgee and the Sunshine Coast, and there is even a fan base in Perth. They also sell at markets around the Riverina (and at the Handmade Canberra Markets), and attend special events like Wagga's Fusion Festival, the CMRI Christmas Fair and the Spring Street Festival.

Today, Meredith has successfully created a lifestyle that allows her to be with her family as much as possible. She is able to dictate her own hours, leaving her free to do all the 'mum' things.

I have always had a passion for really good food. All the women in my family are amazing cooks and bakers. AMAZING. Growing up on a farm 30 minutes from town meant we only went shopping one day a week for the whole week, so if anything was forgotten it was 'bad luck' until next week. This meant my mum was super organised and very smart with the dinners and also my favourite – the baking!

Meredith West, interview 2018



Zoe Lamont

Born 1983

Zoe Lamont's business was born in the harshness of a Zambian village rife with AIDS, along the Thai border, in Tamil Nadu (southern India) and on remote Cicia Island off Fiji.

Graduating with a BA in Public Relations and Organisational Communications from CSU Bathurst, Zoe was unsure of her future direction. Returning home to Wagga, she saved for a year in order to travel overseas. After a few weeks in London, she signed up as a humanitarian volunteer with a volunteer organisation, which led her to the exotic places listed above.

These experiences broadened her perspectives and humbled her outlook. Back in Australia, Zoe could not forget the children and families she had worked with overseas. She had witnessed their generosity first-hand. Even with nothing to give, these communities banded together to look after each other, making sure children were fed and the elderly cared for.

With this mindset, Zoe became attracted to altruistic organisations who were trying to change the world. These included a start-up green energy company and Australia's first online political party, Online Direct Democracy, which she helped launch.

In 2009 Zoe and her girlfriends began meeting in pubs and discussing their future life goals and financial aspirations. From these inauspicious beginnings, 10thousandgirl, a not-for-profit organisation was born.

Soon, the company was running hundreds of events across Australia, and by 2016, they had assisted more than 10,000 women in over 80 regional and metropolitan towns and cities through their life planning and financial literacy programs. For every woman who did their 6 Step Money Makeover Program, a percentage of fees contributed to providing a microloan for women in India, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji or Tonga. So, as these Australian women became financially empowered, their capacity to help others also increased.

Being a woman today is incredibly exciting. When you think that in my mother's lifetime women couldn't borrow money in their own name – we have come a long way in a short time and just the growth of women and business networks across regional and metropolitan Australia shows that there's also very exciting times ahead.

Zoe Lamont, interview 2018

Today in 2018, as founder and CEO, Zoe gives girls wanting to follow in her footsteps the following advice:

Do it. Follow your heart, use your women's intuition, surround yourself with inspiring people. Don't be afraid to rebel. Challenge the status quo.

In a bid to continue offering women free financial education, and fairer financial products to close the gender retirement savings gap, Zoe is also in the process of launching Australia's first women's superannuation fund, Verve Super.

It is her belief that now with internet and travel opportunities, regional women can have it all, running national and international businesses while living a relaxed, healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. Zoe is proof of that.

I have high hopes for the future women of Wagga! I know regional women, now with internet and travel opportunities, can run national and international businesses while living a relaxed, healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. I believe it so much that my husband and I have just moved back to Wagga – so our 3 year old son and 1 year old daughter can have the same opportunities growing up here that I did.

Zoe Lamont, interview 2018



Ginny Stevens

Born 1987

Ginny Stevens was an energetic child. Growing up on her family's farm in Northern Tasmania, she loved agriculture and exercise. In secondary school, she discovered a love of group fitness when she joined the school's rowing team.

Little did she know this would influence her future career path. On leaving school, Ginny completed a degree in Agricultural Science at Melbourne University, leading her to a career in agribusiness.

During her eight-year agribusiness banking career, Ginny was posted to Griffith, Deniliquin and then Wagga. It was in Wagga that she met her husband Andy, and settled on the family farm at Mangoplah.

I believe that country Australia is the best place to live in the world! We have amazing communities full of wonderful people who are so down to earth, but more importantly feed and clothe our population and the world. It is so important for the long term sustainability

of the agricultural industry that we have happy, healthy and resilient farming communities.

Ginny Stevens, interview 2018

One day, on her regular run around the farm, Ginny was reflecting on the high prevalence of mental illness and suicide in farming communities. In a lightbulb moment, she wondered whether she could bring the team sport concept to farmers living in rural and remote communities, as a means of boosting their resilience while improving their mental and physical wellbeing.

As a result, in 2015, her business Active Farmers was born. Designed specifically for farmers with little or no access to fitness expertise or equipment, Active Farmers engages participants with fun, motivational and challenging workouts to suit all levels of fitness and experience. The model has grown to include communities centred around small towns, and counts amongst its participants business owners and employees, school children and families. Importantly, it also provides access to a range of complimentary services including nutrition, mindfulness, massage and access to online mental health specialists.

In January 2017, Delta Agribusiness came on board as both a sponsor and partner, allowing Ginny to grow her business. Active Farmers now services over thirty small farming communities and another hundred have expressed interest in the program. Approximately 400 participants (250 families) now enjoy sessions run by registered Active Farmer trainers in communities as far afield as Tasmania and Queensland.

In ten years' time Ginny would love to see Active Farmers expand to service hundreds of farming communities across Australia. She hopes there will be a significant reduction in farmer suicides and conditions like hypertension and diabetes will be on the decline. Another positive outcome of this holistic approach to fitness is that by creating healthier and happier farmers, the agricultural industry will be more productive, and that's good for everyone.

In 10 years' time I would like to see Active Farmers expand to be servicing hundreds of farming communities nationally. I would also like to be measuring our impact because I want Active Farmers to be genuinely reducing the occurrence of suicide and improving key health conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. I'd also love to spend a little more time on the farm, where I feel most at peace.

Ginny Stevens, interview 2018



Ashleigh Pengelly

Born 1989

In 2017, Ash Pengelly was presented with the Career Kick Start Award at a gala dinner as part of the annual NSW/ACT Young Achiever Awards.

At the time, Ash was employed as the Aboriginal Youth and Community Development Officer for Wagga Wagga City Council. There, she displayed not only dedication to her role, but great commitment towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of which she is part.

While studying a double degree in Arts/Social Work, Ash developed a passion for making her community a better place, resulting in the development of some worthwhile initiatives.

A number of people have inspired me in my endeavours. I think from the beginning my nan inspired me to be in touch with who I am culturally. A lot of my family including my immediate family suffer from muscular dystrophy, which gave me that drive to want to help

my community. My father gave me my work ethic that ensures I never give up even when things are really difficult! Aunty Kath Withers has been an inspiration – starting her artistic career later in life, her experience with owning a business and her gusto at trying (and being highly skilled) at various art forms – really strikes a chord with me.

Ash Pengelly, interview 2018

She organised Lateral Violence training, where participants learned about this type of violence which is directed at one's peers rather than at adversaries. This is an issue common not just in Aboriginal communities, but found in workplaces and other areas of high stress.

Ash also coordinated the Join the Dots program, established in response to concerns from the local Aboriginal community who were having trouble marketing their wares through local retailers. Join the Dots invited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives to learn how to better package and present their products, also giving them practical advice in areas like legal contracts, copyright laws and pricing, thus, 'joining the dots' between them and potential retailers.

Through Join the Dots Ash discovered her own artistic creativity, when she began hand painting teapots combining modern colours with Aboriginal patterns. Maternity leave in 2017 gave her the freedom to further explore this art form. Combining her savvy business mind with wise tips from her Elder and mentor Aunty Kath Withers, Ash began her journey into the small business world. Little Black Duck Aus. (LBD) was born!

Since then, Ash has expanded and grown her business, selling custom painted teapots, alongside a range of quirky quality products, including serving boards, succulent pots, native flora candles and wall prints.

In her own words, LBD epitomizes cultural connectivity with an aim to get a little of our culture into every home! With further plans to grow LBD, Ash personifies her hope for the future young Aboriginal women of Wagga, that they will not only have many opportunities, but also the tenacity to embrace them.

I've worked with local artists in my various work roles over the years but never considered myself an artist at all. I have always been creative and had an interest in doing anything creative like sewing, cooking, photography. It wasn't until I really applied myself to my art that I started to realise, 'hey, I might actually have a little bit of skill here!'

Ash Pengelly, interview 2018



Elise Bowen

Born 1990

Elise Bowen always wanted to work with sheep. From the age of nine, she helped her father with sheep work on the family farm Mount Ronan in York, Western Australia.

Her passion for sheep breeding was passed to Elise from her father. Growing up on a small mixed farm, he began breeding and recording his commercial sheep flock from the age of just thirteen! When Elise saw her own first newborn lamb on the family farm, she was smitten, and began tracking the progress of her ewe and its offspring.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, on leaving school, Elise pursued a career in livestock production. After graduating with a Bachelor of Animal Science (hons) from Murdoch University, she worked on a number of collaborative sheep research programs.

With an interest in data management, and with previous experience under her belt, Elise decided to turn her passion into a business. In June 2014, she established her own service provision company, Sheep Data Management, before leaving WA for the Eastern states, moving to Wagga in 2016. Wagga proved to be the perfect location for Elise's business to flourish, being both well situated geographically, an agribusiness hot spot and home to numerous sheep producers.

In her data management role, Elise usually spends two days a week in the field helping collect data, and three days in the office collating and analysing it. Her work allows farmers to better maximise their flock efficiency, and influence their production outcomes and profitability in a positive way.

In 2016, Elise entered the Young Guns competition, run in conjunction with LambEx and created to showcase young researchers and innovators. Based on the ewe efficiency data she had produced for Mount Ronan, Elise was thrilled to win the Young Professional category.

In 2018 Elise commenced a PhD through Murdoch University, and hopes her research into foetal losses in maiden ewes will aid the sheep industry by developing best-practice management guidelines, allowing producers to optimise their results. That same year, magazine *Meat & Livestock Australia* confirmed Elise's professional ascendancy, naming her a 'sheep industry shooting star.'

Elise believes that fantastic opportunities exist for women wanting to work in agriculture, and hopes this trend will continue into the future. Ultimately, Elise envisages herself involved in a range of capacities within the sheep industry, and hopes to expand into consulting and project management roles and perhaps even tertiary teaching. With such possibilities, her future looks bright.

I think women are critical to the future of all animal industries. We are natural nurturers, and I really think animals respond to this. Consumer perceptions of our agricultural industries, particularly with regard to animal welfare, is an increasing challenge for producers. We are also faced with the stereotyped image of a farmer being an older man, which is outdated and doesn't showcase the knowledge and technological capability of the modern producer. The presence of women in our farming businesses and at the forefront of agribusiness can only be a positive thing for both these issues.

Elise Bowen, interview 2018



Samantha Brunskill

Born 1992

Carrying a well-known name in a small city can be both a blessing and a curse.

Being descended from one of Wagga's pioneer families impacted Sam Brunskill's life from an early age. As General Manager of Brunslea Park, the housing development built upon the historical Brunskill family property on the outskirts of Wagga, she has embraced her lineage. She has also capitalised on it, using her public profile to raise awareness for a topic close to home, mental health and wellbeing.

In her final year of school, Sam was diagnosed as bi-polar. With mental illness still a taboo topic in Australian society, Sam chose to tackle her condition openly and head-on, relying on her inner strength, the support of loved ones, and the principles of Shamanism.

For Sam, Shamanism is a way of life that has influenced her both professionally and personally. In 2017, she completed a 300 hour energy medicine course through the Four Winds Society in Germany, having first felt the 'shaman calling' three years earlier.

In July 2017 she returned to Wagga a qualified Kurak Akuyak Shaman. In addition to establishing her online presence as a Shamanic Mental Health Practitioner, Sam also initiated Embrace Mental Health Meetups, providing Wagga residents with a supportive environment to meet and chat on a monthly basis.

She also became a National Ambassador for the Ian Parker Bipolar Research Fund, enabling her to help educate Australians on the importance of research into mental illness. This has allowed her to contribute to the Fund's scholarship opportunities through sales at Brunslea Park.

Young, successful and attractive, Samantha Brunskill appears to lead a storybook life.

But beneath her bubbly exterior lies a mind at war with itself. Sam is living with Bi-polar, a condition that sees her mood oscillate between euphoric highs and paralysing lows.

Riverina Bluebell website

Shamanism is an ideology that Sam has carried through into her business life. A conscious entrepreneur, she values sustainability, people, collaboration, empathy, connection and community, principles that are reflected in the Brunslea Park model of a community created with old-fashioned values in mind.

Shamanism is what saved my life in my darkest days, a few years ago.

Sam Brunskill, *The Daily Advertiser*, 21 June 2017

In 2016 Sam was presented with the Young Entrepreneur Award at the Golden Crow Awards. In her acceptance speech, she proudly heralded the birth of a new age, that of the mentally ill entrepreneur.

Inspired entrepreneur, tireless advocate, committed mentor, enthusiastic lifelong learner –Samantha Brunskill is among the new generation of multi-passionate businesswomen.

Regional Pitchfest website



Alicia Quirk

OAM

Born 1992

Green and gold balloons rained down, crowds cheered and children queued for an autograph on 25 August 2016 when Alicia Quirk was given a heroes' welcome at an official Civic Reception in her hometown of Wagga. As a member of the Australian Women's Rugby 7's team, Alicia not only returned victorious from the Rio Olympics, but also entered the history books as the first local to win Olympic Gold.

Alicia's sporting journey began at the age of four, when she played her first game of netball alongside her older sister at the Wagga Netball Centre. Like many of Wagga's sporting greats, growing up, Alicia excelled at a number of sports including touch football, swimming, netball, Oz tag, basketball, water polo, softball, cross country and athletics.

As a child, she dreamed of representing her country at the Olympics, but thought it would be either for basketball or swimming. Australian swimmer Susie O'Neill was someone she loved to watch race and compete.

In her teenage years, Alicia narrowed her sporting focus onto touch football, after being selected for her first Australian team in 2009. Alicia made her Trans-Tasman debut in NZ at the age of sixteen, and the following year was selected to be part of the successful Australian Women's Touch Football team for the World Cup in Edinburgh in 2011.

Shortly afterwards, when Rugby 7s was announced as a new sport for the 2016 Olympics, Australian Rugby Union began a nationwide mass recruitment for girls that had the potential to represent Australia at the Olympics. Alicia returned from Scotland to find a letter in the mail inviting her to come and try out. It was a steep learning curve for the slight footballer, who had to transition from a non-contact to a contact sport against girls who were much larger than herself.

She debuted for the Australian Women's 7s in 2012 in London at Twickenham Stadium and in 2014 became one of the first Australian Women's 7s players to be professionally contracted by Australian Rugby Union and featured regularly on the Women Sevens World Series. Alicia was named player of the tournament in the Dubai leg of the 2014 World Series, and was instrumental in the team's qualification for the Olympics as well as Australia's first ever World Series Championship title for the 2015-16 season.

Alicia played every minute of the history-making game against historic rivals New Zealand at the Rio Games, with the Australian team battling to claim the first Gold Medal in Women's Rugby 7s.

To date, this win is still the most memorable moment of Alicia's career. So many emotions ran through her head on the podium – happiness, excitement, sheer joy and overwhelming pride. Also a sense of relief that something she had worked so hard for and dreamed of had become a reality.

Alicia and her teammates played at the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast. This was the first time that the Women's 7s had been included in the Commonwealth Games schedule. Again, Alicia played every minute of the tournament, but this time Australia narrowly lost to New Zealand, placing second.

The Australian Women's 7s were well into their training for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics when the Games were postponed due to the international Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to pursuing her rugby career, Alicia attained a degree in Physiotherapy through Charles Sturt University (Albury) graduating in December 2016. Having sustained her fair share of injuries as a junior athlete, Alicia was always intrigued at how physiotherapists got her back to playing fitness so quickly, so perhaps it was a logical career path to follow. As a professional athlete, she has also gained a heightened sense and awareness of her own body and its capabilities. Furthermore, with her physiotherapy knowledge, she is able to apply that to her sport.

The best piece of advice Alicia ever received was to 'not let anyone ever tell you that you are not good enough'. She has certainly proven beyond a doubt that if you want something bad enough and are happy to enjoy the hard work that it requires, then you will go far. In 2017 Alicia was awarded an OAM for her outstanding sport achievement. While her sporting career continues to ascend, she hopes that she will not stay Wagga's only Olympic Gold medallist for too much longer, dreaming of a day she will see more home-grown sportswomen become professional female athletes, chasing their dreams in the ever-changing sporting landscape of Australia.



Sarah Agboola

Born 1993

Sarah Agboola is a young woman overflowing with passion, energy, and great ideas.

Born in Guelph, Canada, Sarah moved to Wagga at the age of four, and completed her schooling there. Even though she no longer resides there, she still considers Wagga home.

Sarah dreamt of becoming a screenwriter, and on leaving school, moved to Sydney to study film and sound design. After a year, she realised it wasn't for her, and transferred into an advertising degree. Following graduation, Sarah returned to Wagga in 2015 to take a gap year, and unexpectedly, changed the course of her professional life.

That year, Sarah also spent several months in Berlin, and worked as a trolley pusher for Coles, a job she describes as one of the most entertaining jobs she has had! She also started up a Facebook page with a friend, posting volunteer, internship and innovation opportunities for young people, and soon amassed a good following.

While looking for new opportunities to share on her page, Sarah came across an advertisement for a three day start-up event run by The University of Melbourne. Sarah applied, and was immediately contacted by the organisers, who suggested she apply for their Master of Entrepreneurship program.

Sarah enjoyed the three day event so much, she decided to apply for the Masters. Luckily the work she had done with her Facebook page during her gap year counted as an 'entrepreneurial' project, which made her application competitive. As a result, in 2015, Sarah became the inaugural Australia Post Scholar at the Wade Institute of Entrepreneurship, and earned a merit scholarship from Melbourne University to help cover her fees.

A significant outcome of the start-up event occurred in 2017, when Sarah co-founded mtime. A social enterprise developed to support busy parents, Sarah's business provides Moncierges to take care of parents so that they, in turn, can take care of their families. Importantly, mtime gives back to the Australian community by actively recruiting recent migrants to join the Moncierge team. This not only creates job opportunities for migrant communities, but builds relationships with Australian families.

I hope the entrepreneurship community in Wagga continues to thrive. I think it's already in a really exciting state and I feel really positive about Wagga becoming an even bigger hub for women in entrepreneurship.

Sarah Agboola, interview 2018

Sarah has also continued to be involved with youth engagement. Until 2017 she was Australian Sherpa for the G20 Young Entrepreneurs Alliance, which involved working with the Australian delegates attending the conference in Berlin. She also created the Facebook group Wom*n of Colour Career and Study Network, designed to support and assist young women with issues that they might face in the workplace.

Sarah's advice to girls wanting to follow in her footsteps is 'do everything in honour of future you – think about where you want to be in 10 or 20 years and what you want to smile about when you look back on yourself now.' It is easy to imagine that when future Sarah looks back on her endeavours in the coming years, she will be beaming.

I think that growing up in Wagga gave me an advantage in that I don't take much for granted and have varying perspectives to refer to when I think of what it is to be a young Australian. It also made me very resourceful and unafraid to ask for things as I knew if I didn't invent my own opportunities nobody was going to give me any as they were too far away.

Sarah Agboola, interview 2018



Jessica Kennedy

Born 1994

Madalyn Kennedy

Born 1995

Sisters, Jess and Maddy Kennedy, are best friends. A good thing, considering both girls work closely together in their father Andrew's earthmoving and excavations business, Kennedy Bros. Earthmoving in Wagga.

Although born in Western Australia, the sisters moved to Wagga as children when their parents relocated there.

The girls had different ambitions when they were young. Jess loved the creativity of writing, and hoped to become a writer or journalist. Maddy dreamed of opening a hairdressing salon with her best friend.

From an early age, Jess and Maddy spent a lot of time with their father on the family farm. There, Andrew introduced them to the basic operations of earthmoving equipment, and they occasionally helped him out in the school holidays.

After leaving school, the girls pursued different occupations. Maddy, living in Brisbane, worked in childcare and Jess was employed as a lab technician in the mining industry in Cobar.

Maddy moved back to Wagga in November 2016, and was the first sister to join the family business. In February 2017, Andrew asked Jess if she could work for a few weeks, as he needed another pair of hands to help with the heavy workload.

Now, two years later, Maddy and Jess are still in Wagga, employed as fulltime machine operators with their father, and they love their work.

Forget about big boys and their toys... meet Wagga's Kennedy sisters.

Hard hats and high viz are all in a day's work for Jess and Madalyn Kennedy.

The Wagga Way, Spring 2017

When they tell people what their occupation is, many make the assumption that they work in the office. This couldn't be further from the reality. The sisters are responsible for operating large vehicles including bobcats, tipper trucks, and 35-tonne excavators complete with hammer and crusher. Sometimes, clients are surprised when one or other turns up to do a job, perhaps because it is a rare sight to see a woman behind the controls of such heavy machinery.

Earthmoving allows the girls creativity, as there might be ten different ways to approach a job. Both relish seeing the end result of their work, when they leave a site completely transformed from what it was. Jess' favourite part of the job is experiencing the big machines, and feeling their power. Maddy loves being outside, travelling to different worksites, and that sometimes she is able to take her dog to work.

Despite their industry being one that is dominated by men, neither Jess nor Maddy have experienced gender discrimination. They have been given just as much a fair go as their male counterparts.

The Kennedy sisters would encourage other young women to consider joining their industry. Maddy believes that women should not let gender get in the way of achieving their dreams. Jess would like to see more females following in their footsteps, but warns that it is not an occupation for everyone. It is hard work, and sometimes a job will require you to get into a trench and hand dig, moving water pumps around, working long hours in extreme conditions and getting very dirty.

Having said that, Jess acknowledges that the women of Wagga have some serious grunt, and some would really enjoy the work. To those, she says 'See you on site!'

I definitely encourage women and young girls to enter this industry. It can be intimidating at first to show up for a job and be the only female there, however, the men of Wagga are good people and most of them are very happy to see a woman in the driver's seat. I know that the women of Wagga have some serious grunt and would really enjoy this work, and to those I say, see you on site!

Jess Kennedy, interview 2018

**“We are gradually waking up to
the fact that we are reasonable
thinking beings, placed in the world
for a higher purpose than just to
bake, brew, wash and mend”.**

Mrs Irving, of Wagga Wagga, at Women's Conference

The Sunday Times, 16 June 1912

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