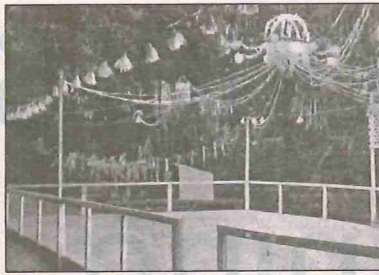


What you should know

■ The CSU Regional Archives is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Ave.

■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

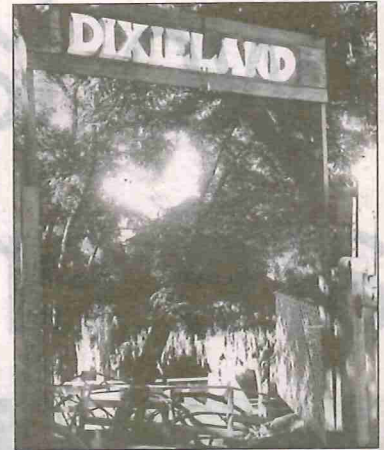
■ For further information, phone 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au or visit the website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



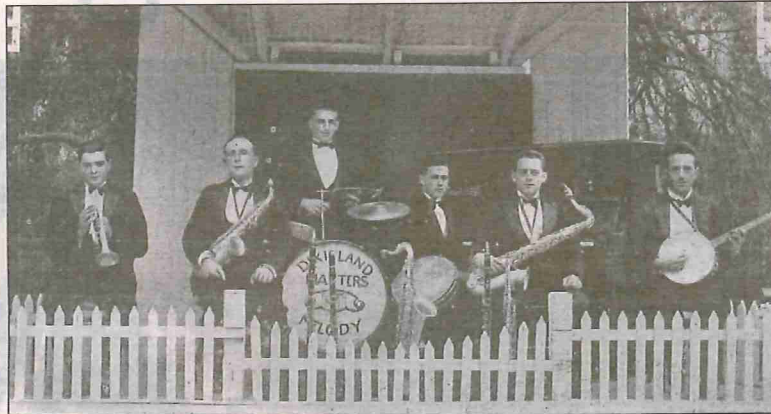
Dixieland dance floor taken from the Dixieland scrapbook (RW1143) CSURA.



Crowd in attendance at the Riverina Dance Championship, taken from the Dixieland scrapbook (RW1143) CSURA.



Dixieland entrance, taken from the Dixieland scrapbook (RW1143) CSURA.



Dixieland Melody Makers 1927 taken from the Dixieland scrapbook (RW1143) CSURA.

DIXIELAND
Without Equal in the World.
Dancing "De-luxe" at Minimum Cost.

After this opening Gala Week there will be Open-Air Dancing at Dixieland Twice Weekly Every Wednesday and Saturday Night.

Bring Your Party to Dixieland.

Admission 6d. Dancing 3d per Couple per Dance.

Advertisement taken from the Dixieland scrapbook (RW1143) CSURA.

A jazz hall on the Bidgee

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



From the early 1920s through to the early 1930s, one of Wagga's most popular attractions was the unique venue known as "Dixieland". Nestled on the bank of the Murrumbidgee River at the end of Little Gurwood Street (now Sturt Street) among the willow trees was a dance floor which truly was one of a kind.

The dance floor was initially laid down in 1923. However, due to the popularity of the venue and the large crowds which flocked to the dances held at Dixieland, it was necessary to enlarge the floor space and install adequate seating in 1925.

The original dance floor actually floated on a number of forty-four gallon drums. However, after it was washed away by floodwaters on a number of occasions a more permanent floor mounted on brick piers was constructed.

Dixieland was maintained by the Wagga Wagga Brass Band with all work and upkeep of the dance floor carried out by volunteers. The area was lit at night with electricity and coloured lights to enhance the atmosphere, which obviously made for an incredible sight.

Arthur Mailey, the Australian Test cricketer, visited what he called the "jazz hall on the Murrumbidgee" in late 1923 when on a tour with the NSW Cricket Team. He later wrote of

his impressions of Dixieland, saying that "the night clubs of Europe and America could not hold a candle to this place. The ripples, the willows, the lights, the hop beer, the stars, the pleasant-faced man at the gate, and the horse outside seem to be sections of a wonderful combination that harmonise and blend, giving birth to an atmosphere that is healthy, sincere and natural".

Mailey and his fellow cricketers were amazed to discover that as New Year's Eve in 1923 fell on a Sunday, that the dancing, music and frivolities at Dixieland would not begun until the Sabbath had concluded. Advertisements for the night promised that the action would commence promptly at one minute past midnight.

Along with the Wagga Brass Band, other regular performers at Dixieland included the Riverina Revellers and the Dixieland Melody Makers. The latter was formed in February 1926 and comprised of: Mr Allan Turner (pianist), Mr E D Gooch (banjoist), Mr Don Bruce (trumpeter), Mr G D Hames (saxophonist), Mr R Thompson (drums) and Mr W Austin (saxophonist). Waltzes, foxtrots and one-steps were the dances of choice, while spectators could watch from the tiered terraces dug into the riverbank.

As well as hosting regular dances and children's fancy dress parties, Dixieland was also the venue for a number of dance competitions and championships.

In January 1926 the Riverina Foxtrot Championships were held at Dixieland which attracted a large number of participants and a huge crowd of onlookers. For the next several years Dixieland hosted many regional dance championships which saw competitors travel

great distances to compete. This was complemented by professional dancers travelling to Wagga to perform dance exhibitions at Dixieland. Classical recitals and Christmas fairs were also common place.

Dance marathons were a novelty which appeared to be particularly popular at Dixieland. These events lasted for an hour with the winning couple being the one which completed the most laps around the dance floor in the allotted time.

In a more extreme version, Frank Speerin, an Australian Dance Champion, chose Dixieland as the site for his attempt to break his own world record for non-stop dancing in May 1931. Incredibly Speerin lasted for 172 hours, breaking his existing record. He danced from 8pm on Saturday, May 16, until midnight on the following Saturday, May 23.

The growing popularity of Dixieland was also evident through the increasingly large number of patrons particularly on New Year's Eve. In 1924 a total of 1050 people paid for admission to the venue on New Year's Eve. This number rose to 1890 in 1925 and an amazing 2050 in 1926.

Even through the Great Depression of the late 1920s and the early 1930s Dixieland continued to flourish.

The CSU Regional Archives holds a wonderful scrapbook (RW1143) which tracks the history of Dixieland from 1923 until 1931. Looking through this scrapbook it is undeniable that at its height Dixieland was the most popular recreational venue in Wagga.

■ **References:** *Wagga Wagga, A History* - Sherry Morris; RW1143 - *Dixieland* scrapbook [CSURA collection]; *Back to Wagga Souvenir 1927* [CSURA]; *Daily Advertiser* 25/05/1931.