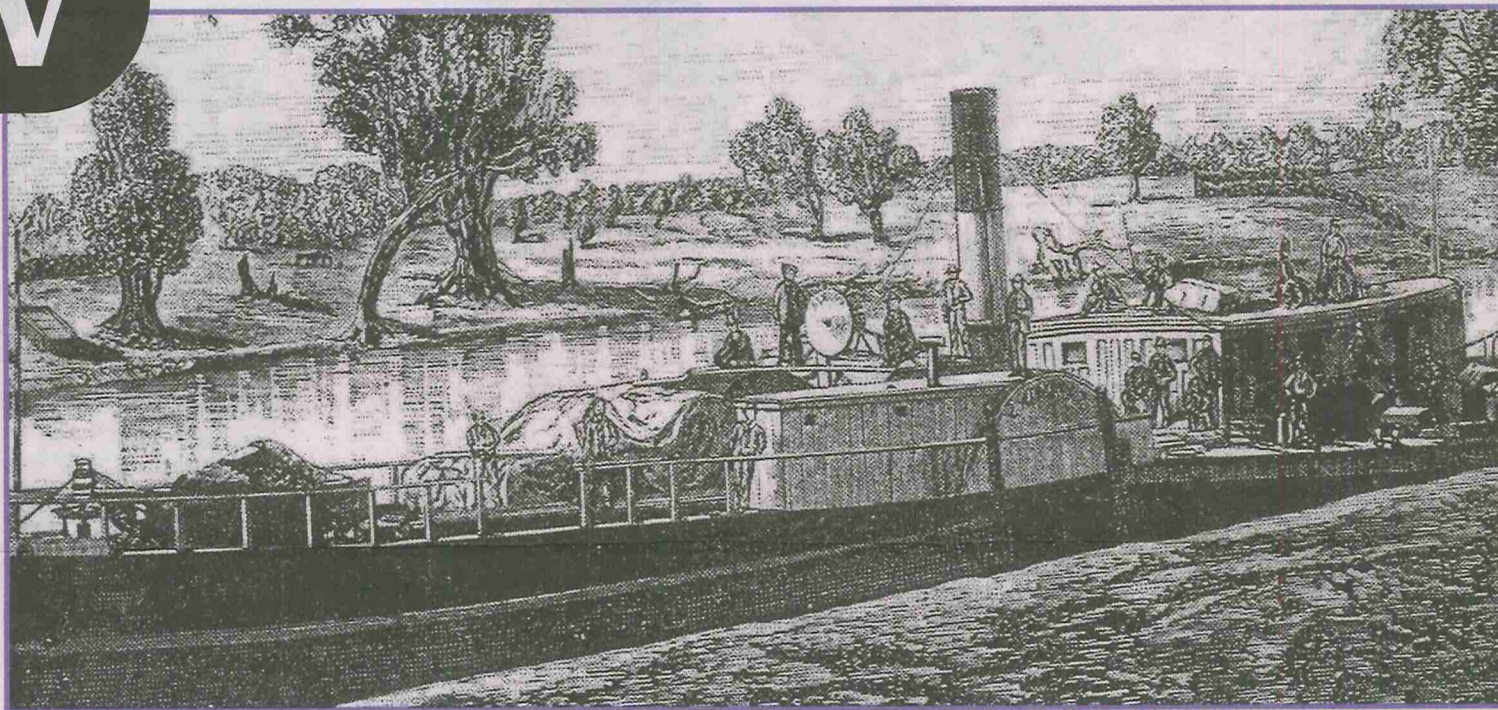


The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days, the archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening will occur on September 7. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during normal business hours.



MAIN: A drawing of the river steamer Albury, the first steamer to reach the upper Murrumbidgee. (CSU Regional Archives Collection – RW2893/10/351).

INSET: A photo of Captain Francis Cadell – a pioneer of river steamers on the Murrumbidgee River (CSU Regional Archives Collection – RW2893/8/260).

River steamers on the Murrumbidgee: Part 1



what you need to know

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



River steamers (and paddle steamers) are a historical component of the "mighty" Murray River.

What is less well known is the Murrumbidgee River was also navigated by steamers from the late 1850s well into the early 20th century.

Certainly the number of vessels on the Murrumbidgee was a lot less than on its more celebrated southern counterpart, but the contribution the steamers made to the development of transport, trade and commerce in Wagga and other settlements along the Murrumbidgee should not be neglected.

Exploration of the river

THE first attempts by river steamers to ply the Murrumbidgee occurred in 1857, when exploratory voyages were made. In September of that year, the Mosquito got as far as Balranald despite the large number of snags in the river.

However, it was August 1858 before another vessel, the Gemini, attempted to go further upstream. Carrying 50 tonnes of cargo, the Gemini went past Hay (at the time called Lang's Crossing) and got 250 miles from the junction of the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers to a place called Illilliwa.

At the same time, Captain Francis Cadell, who had played a pivotal role in navigating the Murray River up as high as Albury, was attempting to go further up the Murrumbidgee in his steamer named Albury. Amazingly, he managed to negotiate the river all the way up to Gundagai, although this was one of the few times that steamers were ever able to reach the upper Murrumbidgee, and as a result, Gundagai never enjoyed the benefits of river trade.

Read all about it – online

THE CSU Regional Archives has started a blog. "On Record" is an online place for us to share news, stories, interesting photographs, new collections, and anything else that catches our eye.

We post stories previously published as *At the Archives* in

The Daily Advertiser which explore the histories of people, places, organisations and events in Wagga and the Riverina. We also showcase items from the collection, both recent acquisitions and prized favourites. We may, from time to time, post photographs that are begging for identification

for which we will need your input.

You can sign up to receive an email notification of any new posts, as well as share any observations you might have or just ask questions.

On Record can be found at onrecordblog.wordpress.com. See you there.

Local reaction

THE Albury made a second trip late in 1858 and reached Wagga on November 14, this time with a barge (the Wakool) full of cargo in tow.

The reaction of the township was recorded by the *Wagga Wagga Express*: "On Tuesday afternoon, the principal portion of the inhabitants of this place proceeded on board the steamer, and started up the river on a pleasure trip. After sailing about five or six miles up the river, the steamer returned to her moorings at 5pm and the company then dispersed, highly delighted with the trip." That evening a presentation was made to the captain at Boon's hotel (a purse of 50 sovereigns), "... a testimonial of their esteem, for the successful manner in which he had conducted the navigation of the river". Somewhat comically, the day before the townspeople had their joyride, the river steamer and the barge were seized by the Chief Constable (James O'Keefe) on the charge of "carrying about fermented and spirituous liquors for sale without a licence". A summons case was heard on November 16, 1858, with several witnesses appearing, including Captain Cadell and a number of passengers. The case was dismissed, after the prosecution failed to substantiate the charge, and the vessel was released from custody.

Navigation problems

UNFORTUNATELY, the extent to which river steamers could negotiate the Murrumbidgee was

reliant on the amount of water in the river.

When the Albury was attempting to come up to Wagga in July 1859, and could make it no further than Tubbo Station (near Darlington Point), the editor of the *Wagga Wagga Express* was scathing in its criticism. "The present uncertain and irregular style of doing business – of sometimes coming here, at others of stopping 100 miles lower down, and of occasionally not starting at all – is utterly valueless, in fact is rather injurious than otherwise." It even advocated the establishment of the "Murrumbidgee Steam Navigation Company" to ensure the protection of local interests, although this did not occur for another decade.

River steamers only reached Wagga on six occasions during 1859 to 1860, and between 1861 and 1865, not a single steamer managed to reach Wagga.

It is these statistics which have led historians such as Keith Swan to conclude that: "The 1860s and 1870s have many fascinating stories of river steamers plying the upper Murrumbidgee to Wagga, but this traffic contributed much less to the town's 'take-off' than has been sometimes claimed, unless one gives some weight to the influence of a community's morale of a merely promising prospect."

(References: Keith Swan, *A History of Wagga*, pp. 88-94; H. Evans, *The Inside Sailors*, published in the *Journal of the WW&DHS*, No.3, 1970, pp. 35-56; *Wagga Wagga Express*, November 20, 1858 and July 30, 1859.)

SEARCH HISTORIC NEWSPAPERS ON LINE

Trove ... then visit www.trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper for your Treasure Trove of Riverina history

The Daily Advertiser Wagga Wagga City Council

Charles Sturt University

Wagga and District Historical Society

