

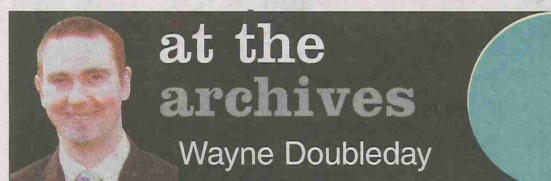
## First woman on council in focus

# Maud a trailblazer

**CSU Regional Archives Saturday Openings**  
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. This trial initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during business hours. It is hoped that enough researchers and visitors will avail themselves of this service to warrant it becoming a permanent occurrence.

### 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 enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au), or visit our website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



at the  
archives

Wayne Doubleday



In Wagga's 141-year history of local government, approximately 250 citizens have served as aldermen or councillors. Of that number, just 16 have been women.

It took a long time from the formation of the first Municipal Council in 1870 for a

woman to even stand for council.

In the election of December 1944, local cafe owner and Labor Party stalwart Maud Chambers, standing as the first woman candidate, went one step further to become the first woman alderman of the Municipality of Wagga.

Her advertising to canvass votes in the days leading up to the election focused on the role of women in government.

"Women have proved that they are capable of pulling their weight in parliament; Why not in local government, which is much nearer the home?" her advertisement asked.

The newspaper report of her election noted Mrs Chambers was the final alderman elected with 971 votes, 49 votes ahead of the next highest candidate in a field of 26 candidates.

She was described as a successful businesswoman, active in Labor Party circles and "widely known for her readiness to lend assistance to all, particularly the less fortunate who are not able to help themselves".

### A woman's point of view

MABEL Maud Chambers, born in 1890, came to Wagga from the South Coast before World War I with her husband, Maurice, a long-time employee of *The Daily Advertiser*.

She raised 10 children and ran the Blue Moon Cafe (next to the old Plaza Theatre in Baylis Street), the Ritz Milk Bar and Dining Room, on the corner of Baylis and Thompson streets, and the Coffee Palace Boarding House at the northern end of Fitzmaurice Street.

She served as a vice-president and treasurer in the Wagga branch of the Australian Labor Party, also working as campaign director for the 1941 election of Eddie Graham as member for Wagga. He went on to hold this position for 16 years.

At a public meeting allowing candidates to outline their views a week before the 1944 election, Mrs Chambers received special applause from the audience, telling them, "People know me and they know I have never hesitated to urge anything that was good for the people generally".

Five of Mrs Chambers' children were serving their country in the war and she hoped to see them return to be good citizens of Wagga.

She told the meeting: "I think we have a duty for those who come back, as well as those who are here, and we must plan for them. I am not making a lot of promises about anything but we must plan and work together as we have never worked before".

In a nod to her role as a woman candidate, Mrs Chambers said a woman's point of view could be valuable in many matters that came before council.

Alderman Maud Chambers was part of the historic first Wagga City Council when Wagga was declared a city in April 1946.

She noted: "It is with delight and a certain amount of pride that I have learned of the announcement that Wagga Wagga was at last proclaimed a city, although to my mind it had been for years a city in all but name".

Alderman Chambers retired from Wagga City Council on October 23, 1946 and left Wagga with her husband to live in Sydney. After his death she returned to the city she loved and was a familiar sight, always well groomed and driving her black Austin car around the town. She died in hospital in Wagga in 1972.

Two sites mark the significance of her



An elegant Maud Chambers in later years in Wagga (Image courtesy of John Chambers).



Maude and Maurie Chambers during World War II with their three sons serving with the Australian army – Corporal Ken Chambers, Corporal Maurice Chambers and Private Trevor Chambers (Image courtesy of John Chambers).

contribution to Wagga public life – Chambers Place, a street near Eric Weissel Oval, named in 1988; and Chambers Park (next to the Tolland Neighbourhood Centre in Bruce Street), renamed in her honour by resolution of Wagga City Council in May 1989.

### Maud's footsteps

IT TOOK until 1959 for more women aldermen to follow the path of Maud Chambers.

At the council election on December 5, 1959, well-known local identity, Errella (Smoke) Heard, and high school teacher Ethel Geoghegan stood under the banner of the Business and Professional Women's Club in a then-record field of 29 candidates.

With a vote count extending over a number of days, they were the ninth and 10th aldermen

elected. Alderman Heard had expressed interests in attracting industry and tourists to Wagga but took a special interest in a better method of garbage disposal and possible sale of by-products.

Alderman Geoghegan had campaigned to bring "intelligence and integrity" to council "to further the progress of the city and the happiness of the citizens".

Errella Heard served on Wagga City Council from 1959 to 1968 and again from 1971 to 1974, while Alderman Geoghegan sat on council from 1959 to 1971.

Their success led to a steady increase in women serving in local government in Wagga.

Since 1959 other women on Wagga City Council have been:

Helen Frisby 1968-1974; Patricia (Courtney) Clark 1974-1976; Mary Kidson 1977-1999 (the longest-serving woman alderman and Wagga's first woman deputy mayor in 1983); Ann Sky 1980-1987; Jean Lashbrook 1983-1987; Kay Hull 1991-1999 (also deputy mayor in the 1990s and retired from council to become the Federal Member for Riverina); Julie Hoy (Elphick) 1999-2004; Diana Simpson 1999-2008; Yvonne Gilchrist 1999-2004 (the first Aboriginal councillor); Karen Wright (Vidler) 1999-2008 (youngest councillor at 21 when elected in 1999); Jan Hay (2004-2008) and the current representatives, Donna Argus and Yvonne Braid, elected in 2009.

Compiled by Nancy Blacklow

Sources: W R Ellis, *The Street Names of Wagga Wagga*, 1990; Sherry Morris, *Wagga Wagga: A History*, 1999; *The Daily Advertiser* November 25, 1944; December 2, 1944; December 4, 1944; April 27, 1946; December 5, 1959; December 19, 1959; September 13, 1999; April 5, 2004; September 15, 2008; *Sydney Morning Herald* December 4, 1944; Wagga Wagga City Council Minute Books, RW2608 /29 and RW2881; Tom Lennon Collection, RW1574/57/537; Grandson, John Chambers, reminiscences.