

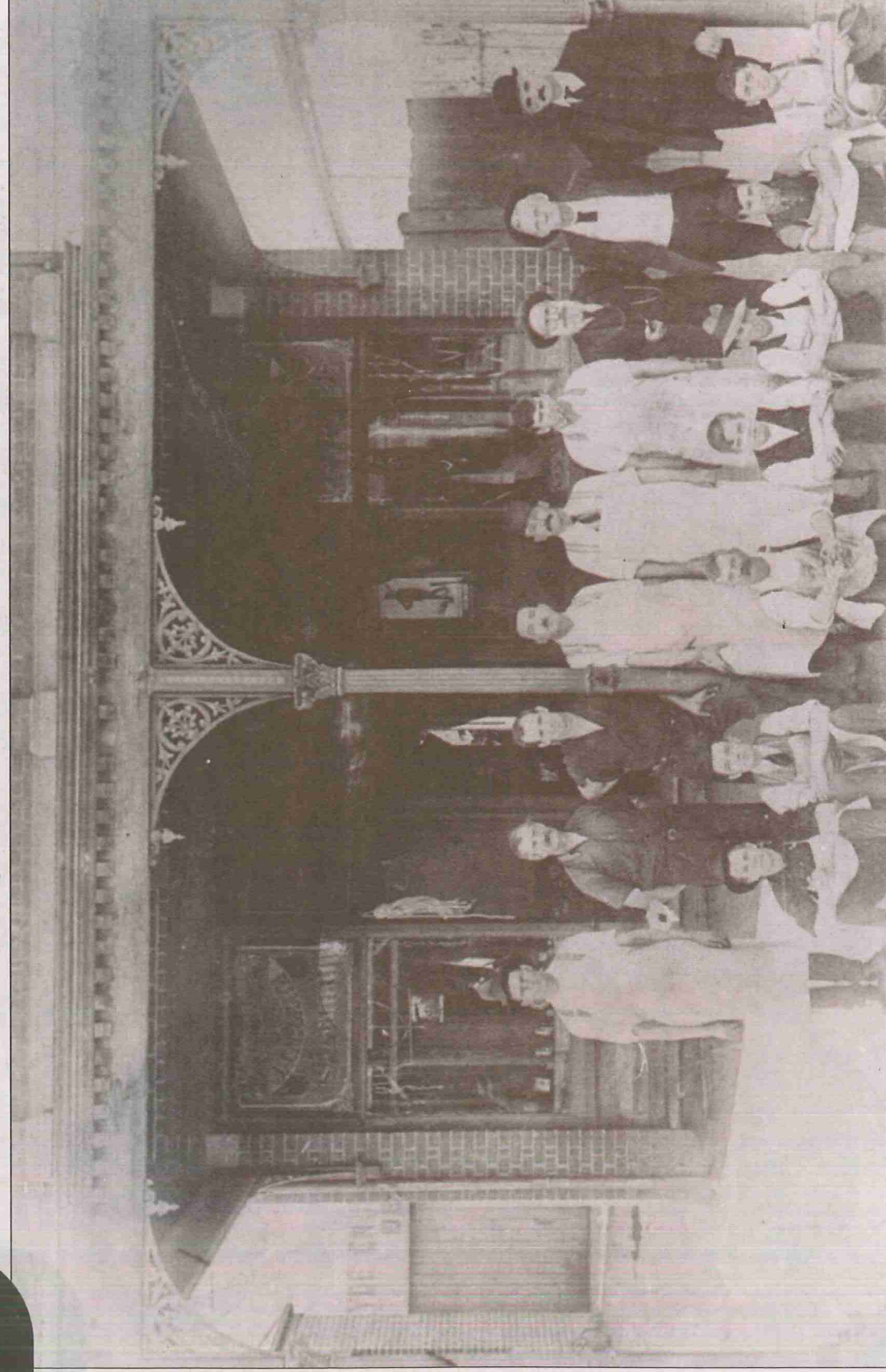
Saddleries played an important part in our history

Saturday openings

The CSU Regional Archives is currently 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 3, 2011.

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



The employees of JJ McGrath and Co outside the shopfront in Fitzmaurice Street.

Image courtesy of Sherry Morris

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, 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



saddlery is, and always has been, a highly skilled trade. Today, in Australia, to become a qualified saddler you must serve an apprenticeship for four years.

Transport and haulage were difficult for early settlers and so saddle and harness makers were in high demand, expanding to the regional areas by the 1850s.

John Joseph McGrath was a youth when he arrived in Wagga from Campbelltown.

In 1865, at the age of 13 or 14, he commenced his trade as a saddle and harness maker, it is thought that he may have been the first boy to be apprenticed to a trade in Wagga.

McGrath brought enthusiasm to his trade and expanded his learning until he developed into a first-class saddler, eventually establishing his own business in partnership with George Rudd.

The two men dissolved their partnership after three years to form their own businesses and by 1880 they were the two major saddlery manufacturers in Wagga.

Both were situated in Fitzmaurice Street and were known as George Rudd's Wagga Saddlery and JJ McGrath's Riverine Saddle Factory.

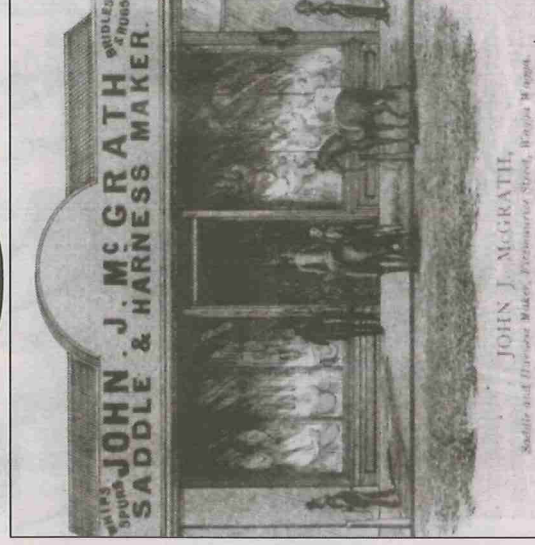
McGrath had 16 employees on a permanent basis and this number increased to 20 when there was high demand on business.

Under his guidance, the skilled tradesmen manufactured all kinds of harness and saddlery goods.

The articles were made from raw material and most of the leather was procured in NSW with the finer quality leather being imported from England or America.

The "Wagga Saddle" or "McGrath Saddle," developed by McGrath, became well-known

Riding highlights



John J. McGrath's shopfront in 1883. Image published in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, March 17, 1883.

throughout NSW and Queensland.

Over the years there was a long list of testimonials giving complimentary accolades in support of his work, particularly his stock saddle.

People such as Fred Morgan from Mount Morgan Mine in Queensland, Messrs Cobb and Co and many well-known pastoralists in the Riverina were impressed with his work.

Almost 100 first prizes were won at the Wagga and many other shows for McGrath's goods. In 1884 he was awarded first prize for his stock saddle at the National Agricultural Society's Exhibition in Melbourne.

To enable Americans to inspect the style and quality of saddles made by the Riverine Saddle Factory, Mr McGrath forwarded a gentleman's saddle to the Chicago Exhibition in 1888.

A riding saddle made by McGrath was taken by a Mr Price to the World's Columbian Exposition held at Chicago in 1893 and this was awarded a bronze medal and a certificate.

As the business continued to expand, it became necessary for new premises to be built and this task was contracted to well-known builders Messrs Chas Hardy and Co with Mr WJ Monks as architect.

This new building, on the eastern side of Fitzmaurice Street and opposite to their original factory, was first advertised as open for business in June 1893.

In the new establishment, the shop, showroom and office were on the first level.

The tradesmen were located on the second floor, while the men who made the horse collars and harnesses were located at the rear of the building (they had previously been in a factory in Cross Street). Consideration had also been given to future expansion needs.

In 1893 there were about 100 harness and saddle manufacturers in NSW and the Riverine Saddle Factory was reported to be the largest factory "beyond the boundaries of the metropolis".

JJ McGrath's successful Riverine Saddle Company was sold in August 1894 to a former employee, CH Rake, in conjunction with EH Ferguson (McGrath's brother-in-law) who subsequently sold to SA Palazzi.

Trading as JJ McGrath and Co, Rake and Palazzi continued to give the same high standard of service to which people had become accustomed and goods were in demand interstate as well as locally.

In 1915 they had even established a clientele in New Zealand.

After selling the very successful business he had founded over 15 years before, JJ McGrath became a grazier and horse breeder on "Wattle Vale", a stud situated on the Junee Road.

McGrath was energetic, enthusiastic and successful in pursuing a very public community life. He played an important role in the development and history of Wagga.

References: *Journal of the WW&DHS No.9*, Sherry Morris (1996); *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* March 16, 1893; *The Daily Advertiser* September 13, 1934; *Progress of Wagga Wagga* (c.1915) Compiled by: June Dietrich