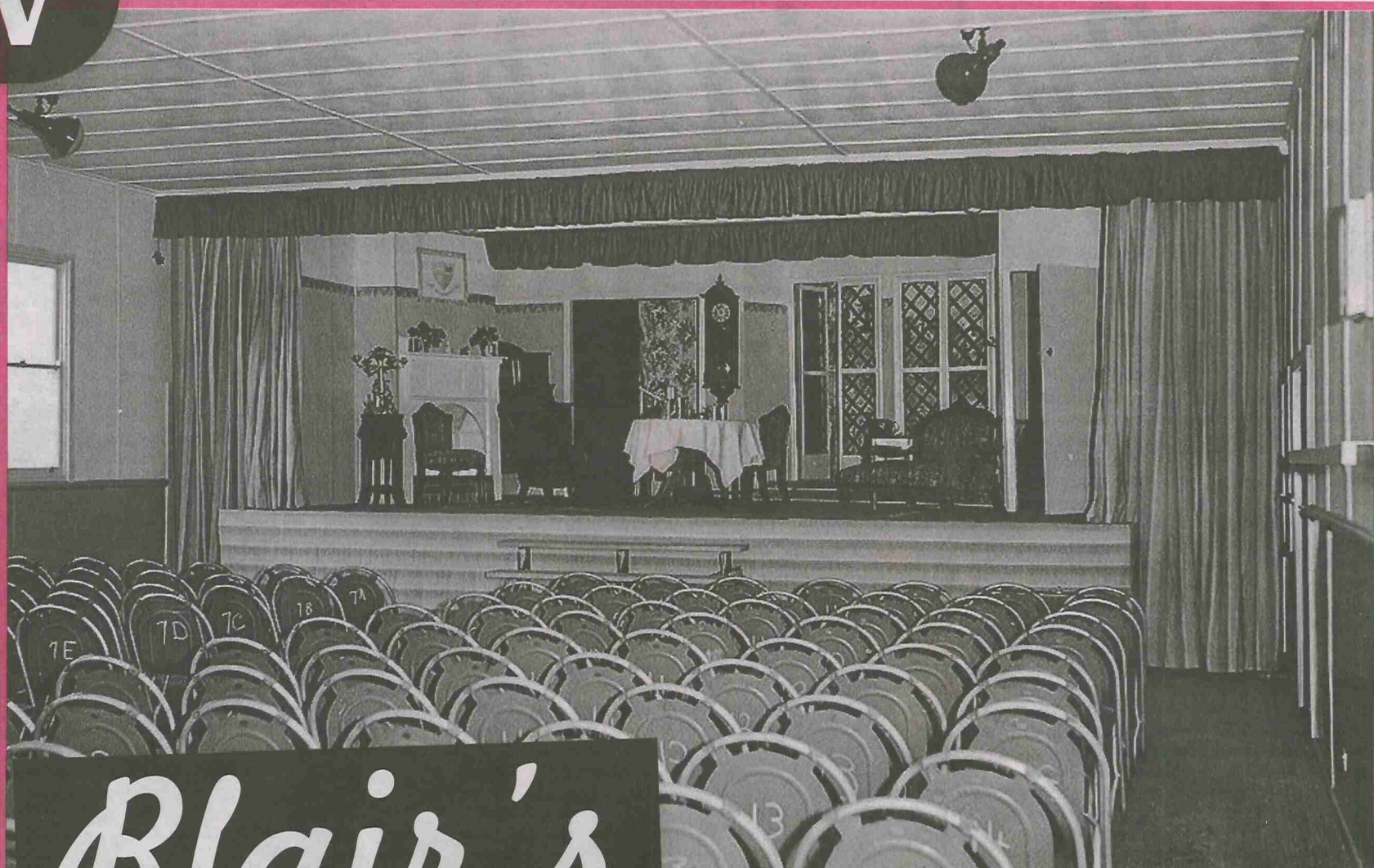


The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of the month. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the Archives on weekdays during normal business hours.

■ The next Saturday opening will be on February 2, 2013, from 10am to 3pm.

Main picture: The interior of the Wonderland Theatre, with the stage prepared for an unidentified production sometime between 1955 and 1970 (from the Tom Lennon Collection, CSURA RW1574/443).



## Blair's

# WONDERLAND

### 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](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.

**J**

ohn Blair was born in County Antrim, Belfast, Ireland. He later moved to New Zealand where he enlisted into the New Zealand Light Horse for the Boer War. For his service in South Africa, he was one of 11 who received a medal from

Queen Victoria.

Around the early 1910s, Blair moved to Wagga, where he made his first local appearance at an auction for the property "Invermay". Described as a spirited bidder, Blair won the property with ease.

He later sold this property for a higher price than he bought it for a few months later.

Soon enough, Blair became a prominent participator of the community.

He made business in Wagga as a Bazaar on Baylis Street where he sold furniture, produce and horse sales.

Serving as both an auctioneer and commission agent, he held a successful career in trade business.

Throughout the community, Blair was well-known to be a regular watcher of the local boxing contests that were held in Wagga, as well as the owner of Suffolk Punch and Arabian horses, which he rode frequently on outings he made.

During the 1920s, Blair established the Wonderland Theatre after realising that there were very few entertainment halls located in Wagga. He later added a boxing stadium to the building, which was eventually transformed into a dance hall: the Cocoanut Grove.

Throughout its lifetime, the Wonderland Theatre served not only as an entertainment venue, but also a popular host for the yearly Wagga Eisteddfod.

Throughout his life, Blair generously lent the theatre and dance hall for the purpose of charity. One such event was in March 1931, where the Wagga Unemployed Relief League

came together and began campaigning to raise donations for locals who were suffering from unemployment or were struggling families.

It was during this occasion that Blair allowed free use of the Wonderland Theatre for events to collect donations for the league.

Unfortunately, in 1942, Blair became the tragic victim of a car accident where a speeding car collided with him.

He passed away at the Wagga Base Hospital on May 19 – two days after the accident. He was buried at the Wagga Cemetery that same day.

An inquest into his death was published in July, revealing he had died of a fractured skull and cerebral lacerations. The driver of the car that had struck him remained unidentified.

Blair was survived by one son – James Blair, who was a member of the AIF – and his three daughters – Mrs KJ Bent, Mrs JG Tobain, and Miss Gladys Blair. His wife had passed away in May 1939.

After Blair's death, the fate of the Wonderland Theatre and Cocoanut Grove was shifted over to a Sydney firm that Blair had made a contract with prior to his death. Both the theatre and dance hall continued to thrive and serve the community until each closed during 1969-70.

Through the urging of locals, the lane that the Wonderland Theatre once resided in was officially named Wonderland Lane in its honour in 1972.

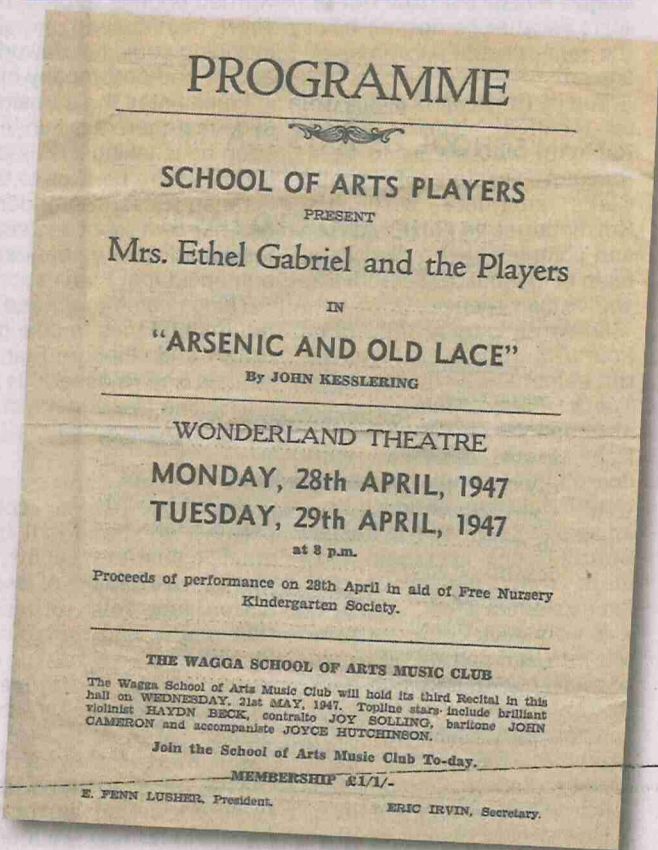
The lane is located on the south side of Thompson Street, with its entrance between Raine and Horne and Pack and Send. It bends towards Baylis Street at the Sturt Mall, then narrows to a walkway to emerge next to Thomas Jewellers.

Compiled by Rebekah Lai

References: *The Street Names of Wagga Wagga* compiled by William R Ellis; *The Daily Advertiser* January 18, 1924, May 19, 1942, July 15, 1942; *Wagga Wagga – A History* by Sherry Morris

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



A production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* was presented by the School of Arts Players at the Wonderland Theatre in 1947 (from the Holmes Family collection, CSURA RW2951/50).