

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 is today, October 8, 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 Wagga branch of the Australian Joint Stock Bank during the 1891 flood. The Murrumbidgee peaked four times that year at Wagga: the highest being 10.46 metres on June 29. With no levee, the inundation of Wagga businesses was a common occurrence.

From the Gormly Family Collection, RW98/25

Talking stock

Looking back at Wagga's first bank



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday

The Australian Joint Stock Bank

In 1891, a number of photographs were taken of the flood waters at the corner of Fitzmaurice and Gurwood streets. One of these images captured a well-built, stone building which, despite the plethora of decorative work on the verandahs and the women and children hanging out of the windows, proclaimed itself as the more commonplace Australian Joint Stock Bank.

Sherry Morris in *Wagga Wagga, a History* records that F. A. Thompson introduced the first banking facilities in Wagga in 1855 whereby he had the authority and means to cash cheques and money orders. However, the Australian Joint Stock Bank has the distinction of being Wagga's first official bank branch, which opened on January 3, 1859, under the management of John Frederic Skinner.

The bank branch started out in a slab and bark building on the corner of Fitzmaurice and Kincaid streets; they later built the two-storey building in Fitzmaurice Street in 1863. This building incorporated a residence for the manager and his family, although it was not quite yet the eye-catching structure it was in 1891.

W.A. Cottee

OF ALL the managers of the Australian Joint

Stock Bank, William Alfred Cottee is probably the most interesting.

He became a well-known figure in the finance world, well respected for his management expertise and knowledge of finance, the land acts, and the pastoral industry.

Cottee emigrated from England with his wife Susannah in 1858 and upon arrival in Sydney, took up a clerical position at the Australian Joint Stock Bank.

The next year he was promoted to teller at the Bathurst branch; in 1860 he was manager of the new branch at Yass, then relieving manager at the Wagga branch in 1861.

He was officially promoted to manager of the Wagga branch in October 1862, where he remained for the next 15 years. Cottee left Wagga to become the first manager of the Sydney branch of the Australian Mortgage Land and Finance Co. Ltd.

The Blue Cap Gang

THE Hon. James Gormly tells a strangely anti-climactic story in his book, *Exploration and Settlement in Australia*, about William Cottee, himself, and the threat of bushrangers.

It appears that Cottee wished to open a branch of the Australian Joint Stock Bank at Hay and asked Gormly to drive a special coach to carry himself and his accountant to that town (Gormly had many of the local government mail contracts, and as such owned a number of coaches and many horses at relay stations spread across western New South Wales). Gormly says that Cottee was "a timid man and was aware that a new gang of bushrangers was then reported to be infesting the country on the north side of the Murrumbidgee on the road from Wagga to Hay," so Gormly suggested they should carry guns in order to defend themselves should an attack be made.

Along the way, the coach stopped at Bundigery (or Bundidgeree) Station, the residence of T. A. Browne, better known as Rolf Boldrewood.

author of *Robbery Under Arms*. Browne told the men that the Blue Cap Gang had just that day, "stuck up" Barellan Station and had been seen near Gogeldrie Station on the road to Hay. He believed that if they continued their journey they would very likely meet the bushrangers within 24 hours.

"The news alarmed Cottee, who informed us that Harry Angel was ahead and had on his horse-dray, under a load of general station supplies, a bank safe containing the money intended for the use of the new bank to be opened in Hay and that he (Cottee) had the keys of the safe in his pocket."

Gormly placed the keys in the sockets of the coach lamps and melted candle wax over them in order to hide them.

The next night was spent at the McNeil Brothers' North Yanco Station, where preparations were also being made against the nearby bushrangers. The next day, the travellers found that Messrs Waller and Gordon of Cuba Station, 20 miles down river, had set up similar defences on their property.

That afternoon the special coach passed Angel on his dray and found the safe was still in its hiding place. They left him and went on to Hay which they reached before midnight. Angel arrived in town safe and sound by 10 o'clock the next night.

Not one sign had been seen of the Blue Cap Gang.

Compiled by Jillian Kohlhagen

References:

- Morris, Sherry (1999) *Wagga Wagga, a History*, pg 58; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Jan 13, 1859;
- Linton, John Eddis, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 3 (1969); Wagga City Council, *Murrumbidgee River and Floods* (2011) <http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/www/html/303-murrumbidgee-river-and-floods.asp>; Gormly, James (1921) *Exploration and Settlement in Australia*, pg. 85 to 87.

what you need to know

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakenmore 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.