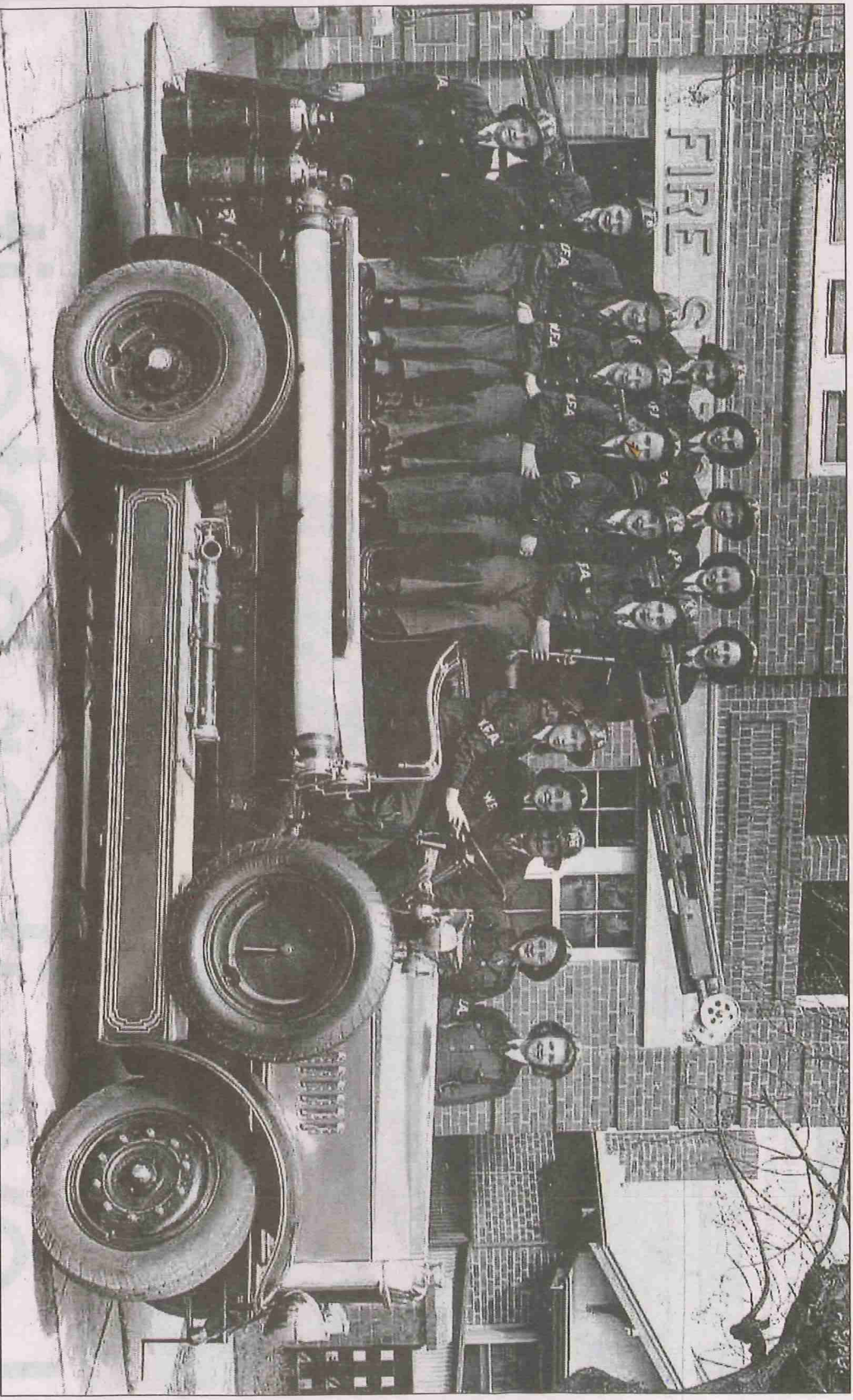


What you should know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the 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 straightforward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

■ For further information, phone 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au or visit the website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



This image was taken outside the Wagga Fire Station in Johnston Street and shows (back) Mary Sullivan, Joyce Graham, Olive Dunn, Marge Johnson, Enid Johnson, (front) May Peacock (behind extinguishers), Lorraine Davies, Elma Paul, Jean Weeks, Alma Collet, Marion Oxley, Joy White, Betty Morrow (behind steering wheel), Audrey Cameron, Miss Aberdeen, Elaine Bertram and Shirley Armstrong. (CSU Regional Archives, RW2008)

Local women's fire unit was third in regional Australia

Wagga's female FIRE AUXILIARY

at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



This is our third article on women's voluntary services during World War II and our focus this week is the Women's Fire Auxiliary (WFA).

The WFA was a section of the Women's Australian National Service (WANS). The Wagga WANS Branch became the third unit outside the metropolitan area to form a WFA; the other two being Lithgow and Wollongong.

The value of auxiliary fire fighters had been proved where air raids had ravaged overseas countries and the Wagga WFA spent three months doing their course of fire fighting.

This course included weekly lectures delivered by sub-station officer Pasko, assisted by senior fireman McHenry. Sub-station officer Pettit gave lectures in the absence of Mr. Pasko, when he was on annual leave.

As well as lectures, an essential part of the course was spent on practical work with hoses, chemical extinguishers and a regular feature was the use of the latest fire-fighting appliances.

To become familiar with the routine of the

fire station the girls were posted to watchroom duty at the Wagga Fire Station and by July 1942 they were ready for the examinations.

These were held at the fire station, where the inspector of NSW Fire Brigades, J Neville, was in charge and said that the girls were well up to the standard of the syllabus, which was essentially based on fire prevention, fire extinguishing and fire protection.

The first successful WFA candidates to pass the examinations were: Misses A Aberdeen, E Paul, J Wickes, R Fitzgerald, E Woodland, A Pellans, B Harrington, M Sullivan, B Morrow, J Fenton, O Dunn, D Crowe and E Collett.

In addition to their fire-fighting training, the WFA were expected to attend drill practice at the drill hall with the WANS as well as first aid classes, lectures and demonstrations provided by the Air Raid Precaution and were rostered for canteen duty at the services rest hut.

WFA girls were equipped with two uniforms, their working gear consisted of navy blue combination overalls with a scarlet WFA armband; their dress uniform was a grey two-piece suit, white shirt, tie and the scarlet armband.

At a WANS display on December 15, 1942, the WFA, under the command of their captain Miss Audrey Cameron, gave a display of rescue drill by demonstrating the strenuous task of dragging a heavy person from a burning building, followed by gas mask drill showing protection from any poison gases that could be encountered.

The WFA concluded their demonstration with a wet drill - the hoses and hydrant were connected and, using a length of 100ft hose, water was sprayed over the ground in record time.

In an interview, Mr. Pasko explained that at a fire demonstration in Sydney a 25ft hose was used by WFA and considered to be satisfactory whereas the Wagga girls capably managed to handle the 100ft hose and that he was particularly pleased with their work.

Ten members of the WFA went to Sydney to take part in a fire brigade's field day held at Centennial Park in April 1944, although the Wagga unit was not successful, they learnt new procedures and it was reported in *The Daily Advertiser* that they enjoyed the experience immensely.

From the Sydney demonstrations, an image of May Peacock, Emma Collett and Betty Morrow jumping from a fire unit at the fire brigade's field day was printed in *The Daily Advertiser* on April 29, 1944.

At the end of the war, the WFA was disbanded and women were excluded from paid fire-fighting service; this was made official by government legislation.

It was not until 1978 that it was announced that women, for the first time, would be "allowed" to join the NSW Fire Brigade as active fire fighters; this announcement coincided with the news that a site for a second fire station was being considered in Wagga.

Even though women had successfully become proficient in fire-fighting procedures during World War II, it was 55 years later, before they were to be invited to "join male firemen in using hoses, rescues and ladder work."

References: CSU Regional Archives RW2008; *The Daily Advertiser*: 07/07/1942, 15/07/1942, 17/12/1942, 22/04/1944, 29/04/1944, 18/09/1944.

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