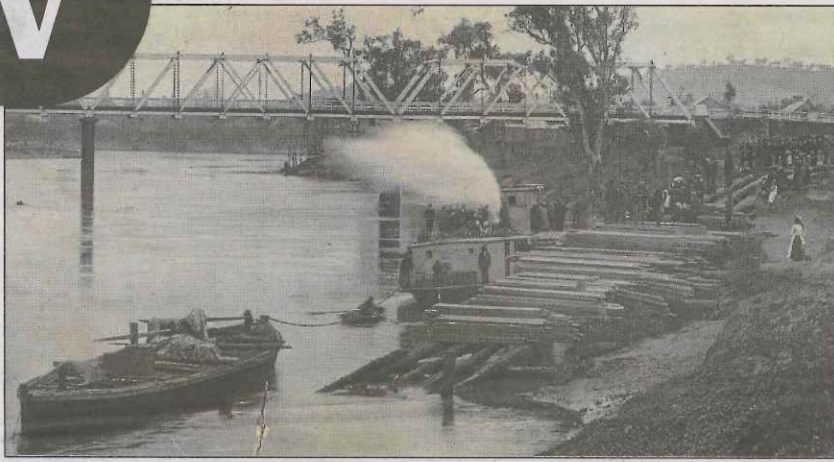
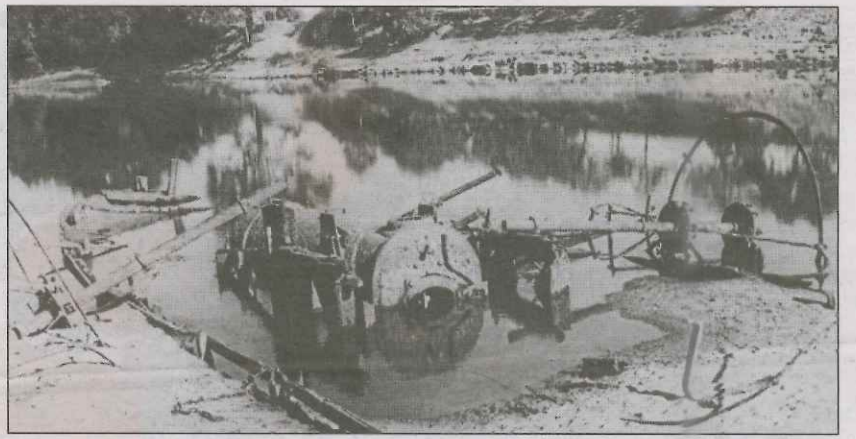


The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of the month. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the Archives on weekdays during normal business hours. The next Saturday opening will be on October 5, 2013, from 10.00am to 3.00pm.



The Wagga Wagga steamer and barge tied up at the Wagga wharf just near the Hampden Bridge. This photograph was taken sometime between 1895 and 1918. (RW3016)



In November 1918, the Wagga Wagga found its final resting place at Narrandera. When the Murrumbidgee is low, the remains of the Wagga Wagga can still be seen upstream of the railway bridge, on the northern side of the river. (RW1574/336/1549)

Steamers on the 'Bidgee

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, 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



river steamers on the Murrumbidgee: Part 3

Parts one and two of this series on the Murrumbidgee river steamers told the stories of the beginnings of river transport, the problems encountered throughout the years and the efforts made to keep the steamers viable.

This final instalment looks at some of the memorable rivermen and their steamers and, in particular, the Wagga Wagga. The important role that river steamers played in helping to establish trade and commerce in the fledgling townships and communities on the Murrumbidgee River is also discussed.

Personalities

AMUSING anecdotes, exciting yarns and interesting characters no doubt went hand in hand with river steamer transport on the Murrumbidgee.

In May 1870, during a period of flood, the steamer named JHP was plying up-river from Wagga to collect a load of lime. Due to the higher water level, the steamer could not fit underneath the Company Bridge. The skipper, Mr Warby, was a resourceful man, and he decided to shift the ballast to one side of the vessel causing the steamer to list enough for the funnel to sufficiently clear the bridge, allowing him to travel on his way.

Gus Peirce, another interesting character on the river, was skipper of the Victoria, but supplemented this job with a career appearing as a comedian in Wagga.

Tom Bynon, who was skipper of the steamer Wagga Wagga for 38 years, claimed to have seen four fights going on at once in Hay between the "land lubbers" and the mariners, while bales of wool were being loaded.

The "Wagga Wagga"

UNFORTUNATELY today, we are left with few physical reminders of the history of the river steamers plying the Murrumbidgee River. Archival records documenting the steamer navigation of the Murrumbidgee are also scant.

The only item we hold at the CSU Regional Archives, other than a small number of photographs, is a microfilm copy of the log book of the steamer named Wagga Wagga, which oddly enough was not even based in Wagga, but did visit the township on many occasions, and has the

distinction of being one of the very last operational river steamers on the Murrumbidgee River.

From 1878 the Wagga Wagga made regular trips on the river between Hay, Narrandera and Wagga and was primarily used for the conveyance of timber and wool. Reading the log of the steamer is somewhat mundane, but every now and then an entry grabs attention:

- "August 16, 1880 – Started from Warby's at 8.15am. William, the bargeman, fell overboard from the barge at 8.45am. Stopped the steamer and did best to save him, could not do it. Started again at 9.15am."

- "October 23, 1880 – Near Wagga Wagga, had only managed 10 miles downstream, slowly, when the steamer stuck. Five hours later at 11pm she was freed and the crew camped for the night. In the morning, the barge was stuck fast and wasn't got off 'til 3pm. Struggled then on low water, the steamer and the barges becoming stuck at regular intervals. Engines and paddle wheels also required attention at times. Troubles near Narrandera saw the crew paid off and the steamer laid up. Set off again in November."

- "December 6, 1880 (same trip as above) – Struck a snag, was run into the bank where she sank."

- "December 8, 1880 – Working to rise steamer."
- "December 9, 1880 – Working to rise steamer."
- "December 10, 1880 – Working to rise steamer."
- "December 11, 1880 – Working to rise steamer."

- "December 12, 1880 – Finished repairs of steamer and started at 5.30pm. Barge struck a snag at 7.30pm. Saving cargo. Knocked off at 11pm."

- "December 13, 1880 – Saving cargo."
- "December 14, 1880 – Saving cargo."
- "December 15, 1880 – Saving cargo."
- "December 16, 1880 – Finished repairs on barge and loaded cargo on board."
- "December 17, 1880 – Started at 6am. Continued to Hay without further mishap."

On another trip in May 1881 to Narrandera, the barge was grounded and damaged, so the crew cut wood for three weeks waiting for a rise in the river level. Such was the life of an inland sailor on the Murrumbidgee.

You may wonder what became of the steamer Wagga Wagga. On the day World War I ended, November 11, 1918, the steamer was beached at Narrandera for caulking work, as she was taking on water. The work was never carried out and today, the Wagga Wagga lies in exactly the same spot. Its remains can still be seen when the river level is very low.

Legacy

KEITH Swan maintains in his *History of Wagga*, that only between 1870 and 1875 was steamer transport of any importance to Wagga, and even then it was "irregular, unreliable and possible at

most for seven or eight months of the year." He continues by stating that the river steamers on the Murrumbidgee contributed little to the overall development of Wagga as a whole.

These assertions appear to be based solely on a numerical and statistical analysis, which ignores the crucial social and cultural changes in mindset and ideals that this new mode of transport delivered to the then isolated settlers and communities of the Murrumbidgee River.

Passengers were often carried on the trips by river steamers, and obviously would have enjoyed a trip free from dust, mud and the rough ride which was synonymous with road transport of the time. Foodstuffs and supplies were delivered in a much cleaner condition than by bullock wagon.

Often the manifests of the steamers cargos would be reproduced in the local newspapers, and reveal that ironmongery, furniture and other equipment including saw mills and reaping machines were transported, and even occasionally livestock. In 1872, the Victoria had, as one of its passengers, the enormous bull named "Robin Hood" which was being delivered to a station on the Murrumbidgee.

A 19th Century NSW Special Committee appointed to examine the advisability of opening up the rivers and improving their navigability also commented on the influence the river steamers had on developing river areas, emphasising that navigability led to social improvements, cheaper transportation of comforts and conveniences previously unavailable, and perhaps most importantly, "...will give a fixed and civilised character to a society which up to the present time has been comparatively rude and nomadic. Under such improved circumstances families will be found where previously a male population only existed, and towns will arise as commercial depots, and as stations for labourers, from where in due time, churches and schools will each dispense their own peculiar blessings".

Ian Mudie, in his book entitled *Riverboats*, captures the essence of the impact that the river steamers had not only on the Murrumbidgee River, but the river systems of NSW, Victoria and South Australia. "Almost casually – with few recognising, then or afterwards, the importance of their role – the rivermen and river steamers were making possible the civilised settlement and the development of a vast area of the Australian continent."

References:

Mudie, Ian (1961), *Riverboats*; Swan, Keith (1970), *A History of Wagga Wagga* pp. 88-94; CSU Regional Archives – log book of the steamer *Wagga Wagga*, RW1619, photograph from the Jonee Museum Collection, RW3016, and photograph from the Tom Lennon Collection, RW1574/336/1549.

SEARCH HISTORIC NEWSPAPERS ON LINE

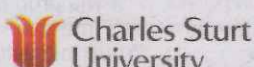
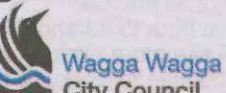


Trove

... then visit www.trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper

for your Treasure Trove of Riverina history

The Daily Advertiser



Wagga and District Historical Society

