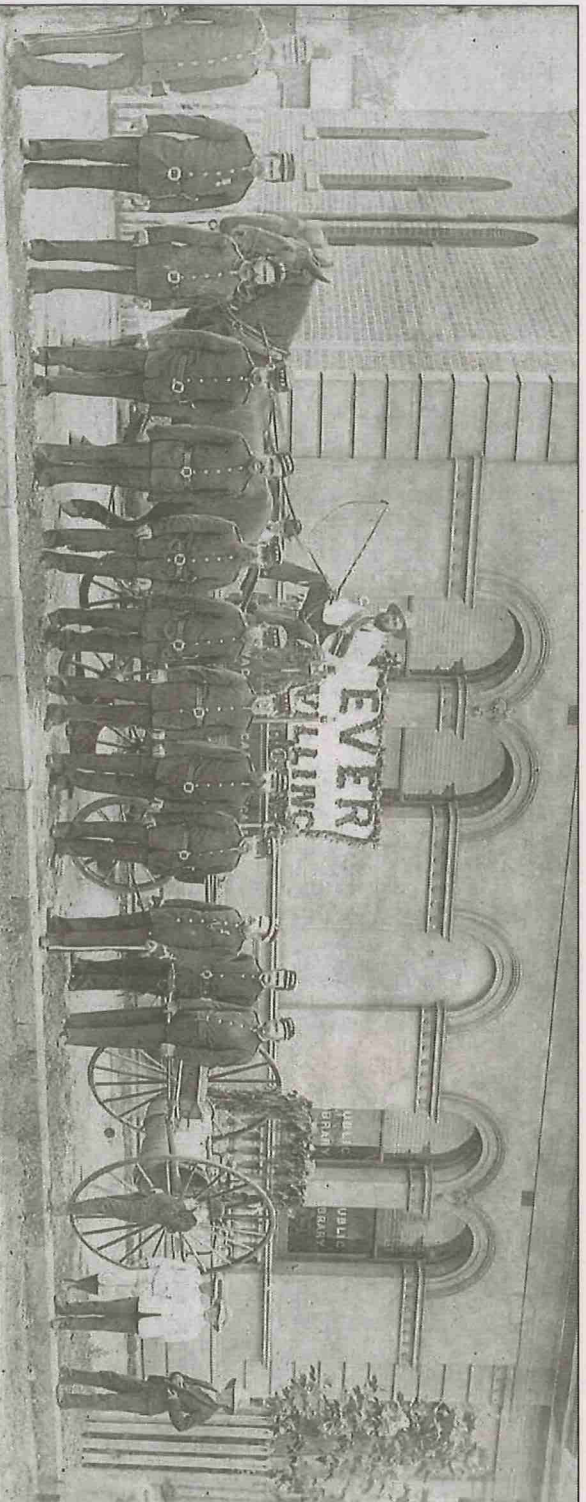


**What you should know**

■ The CSU Regional Archives is 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 enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

■ For further information, phone 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au) or visit the 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.



All three photographs are taken from FM5, a collection from the Wagga & District Historical Society housed at the CSU Regional Archives. This photograph shows the Wagga Wagga Fire Brigade in 1881.

# A look at our first fire fighters

at the archives  
Wayne Doubleday



The formation of Wagga's first fire brigade took a number of years to eventuate, despite the early growth of the township. Initial discussions first took place in 1871 and continued right through the 1870s. But it was not until 1880 that any formal steps were taken.

A meeting was held at the Commercial Hotel on June 7, 1880. The Mayor, Mr Fitzhardinge, was elected as chairman. It was agreed to call for those interested in forming a fire brigade to attend a meeting on June 12 at the Mechanics' Institute.

The Wagga Wagga *Advertiser* reported about 25 people attended the meeting. Thirty-three men applied for membership, with 30 elected to the brigade.

A T Bolton was elected as captain, F J Piggott as secretary, and J McGrath as treasurer. T Harrison was elected foreman, with T West as assistant foreman. Dr Wren accepted the post of honorary medical officer.

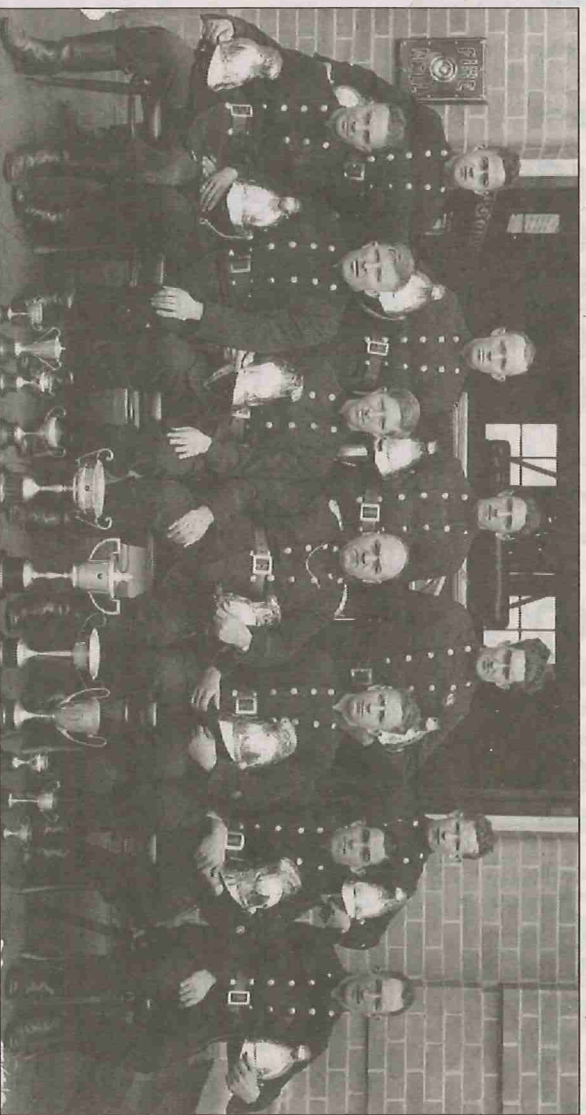
The committee held its first meeting in Mr Bolton's office on June 15, 1880. The brigade acquired one manual fire engine which was housed in a Baylis Street cottage.

The Brigade was put to the test on October 15, 1880, when one of the worst fires in the town's history destroyed a number of buildings in Fitzmaurice Street. It was believed the fire originated in Mr Adrian's furniture warehouse, an old wooden structure.

The following businessmen were directly affected: Mr Wilans, solicitor; Mr Turner, tinsmith; Mr Browe of the Mason's Arms; Mr Cassin, saddler; Mr Rand, chemist; Mr Eddy, draper; Messrs Rudd and McGrath, saddlers; Mr Blackmore, barber. Other buildings destroyed included Mr Adrian's furniture warehouse, Mrs McGregor's fancy goods store, the Masonic Hall and the Criterion Hotel.

The *Advertiser* reported: "The members of the brigade showed every alacrity in getting the engine to work, but at first it did not prove itself a success. Afterwards, however, it worked better, and a constant supply of water was available, pumped up by volunteers. The stream of water thrown by the engine, however, is so small that it may be said to have been practically useless from the outset."

The question was put to Capt Harrison regarding the limited success of the engine, but



Above: The Wagga Wagga Fire Brigade displaying trophies won in competition (c. 1940).



Left: A portrait of the Wagga Wagga Fire Brigade in 1891.

he replied that the engine was positioned in the yard of the Criterion Hotel where they knew there was a water pump, enabling two streams of water to be played over the fire. Should they have chosen to use water drawn directly from the river, as was suggested, they would not have had sufficient hose for two streams of water.

In 1883 the brigade moved to Morrow Street. Almost 20 years later, in June 1902, disaster befell the fire brigade when the station and all of the equipment was destroyed by fire. By June the following year, the municipal council had decided to grant the site in Wollundry Avenue as the new station for the Brigade.

Apart from small council subsidies, the brigade was maintained in its infancy by fundraising through subscriptions and socials organised by Brigade members.

The first horse-drawn turbine engine was

purchased by the brigade in 1913 and by 1914, three street alarms were in service. The number of alarms had reached nine by 1927 and this included private alarms for businesses and even an automatic sprinkler system connected to the station.

Historian Keith Swan maintained the fire brigade served other purposes than merely fighting fires. He argued the organisation was "important as another outlet for the men of the town... one of those levelling organisations where professional men and tradesmen worked together on a necessary task."

■ **References:** *The Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, June 8, 15 & 17, 1880 and October 16 & 19, 1880; Swan, Keith J. *A History of Wagga Wagga. City of Wagga Wagga, 1970*, pp.120 & 155; *Back to Wagga Wagga Souvenir, 1927* (copy held at CSURA)