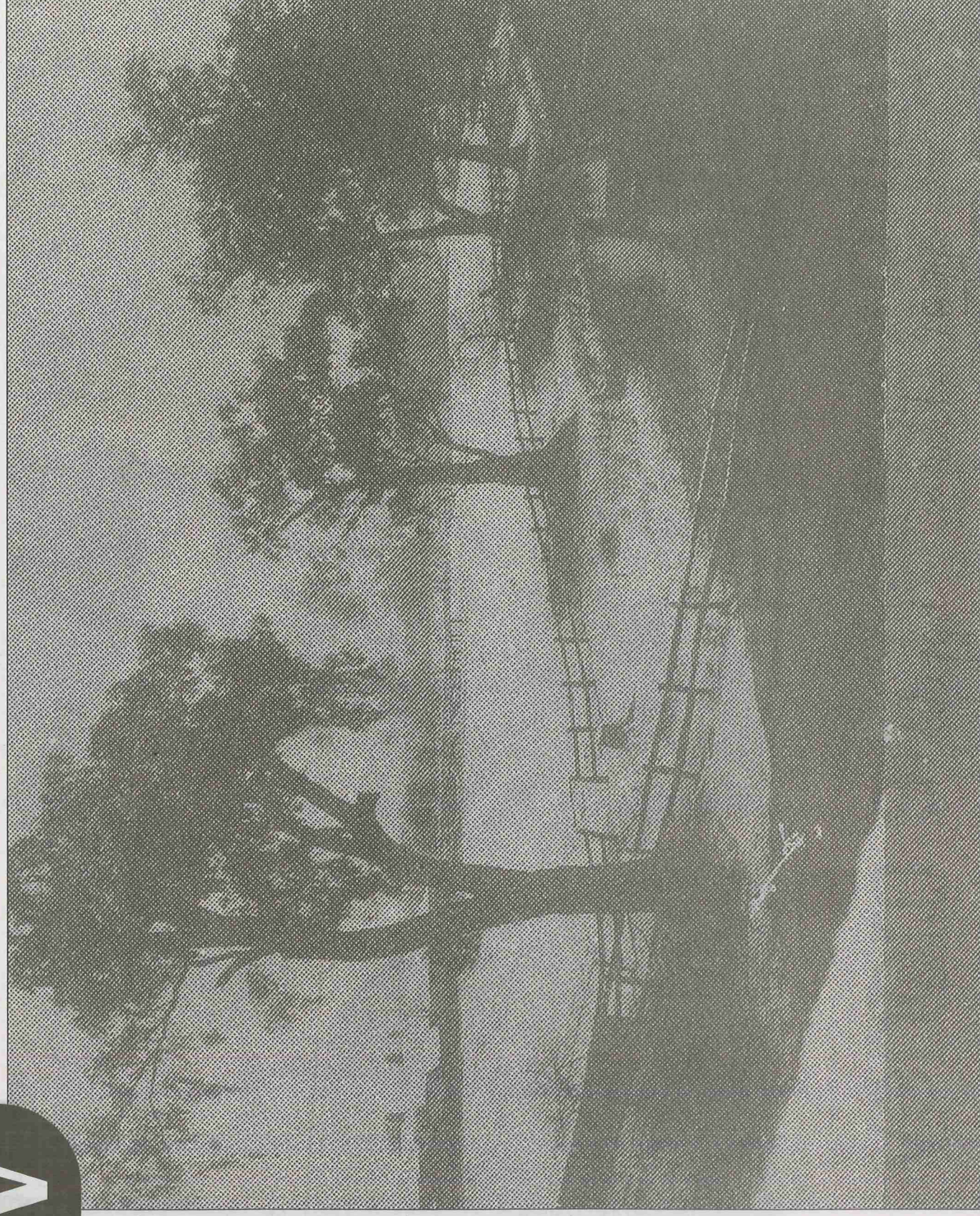




Collins Park under snow, August 8, 1899 (*Daily Advertiser* photo 29/10/1899).



what you need to know

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Snow in Wagga, August 8, 1899 (CSURA Collection – RW1150/12).

White days in Wagga



When the residents of Wagga awoke on the morning of Tuesday, August 8, 1899, they were greeted by an event which today is still a very rare occurrence.

Overnight, two inches of snow had fallen over the majority of Wagga.

Elderly residents and early settlers of the township recalled only one earlier fall in Wagga, albeit on a smaller scale, roughly 40 years before, but no definitive date or descriptive record of that event were recorded (although one source suggests a snow fall in 1856).

Snow falls in Wagga and the surrounding districts have often taken the form of sleet more than snow, and usually dissipate either as the snow hits the ground or very shortly after.

The fall of August 8, 1899, by contrast was quite heavy and widespread. Upwards of six inches were recorded in the Sandy Creek and Big Springs areas, where the snow was still visible on the higher ground the following day.

The snowfall in Tumberumba was the heaviest ever seen by the older inhabitants, with snow a foot deep in the town and much deeper on the hills.

Other townships in the Riverina which received falls included Albury, Coolamon, Gundagai, Yass, Young, Temora and Tumut.

The Daily Advertiser recorded in detail the way in which the people of Wagga responded to this weather anomaly and the effects it had on normal daily routines.

One frightened youngster upon seeing snow for the very first time described it as “white blotches that don’t make any noise as they come tumbling down through the air”.

The snow began falling at 5.30am and didn’t stop for three hours, so many early risers and those people whose occupations compelled them to be up and about, were quite shocked to find snow falling so heavily.

“Younger people, and some oldsters, who had never indulged in the past-time, lost no time in getting on some clothes and going out for a good game of snowballs. One enthusiast, content with only pyjamas and slippers, waged war on all and sundry, including the milk boy.

“In the streets the fun was fast and furious. In Fitzmaurice Street no one was safe from attack, but the crowd was on the whole good humored, and took its pelting individually with what grace it could.

“Snowmen were to be seen in one or two places, and huge balls of snow were also rolled around.”

The snow brought business in the town to a standstill for most of the morning.

The Daily Advertiser reported that the amount of work done in the morning must have been very minimal as everyone made the most of the novelty.

The snow had mostly vanished by midday, except for a few spots on the hills and higher ground.

“It had disappeared and become only a memory – but an historic memory.

“Historic no doubt it will be if snow visitations are as few in the future as they have been in the past.”

Oddly enough, less than two years later in 1901, another fall occurred in Wagga. However, it

was much smaller and more sleet than snow. In more recent times, perhaps one of the heaviest snowfalls to occur was on Monday, August 17, 1970.

The front page of *The Daily Advertiser* reported that for some Riverina localities this was the first time snow had fallen.

The snow was at its deepest in Wagga on the higher parts of Willans Hill, with many parents driving up to Captain Cook Drive so their children could play in the snow.

Strangely, in other parts of Wagga the falls were much lighter and by breakfast time had all but disappeared.

On the hills surrounding Wagga, the snow lasted a little longer until mid-morning. Not surprisingly the falls at Adelong, Batlow, Tumut and Tumberumba were much heavier – upwards of 12 inches.

Harden, Cootamundra and Young also received some of the heaviest falls in living memory, while The Rock, Culcairn, Mangoplah, Yerong Creek, Big Springs and Gregadoo also had considerable falls.

While no doubt a novelty for most, the snow falls did create some problems. Telephone communications between a large number of towns were interrupted, the roads became extremely hazardous for driving, there was an exceptionally high demand for gas and electricity, and at the Southern Poultry Supply Farm in Koorringal, 1400 young turkeys froze to death in the freezing conditions.

Even the beer was getting too cold if left outside.

Mr Norm Alchin, working at the Union Club Hotel bottle shop, told *The Daily Advertiser* that it was warmer in the cool room than outside.

“The beer’s getting too cold if it’s left out in the open,” he said.

References: *The Daily Advertiser*, 10/08/1899, p. 2; 29/10/1968 (100th Anniversary Supplement); 18/08/1970, pp. 1-2.