

What you need to know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and the first Saturday of every month from 10am to 3pm. 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 please phone 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.

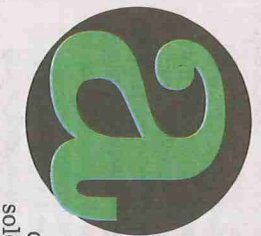


Workers for the Wagga Soldiers' Comforts Fund pack Christmas cakes during WWI. The ladies pictured include Mesdames Smith, Collins, McGrath, Hartland, Dobney and Crouch.

Keeping comfortable



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



At the outbreak of WWI, a woman's role in the community was seen to be in the home. However, their organisational skills proved to be exceptional in raising funds to provide comfort parcels for the soldiers serving overseas.

Quite a number of fundraising organisations were active throughout the whole war period. One of these, the Australian Comforts Fund, was established in 1916 to provide and distribute comforts to the enlisted men in all the conflicts currently taking place. The headquarters was based in Sydney.

By May 1916, a group of 195 Wagga women had seized the opportunity to form the Wagga Soldiers' Comfort Fund to provide parcels for enlisted men, particularly from Wagga and the surrounding district.

By August, membership had increased to 412 with the executive committee comprising mayores Hannah Oates as president, secretary Lucy Shaw and Bee Bellair treasurer, later Mrs FC Thomas.

The Wagga Soldiers' Comforts Fund later joined smaller comforts funds from places such as Bruceedale, Yathella, Ladysmith, Pullitop and Dhulara and in December 1917 became the headquarters of the district fund.

Packing parcels

THE ladies resolved not to form an official branch of the Australian Comforts Fund, which was known as the War Chest Fund, as the group preferred to raise money to provide parcels specifically for locally enlisted men.

The ladies met in a large room over the Commonwealth Bank in Fitzmaurice Street and on a "packing day" a *Daily Advertiser* reporter described the "scene of patriotism ... evident in

Hours extended

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 occurs today. 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 faces of the voluntary war workers amongst the tables laden with goods to be sent to places such as Egypt, Mesopotamia or France".

"The workers were allocated different tasks, with some of the ladies packing the parcels and then passing it on for the final wrapping to be sewn securely, with indelible ink being used to write the name of the soldier for whom it was intended. In one day, 240 parcels could be packed with the Boy Scouts helping with the dispatch.

'What'll beat them'

THE Wagga Soldiers' Comforts Fund organisation was seen to "be doing much to brighten the life and lighten the burden of the local men in the trenches".

The ladies thought of many innovative ways to raise funds, with one very successful event being by the sales of buttons. One of the ladies was quite daring for the time and used the sales approach of "Buy a Button for a 'Bob'", very few people refused.

The buttons had a blue background with a spray of wattle in a yellow circle with the words "Wagga boys fighting - what'll beat them!" Buttons and wattle were for sale and wattle adorned the tables along the street. The day was very successful financially, with a sum of 78 pounds, nineteen shillings and nine pence being raised.

'All smiles'

TO KEEP the troops up to date with local news from home, parcels of newspapers were sent away every Tuesday.

The papers and parcels were received eagerly by the men and were reportedly very much appreciated, which could be seen by the letters sent to relatives and friends.

On one occasion, a report showed that 156 packets of cigarettes had been donated including 100 packets from the Christian Brothers School. Tobacco and cigarettes were very acceptable as a letter from CE Bryant dated: France, May 2, 1918 stated to Mrs Cotton of Railway Street:

"During the last week, I have been enjoying the good Havellock tobacco which is unprocurable here. Of course, we get plenty of issue tobacco, but it is not like the good-old Australian blend. This is the second parcel I have received from the Wagga Soldiers' Comforts Fund. There are quite a number of Wagga chaps in my battery. It has been a very anxious time during the last two months, but we are all hoping that the worst is over now."

Mrs Cotton also received a letter from Clyde R Collins, writing from France on May 8, 1918. Collins wrote, "... It (parcel) came when it was most needed", and asked Mrs Cotton to convey his heartfelt thanks to the committee of the Wagga Soldiers' Fund.

He added, "You would be pleased to see the lads when they receive these parcels. They are all smiles. There are quite a number of Wagga district boys with our battalion, including Sergeant AE Khnsella, L Cpl Chassels, and Pte Ted Drake. They are all quite well and look it, too."

The Wagga Soldiers' Comforts fund disbanded on April 10, 1920, and many of the women moved on to use their organisational skills for peace time charities and committees.

■ References: *Wagga Wagga a History*, by Sherry Morris, *The Daily Advertiser*, Wagga: May, 5, July 5 and 8, August 7, 1916; January 18, July 29, 1918.

Compiled by: June Dietrich