

What you should know

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■ 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 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.

On the warpath

Voluntary Women's Register – an important part of the war effort

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



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World War II changed the paths of thousands of Australian women as they found themselves in altogether different roles than was traditionally known to them.

It became increasingly evident that women would be needed to fill the labour shortage as the men were recruited for active war service.

In 1939 the Commonwealth Government decided to authorise a Voluntary Women's Register to enable all states to be uniform in the co-ordination of essential services in a national emergency.

The idea was to utilise specialised women's skills so that they could be placed in an area of their expertise and interest.

On July 5, 1940 the Capitol Theatre in Wagga Wagga was the venue for a huge rally to inaugurate the Women's Australian National Service (WANS).

This rally was the first in rural NSW and was held just 10 days after the successful launch of the movement by Lady Wakehurst and Lady Gowrie in Sydney.

Lady Wakehurst urged the ladies present that their assistance was needed to open up new fields of training to fill the vacancies left by the men.

The state president of the Country Women's Association, Ada Beveridge, addressed the gathering at the Capitol and outlined the work being carried out by English women.

It was her belief that the first thing Wagga women could do was to support the aims and objectives of WANS and become physically fit, to enable them to cope with any situation.

Lorna Byrne, organiser of the women's branch of the agricultural bureau, spoke of the plan for the WANS which was for the organisation to train women into many diverse areas.

Miss Byrne was interested in the Women's Land Army as it was a new concept to Australia at this time; it later became a paid service.

Sections of the WANS began operating all over Australia and by 1941, training classes had begun in Wagga in canteen cookery, motor transport driving, motor mechanic classes, first aid, including stretcher work, home nursing, camouflage net making, and map reading.

After about three months of tuition, the women were required to pass examinations for each course they enrolled in.

The women of Wagga worked incredibly hard in aid of the "Wagga war effort," especially in view of the fact that their involvement was all on a voluntary basis.

All voluntary organisations played important roles in the difficult time of war, some examples being the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), the Red Cross, the various committees of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC), the Air Raid Precautions Organisation (ARP), the Country Women's Association (CWA) and the women's auxiliaries of many organisations.

Women all over Australia acknowledged the necessity to support the men and boys who had joined the fighting forces.

The contribution of volunteers makes a dramatic difference to the cultural and social life of communities today and they should be acknowledged for the invisible work that they continue to do, sometimes for decades.

Life for millions of Australians would be dramatically different and people in all communities would feel the effect if the volunteers of this country did not assist in a



Above: Women's Australian National Servicetransport drivers Dot, Peg, Honor, Nellie, and Una. Below: Women's services on parade.



multitude of fields.

As women's involvement in the voluntary services had a huge impact on the Wagga community during World War II, we intend to conduct more research into this particular area for future articles.

It would be very much appreciated if anyone could assist by supplying information or photographs which would be scanned and

returned immediately. Our contact phone number is 6925 3666 or email archive@csu.edu.au

References: Wagga, A History Sherry Morris; The Canberra Times 28/02/1939; The Daily Advertiser 05/07/1940; 1941-1942; 18/04/1978 [Dianthus article]. Compiled by: June Dietrich