



THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON WODONGA AND ITS SURROUNDS

PLACES AND STORIES

Contextual Background



This exhibition was supported by the Victorian Government and the Victorian Veterans Council as part of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War Two Grant Program.

<https://www.vic.gov.au/veterans-support-and-commemoration>

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PART 2: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The transition from war to peace in 1945 prompts reflection on the nature of war on the home front, the expectations of peace, and ideas about the kinds of places Albury and Wodonga were becoming. How was the war on the home front perceived, and experienced in Wodonga and its surrounds? What did this place expect of the peace? What kind of place was emerging at the end of the war?

This account of war and its aftermath explains how the unprecedented national emergency of total war called on all the resources of the town and its countryside. It shows the local implications of post-war planning. It traces some of ways war insinuated itself into everyday life, upsetting established ways of thinking about gender and race/ethnic differences.

The places and stories presented here frame a central argument that the border between the two states trembled during the war. Defence forces found the border an impediment to military activity. They sought to minimise that impediment by facilitating the expansion of railway facilities and by building huge military camps. Commercial enterprises vigorously questioned state control of land transport at the border. Citizens of Wodonga and Albury found common interest in maximising their claims on government largesse. War changed the way this border community situated itself in relation to others. It marked the awakening of a cross-border solidarity. War changed the Wodonga Albury Crossing Place.

1: Fighting the War on the Home Front

The Second World War unfolded in four distinct phases on the Wodonga home front.

Distant war

Initially Australia seemed to be involved in supporting Britain in a European War, as it had through the First World War. The war would imperil the young people who went to fight. But it was a distant war that would, otherwise, have minimal effect on the local community. Nevertheless, there were suspicions that Japan, which had aggressively attacked China, might try to secure advantage from the European conflict. Japan could become a 'potential assailant'¹. Even before war was declared Wodonga townspeople began preparing for such a possibility. Men, women and children were invited to march behind the town band to the Shire Hall to hear and help with the arrangements the town engineer was making in case of the remote possibility of air attacks².

¹ BMM 2 May 1938.

² BMM 2 January 1939.

Garrison town

In mid-1940 Wodonga suddenly became a garrison town. One of Australia's largest inland military camps was hastily built at Bonegilla. When it opened, Bonegilla Army Camp was used for training new recruits from Albury, Wodonga and their immediate surrounds as well as recruits from Wangaratta and from Seymour. It had a 600-bed hospital. Bandiana was developed as an ordnance base and vehicle park.



State Library of Victoria H2001.94/8.

The proximity of camps accommodating 11 000 people strengthened the local economy. Local men built the facilities and the connecting railways. Local contractors met the demands for fruit, vegetables, eggs, milk, ice cream, meat and firewood.

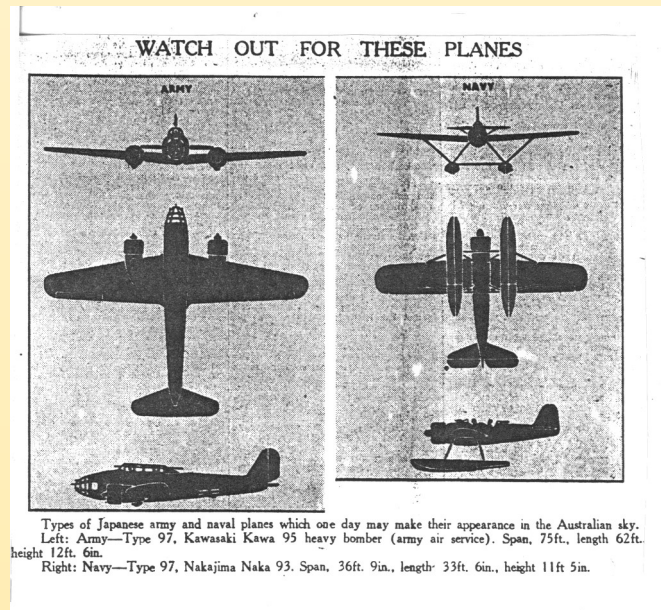
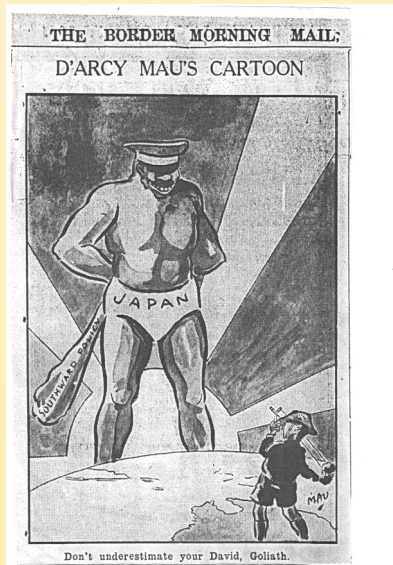
The local community mustered to support its soldier lads and lasses. Sporting events and entertainments were arranged for those on leave. The Wodonga Shire Council built a rest room for army personnel., next to the new fire brigade station (on the current site of Wodonga Post Office). A Wodonga Army Girls Society of 22 girls paid monthly visits to Bonegilla Military Hospital to entertain the troops. Evol Nelder, a lead singer, was hailed as 'Wodonga' s Deanna Durbin', a popular Hollywood star.³ Wodonga women formed a mending group which visited Bandiana weekly to help soldiers repair their kits.

There were tensions over bus arrangements as Wodonga tried to ensure that army people on leave had opportunity to visit Wodonga as well as Albury. Special recreational facilities were established, mainly in Albury, for servicemen and servicewomen employed or training at Bonegilla and Bandiana. The Blazing Stump Hotel was the drinking spot nearest to the encampments.

Like all garrison towns, Wodonga and Albury welcomed '**our military friends**'. The presence of men and women in uniform provided a sense of local involvement in the war effort. The army provided pageantry that lifted morale and added to a sense of occasion. Its presence may have assisted recruitment inspiring district men and women to enlist. Townspeople acquired an easy familiarity with military ranks, acronyms, regulations and ways. Wodonga felt militarized: it was playing a direct role in helping to win the war.

³BMM 10 November 1941, 20 July 1942

Vulnerable community



In December 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and had launched a vigorous multi-pronged campaign to the north of Australia. The new Prime Minister John Curtin, declared this **'our gravest hour'**. Panic set in. Wodonga prepared for air attack. *Border Morning Mail* published grim headlines and silhouettes of Japanese planes to alert readers searching the skies above them. Public air shelters and backyard trenches were dug. There were brown outs and practice air raid drills. Townspeople were encouraged to have their blood type classified in case of injury. They were given training in first aid. A volunteer air observation post was set up at Woodland Grove. Days of prayer were organized. Council took a survey of the shire's resources, counting, for example, the number of cars, bikes, horses and fowls in case a scorched earth program was required to frustrate invaders. *Border Morning Mail* pictures and stories of troops training at Bonegilla were circumspectly relocated in the captions to **'somewhere in Australia'**.



These pictures show men of Wodonga digging trenches for the schools of that town. These trenches are adjacent to the State and Convent schools. The work was organised by the Shire President and Chief Warden (Cr. J. S. Hore).

BMM 23 February, 1942

Both the war in Europe and the new war in the Pacific did not go well for the Allies in early 1942. The enemy was at the gate and Prime Minister Curtin looked to America for support. However, the Americans were forced from the Philippines. Many wounded Americans were sent to Bonegilla Army Hospital. *Border Morning Mail* welcomed the 'attractive' American nurses who cared for them. Townspeople admired the ingenuity of American jeep s accompanying the many convoys of military vehicles driven by 'our American friends' through the town.



BMM 28 May 1942



BMM 28 May 1942

Mid-year, there was good news from the war fronts. The Japanese advance in the Pacific was halted with the naval battles of the Coral Sea and Midway Island. The German advance in Europe was halted at Stalingrad. Prime Minister Curtin assured the nation it was no longer in threat of invasion. For Australia 1942 was the pivotal year for the conflict.

Enduring the long hard road to victory

Both 1943 and 1944 were years of increasing local disquiet. There was amongst townspeople a growing impatience with the austerity imposed by government to husband resources and a nagging discomfort about local military activities. This disquiet was exacerbated district-wide by a grim struggle through a long drought.

Rationing of tea, butter, sugar, clothing, petrol and eventually meat were introduced. Daylight saving began. Interstate rail travel required permission. No new building construction was allowed; home repair building materials were in scarce supply. John Dedman, the Minister with prime responsibility for implementing the War Cabinet's National Economic Plan, was frequently reviled as the restrictions increased. Retailers complained of Dedman asking the community to be sparing in spending on Christmas trifles and toys. He was '**killing Santa Claus**'.⁴ Indeed, Santa did not arrive, as he usually did, on his big toy horse at Mates, Albury's biggest department store, in 1943 or 1944.

In Wodonga and Albury shortages were made worse by the army presence. Confectionery, cigarettes and bottled beer were difficult to buy. The army was given precedence for railway tickets, firewood, ice, milk, ice cream and blankets. Wodonga went cold because of the lack of firewood. Milk bars could not always sell milk shakes; they served ice cream made with skim milk. Newsprint restrictions closed newspapers in smaller towns nearby and reduced the *Border Morning Mail* to 4 pages. The community objected to 'Dedmanism in bigger doses'⁵.

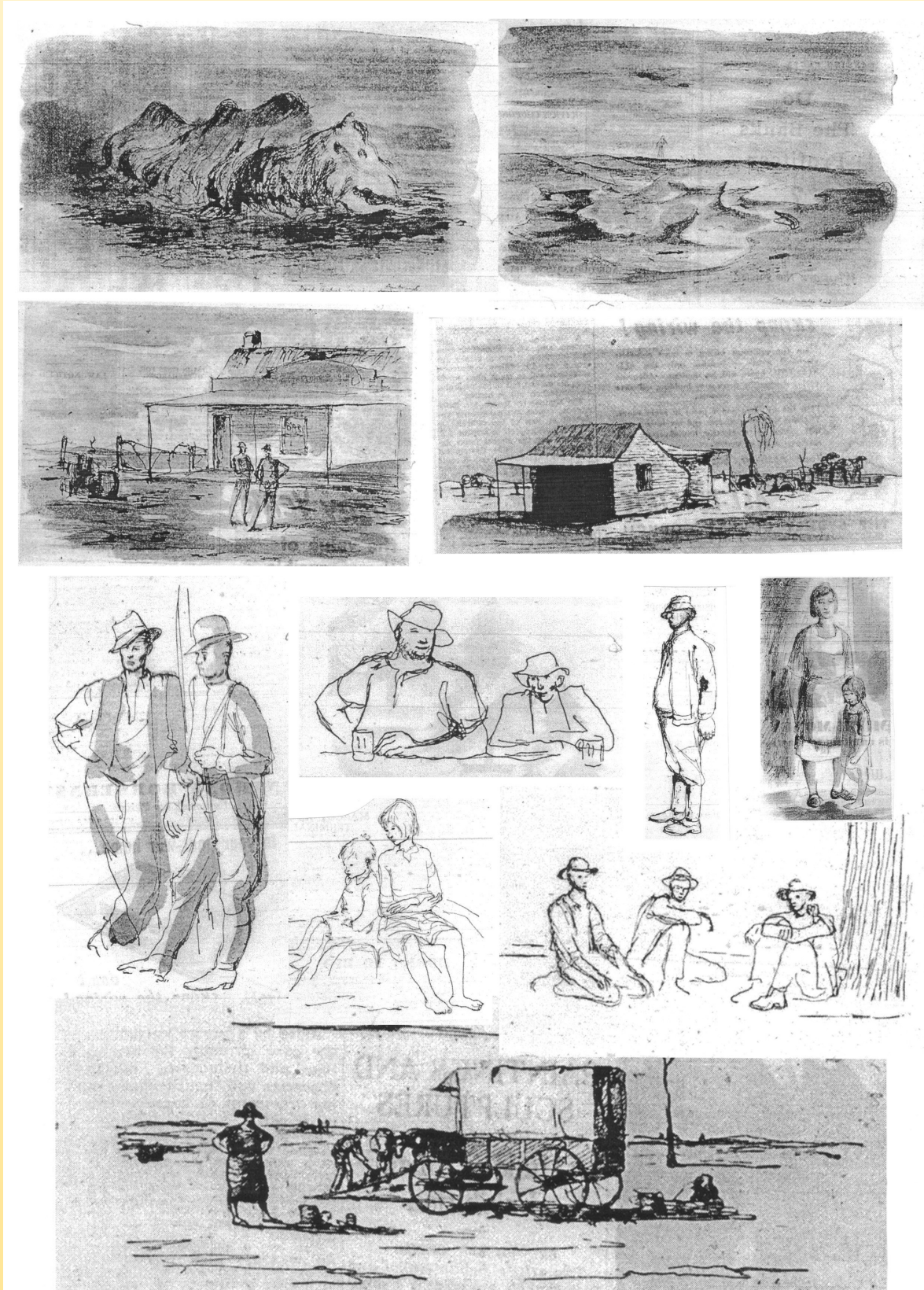
These home front **austerity** inconveniences paled into insignificance when considered alongside the sacrifices being made by people in conflict zones, on battlefronts and in prisoner or detention camps. Nevertheless, there were local reminders of the nearness and brutality of war. Members of the community were well aware that the young men in uniform, on parades and clustered informally in pubs or on the street, were destined for the perils of the front. They heard the sound of small arms fire at target practice. They saw the occasional display of naked steel in military processions. Some witnessed the wounded and disabled, returned from the front, being transshipped on the railway platform between ambulance trains.

Farmers were pleased to supply food to the armed forces, but complained about labour shortages and the weather.⁶ They said there was too little help with the allocation of Italian Prisoner-of-War labourers, and even in the late-war release of some men from military service to help at harvest time. The near-monopoly use of the railway for defence purposes made it difficult to get supplies of super-phosphate. The hot, dry conditions of the pre-war summer of 1938-39 came again in 1942-43 and even more so in 1944-45, **the worst drought in sixty years**.

⁴BMM 6 November 1942.

⁵BMM 22 December 1942.

⁶BMM 8 and 16 March, 6 April 1943.



Russell Drysdale sketched people enduring the 1944 drought along the Murray River for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The newspapers kept local readers aware of significant changes in the battle zones. In 1944 they could reported D-day, and in 1945 victorious battles in the Pacific islands and the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There were spontaneous local celebrations of VE Day and VP day, but the big celebrations came on an officially declared Victory Day in 1946⁷.

⁷BMM 11 June 1946

Planning Post-war reconstruction

Planning for a changed post-war Australia

The Commonwealth and the state governments made preparations for the post-war years. They wanted to increase the size of the population so that Australia would not be so vulnerable to attack. They wanted to expand the national economy to include secondary as well as primary industry and saw the need to increase the workforce. They wanted to provide care for all the returned servicemen and servicewomen. They looked broadly to improve the economy, so as to guarantee full employment and to improve the social welfare system. They wanted to improve living conditions by regulating shorter working hours and providing not only more, but also better houses with superior amenities. They wanted to 'enrich community life'.

The Commonwealth established a Ministry for Post war Reconstruction with JB Chifley as the Minister and HC Coombs as the Director-General. It created three investigative commissions to address its major concerns - rural reconstruction, the expansion of secondary industry and housing. It tried to stimulate public participation in the planning process. Radio station 2CO broadcast a series of over a dozen programs on 'After the war what next?' Churches organised discussion groups. With the prospect of winning the war, Australia also wanted to win the peace. It looked for community involvement to do that.

Debates were held, focusing sharply on the roles of government and of private enterprise. There were heated political discussions ahead of a referendum in October 1944 on the Commonwealth retaining controls it had assumed in war-time over jobs and housing, primary production and social welfare for at least five years after the war. Another referendum was held in 1946, limited to the Commonwealth retaining controls on prices and rents. Both referendums were defeated. On both occasions, *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* carried large advertisements for the NO vote: 'More power to Canberra means less freedom for you'. John McEwen,⁸ the Member for Indi, was a major contributor to these debates opposing government controls as a form of socialism, suspect for its Cold War associations with communism. *Border Mail* was sceptical about government being able to implement many of the planned schemes. Talk about full employment, state supplied housing, wide ranging welfare schemes and community facilities seemed utopian.⁹

A new political party, the Liberal Party of Australia, was formed at a conference held in Albury in 1944. Robert Menzies, the leader, won approval for a list of objectives which provided an alternative vision of post-war Australia. Both the Liberal and the Labor Party agreed on many things, but differed on the role of government in meeting needs. The Liberal Party emphasised the importance of private enterprise and self-help. It decried the socialism espoused by the Labor Party. It supported the injunction to 'have-a-go' as well as 'fair go'.¹⁰ Local branches of the party were formed in Wodonga and Albury prior to a federal election in 1946. Labor retained power in 1946. A Liberal Party/Country Party won power in 1949. Wodonga was represented at both the state and federal level by Country Party members working in coalition with the Liberal Party. Political debates about the best way to shape Australia continued long after the war.

⁸W&TS 7 July 1944.

⁹BMM 3 February 1944.

¹⁰BMM 5 December 1944.

Planning a Murray Valley Region

Within six months of war being declared, there were discussions of what the post-war years might look like. The *Border Morning Mail* was excited by a suggestion of ambitious water conservation projects, which would improve not only rural productivity, but also living conditions in rural Australia. It invited readers to imagine the changed conditions of life in the Murray Valley, if expenditure was made available for water to turn turbines. It foresaw 'a countryside gridded by power lines'. The newspaper hoped that war might make possible 'a better world' allowing '**the common man to live in decent houses in decent surrounds**'.¹¹ There would be much argument about how decent houses in decent surrounds might mean and how they might be achieved, but that dream was voiced frequently through the 1940s.



The Commonwealth's Rural Reconstruction Commission paid one of its many investigative visits to the border region at the end of 1943. At meetings in Shepparton, Dookie, Rutherglen and Albury, its chief spokesperson, Professor SM Wadham, explained that war had highlighted the importance of producing food. Accordingly Australia needed increased water storages to make irrigation possible.¹² The prospect of expanding the Hume Dam to the size that was originally proposed was popular in Wodonga and in communities along the river. Victoria's recently elected Country Party government endorsed the proposal as it wanted to **foster decentralization with closer settlement of the Murray Valley**.

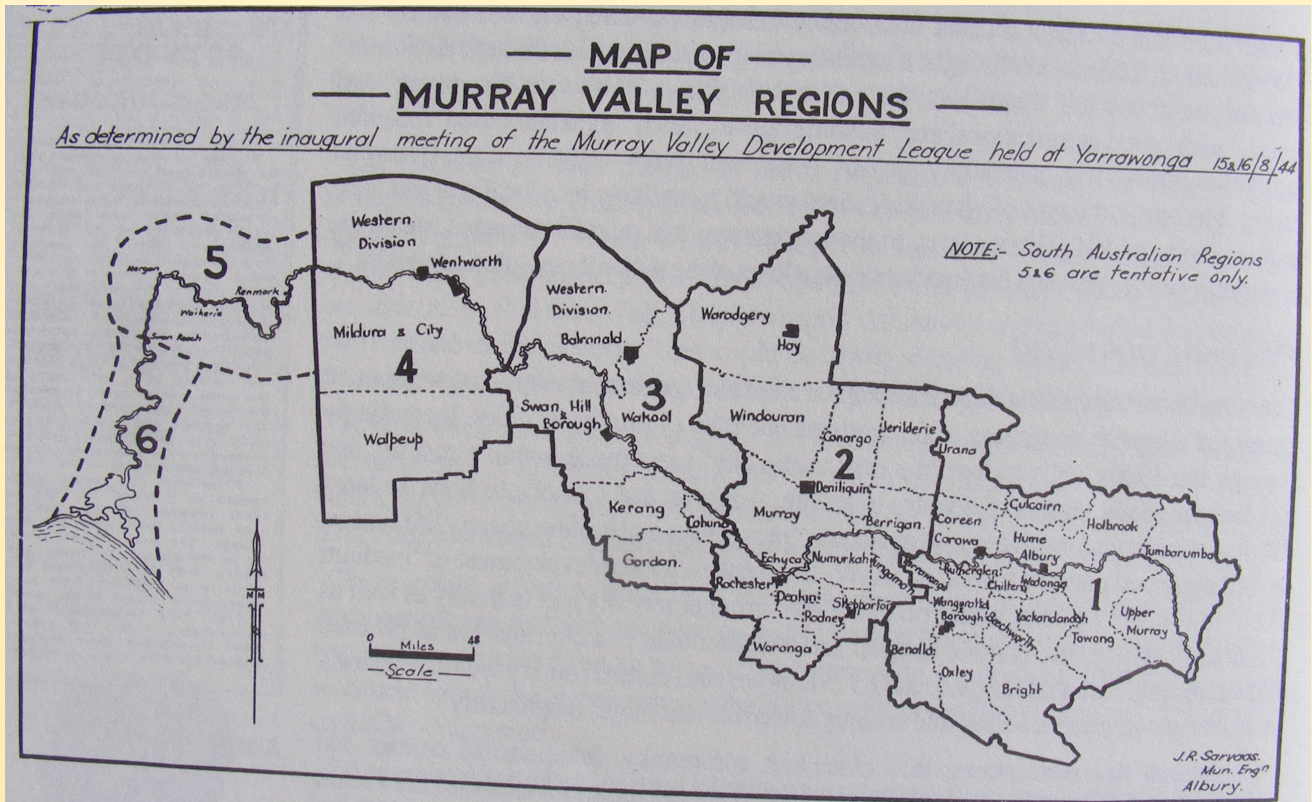
Regionalism was in the air, but states insisted on their autonomy. The states wanted any Commonwealth work on regional planning to be only advisory. They would retain the authority to decide how and if regions in their states would be formed and how those regions would be developed.

Wodonga Shire Council joined Albury Municipal Council in baulking at the suggestion that Wodonga might be in a North East Region centred on Wangaratta and Albury might be in a Riverina Region centred on Wagga Wagga. Both councils looked instead along the river for a Murray Valley Region.¹³ A two-day conference for local governments along the Murray River was held at Yarrawonga in 1944. As a result, Victoria and New South Wales agreed to form Upper Murray regions that would have joint meetings in the interest of developing the whole Murray Valley region. The Commonwealth agreed to undertake a detailed survey of resources in a Murray Valley region and to contribute 25 per cent of the cost of expanding Hume Dam.

¹¹ *BMM* 12 February 1940.

¹² *BMM* 10 December 1943.

¹³ Roy Collings, *Memoir*, Laitystreet.com >blog.roycollings, 2007.



The **Murray Valley Development League** formed by the local governments at Yarrawonga was a bottom-up cooperative initiative. The aim was to secure the maximum conservation of water in the Murray and its tributaries, and to plan for the overall development and conservation of the Valley. Its advocates cited the example set by the Tennessee Valley Authority where a river valley comprising seven states had been developed with federal assistance in building nine dams which supplied irrigation for rural development and hydroelectricity for industries.

With the other local governments along both sides of the river, Wodonga, went into peace with what was championed as a major cooperative focused on Australia's food and water resources.

Moving from war to peace

Reconstructing Wodonga

The people of Wodonga faced major challenges when the fighting ended in 1945. As early as 1942, Wodonga's returned servicemen from the First World War had joined with others locally to demand 'fighting men's rights' to jobs and houses.¹⁴ At a thanksgiving service immediately after the conflict had ended, Rev WA Williams, Rector at St Luke's Church of England and Dean of the North-east Deanery asked **'what kind of homeland are we going to give the returned servicemen and servicewomen when we welcome them home?'**¹⁵

Townpeople organised welcome homes and formed support groups to help those who had served. The enlisted were demobbed gradually. For ex-service men and women, moving to 'civvy street' meant facing the challenges of re-establishing family life, finding jobs and houses midst a chronic house shortage. Ex-servicemen worked together across border to promote the interests of those who had returned and the families of those who had not. Many of Albury's returned men thought that the best way to go about that was to affiliate their sub-branch with the Victorian rather than the NSW Returned Soldiers League.¹⁶ That move baulked, but subsequently returned service organisations cooperated across border, even though they were sub-branches affiliated to different state-based organisations.

Many did not return. Their sacrifice was acknowledged at thanksgiving services, at revitalized Anzac Day commemorations and at war memorials. For at least eighteen months, *Border Morning Mail* carried reports of parents receiving formal notice of the deaths of sons who had previously been reported as prisoners of the Japanese or as missing.¹⁷ Both Wodonga and Albury constructed honor rolls. *Wodonga & Towong Sentinel* published a Wodonga Shire honor roll almost weekly from 1945 to 1947.



Border Morning Mail published more inclusive Albury and District honor rolls, which were revised several times to try to capture all those who had enlisted.¹⁸ A 1995 reckoning found 5,414 border district residents had enlisted. Of the 307 who died 38 had been declared missing; 41 of the dead were among 158 prisoners-of-war.¹⁹ Many of those left behind were part of the war toll. Counts of pension entitlements of the dependent bereaved showed there were, nation-wide, 11,662 war orphans and 67,457 children of incapacitated men. The average age of war widows was 26.

Civilian life remained not easy. Rationing of tea, butter and petrol remained in place until 1950. Building materials were not readily available, so houses remained in scarce supply. A spate of industrial disputes disrupted the supply of coal leading to problems with the generation of electricity and frequent post-war blackouts.²⁰

¹⁴*BMM* 14 December 1942.

¹⁵*W&TS* 24 August 1945.

¹⁶*BMM* 15 January 1945.

¹⁷For example, *BMM* 4 June 1945.

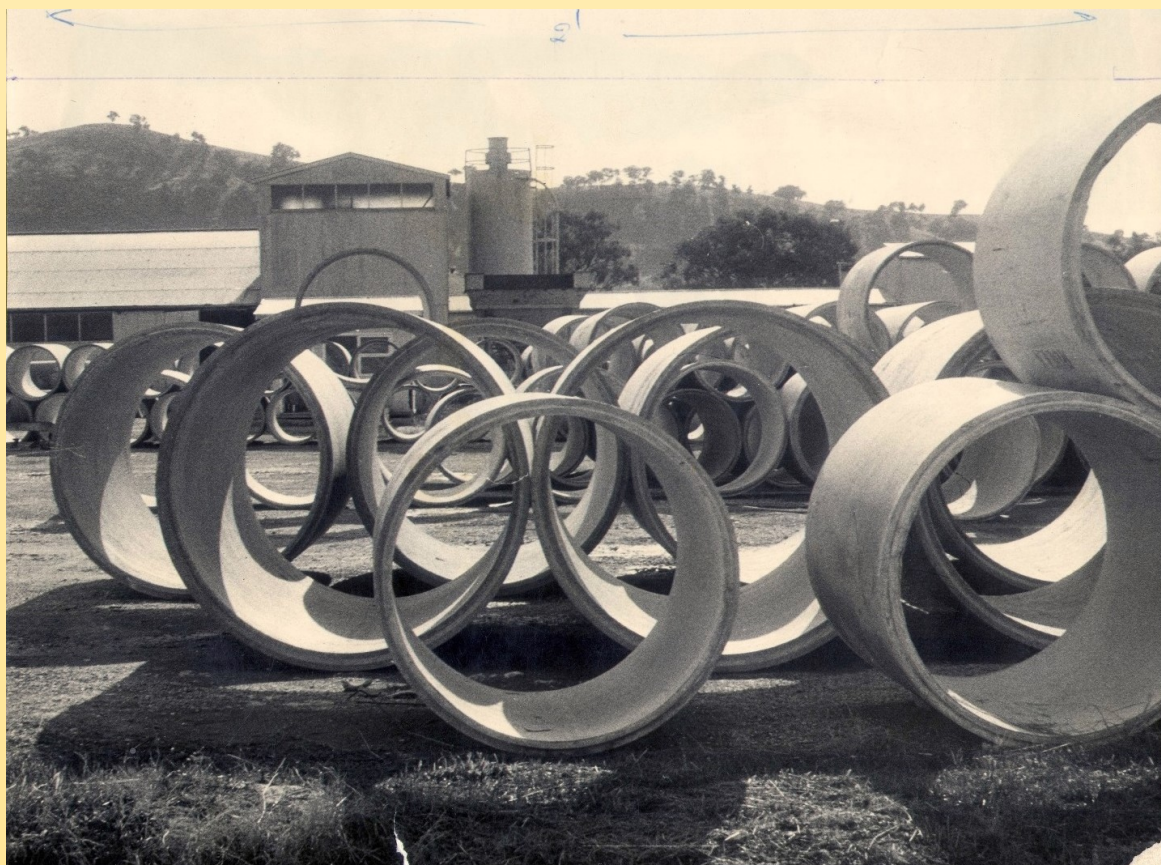
¹⁸The lists expanded, sometimes to ensure they included people who had enlisted elsewhere, sometimes to include people who had loose family connections with the district, *BMM* 9 February 1942, 2 January and 24 April 1943; 11 June 1945.

¹⁹This calculation was based on volunteered information and included those who had served in Albury, Wodonga and the three adjacent shires, Howard Jones, *March of the Veterans*, 2014.

²⁰*Herald* (Melbourne) 11 October 1945.

Townpeople worried about what the withdrawal of the large military presence would do to the local economy. They were pleased to see that Bandiana would continue.²¹ There was a keen interest in the disposal of military assets no longer required. Redundant army huts were made available as school classrooms state-wide. Community organisations such as sporting groups and youth clubs purchased them at nominal cost. There were **big disposal auction sales** at Bandiana involving the sale of vehicles, tyres, batteries, spare parts, clothing, camp furniture, stoves, tents, blankets, watches wireless parts, cutlery, periscopes, telephone wire, gas masks and even tanks. AG Baker, an enterprising motor dealer, bought 300 Bren carriers and 30 tanks which he dismantled for their motors and parts.²²

The local post-war economy was boosted by the retention and reuse of the army facilities and by two major new river-related developments – the expansion of Hume Dam and the extension of the **Kiewa Hydro-electricity scheme**. Work did not begin on expanding the Hume Reservoir until the 1950s, but townspeople worried in the 1940s how the proposed expansion would involve shifting the town of Tallangatta. The expansion of the Kiewa hydro-electric scheme meant doubling the storage capacity of Pretty Valley and Rocky Valley and building two additional power stations over a ten-year period. Wodonga was a recruitment and transit depot. At Bandiana a bulk cement transit depot was established to handle each week 2 000 tonnes of material that would be taken by a fleet of trucks over a vastly improved road connection.



²¹BMM 19 December 1950.

²²BMM 17 and 23 May 1946

At the beginning of 1947 townspeople were worried about how the facilities at Bonegilla Army Camp might be used. Perhaps the camp might best be broken up to meet the demand for building materials. Perhaps part of it might be used to house workers employed in expanding the Hume Dam. Tom Mitchell, the newly elected Member for Benambra, suggested it be used as a university college like that established by the University of Melbourne in Mildura. In October, John McEwen, the Minister for the Interior and Member for Indi, announced that Bonegilla would become an immigration reception and training centre for people displaced by the war in Europe.



Plans were needed to ensure the continuing development of the town's economic mainstays. JR Foster, the local manager of the Wodonga's branch of the Bank of NSW, reported to his head office that pre-war Wodonga was a busy railway terminus with a successful new municipal saleyard. Through the war he stressed the importance of the close proximity of the military camps. Post-war, it seemed to him that the railway and the saleyard were important, but they were supplemented by the productivity of the surrounding countryside: **'the town is centre of one of the foremost dairying and fattening districts of the State'**.²³

Improving Wodonga

Wodonga's immediate problems were those of **rapid growth**. Wodonga doubled its pre-war population creating the need for more houses, better roads and drains. Pre-war plans for a more efficient water supply service and a sewerage system were revisited and implemented. A Wodonga Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1941 and the more broadly based Wodonga and District Progress Association was reformed in 1946. They both plied the Shire Council with suggestions on ways to improve Wodonga. They were most concerned with roads, drainage and street lighting, but they were also concerned about wandering stock, untidy bike parking, and the beautification of Woodland Grove. Wodonga Shire Council had to set priorities to fit its limited funding base. It insisted a sewerage service was top priority.²⁴

Pre-war plans to extend the supply of **electricity** to the surrounds and to connect Wodonga to Albury's **gas** supply were also revisited and implemented. The surrounds prospered with kind post-war seasons and markets. More farmers took to dairying, particularly after electricity was extended into the Kiewa and Leneva Valleys. The number of dairy farms in the Wodonga district increased from 74 to 228 between 1945 and 1950. Rabbit trapping and poultry farming flourished.

²³Wodonga, *Branch managers' half yearly reports*, Bank of NSW, Westpac Archives, 30 September 1936; April 1945; April 1948, April 1949

²⁴For example, reports of Wodonga Shire Council meetings, *W&TS* 9 July, 3 and September, 1948.

Between 1945 and 1949 the number of buildings in the shire almost doubled from 400 to 850. Building materials remained in short supply encouraging Dunstan and sons to open a new timber mill in Eskdale. Nevertheless there was still a shortage of houses. For many this shortage presented one of the major challenges of the post-war years.

The Shire Council decided to permit the construction of **temporary dwellings** such as garages in which people might live while they built the rest of the house. However, the buildings often remained incomplete for years, and families continued to live in the 'temporary' structures. Both Wodonga and Hume Shire Councils remained sympathetic to people's need for shelter and tolerated temporary dwellings much longer than Albury City Council did. This meant people who could only afford temporary dwellings gravitated to Wodonga and Lavington. This continued the pattern observed by the manager of the Bank of NSW, who in 1940 noted that many people worked in Albury, but lived in Wodonga because it was cheaper.²⁵



The State Government built its first lot of 30 **housing commission houses** in William Street. Subsequently its houses were to spread over the town as a whole. By 1971 it was said that it had built a third of Wodonga's housing stock.

It was not only the number of houses that were of concern, but also their quality. The census of 1947 showed big differences in the access to facilities in Wodonga, Albury and Lavington.

Proportion of private dwellings with facilities, 1947

	Wodonga shire	Albury	Hume shire
Electricity	69	93	39
Gas	0	35	0
Running water	74	94	10
Flush toilet	8	71	7
Fuel stove	91	51	95
Total dwellings	937	2576	1075

- Census Report 1947

²⁵Wodonga, *Branch managers' half yearly reports*, Bank of NSW, Westpac Archives, May 1940.

Moving towards a Wodonga Albury regional identity

People have a range of place identities, most frequently acknowledged in terms of scale – national, regional, local. Historians analysing the impact of the Second World War make much of the new post-war interest in national identity. During the war, Australian troops fought as Australian units within an Imperial army. In the immediate post-war years, there was a surge of interest in defining distinctive Australian ways, for example, in sport, art, music, history and language. So, too, there was new interest in asserting place identity at the local level. Towns, like Wodonga, had patriotically competed with other towns, such as Shepparton, in boasting of recruitment numbers and loan funds raised locally. Wodonga and its surrounds were proud of the roles played by the local branches of agencies like the CWA and the Red Cross to support troops at home and abroad.

By 1947 the town population had nearly reached 3 000, which made it as big as Beechworth, though less than half the size of Wangaratta the largest town in the North-east. That was a problem. The Melbourne-based state government preferred to sponsor development in Wangaratta, which had a full moon of influence within Victoria. Wangaratta's woollen mills had been kept busy meeting the demands of war-time. In 1944 Wangaratta was favoured with a new large factory to make aluminium sheets for aircraft manufacture. Those factories continued making rayon and clothing in the post-war years. From a Melbourne perspective, **Wangaratta was the key to the North-east.**²⁶

Albury had a similar problem with Wagga Wagga winning state government recognition as the administrative centre of the Riverina. A series of articles in *Border Morning Mail* entitled 'A Tale of Two Cities' in 1946 described **Wagga Wagga as being 'petted and patted'** by government. Wagga Wagga had won a government aerodrome, a Teachers College, a wheat research institute.²⁷ State government largesse poured into Wagga Wagga, not Albury, as it poured into Wangaratta not Wodonga.

Paradoxically while Wodonga energetically asserted its own being, there were plainly advantages in working together with Albury. Through the war there had been calls for Albury and Wodonga to work more closely together to win for example an inland killing centre. But the NSW centre was established in Wagga Wagga and the Victorian centre in Wangaratta. *Border Morning Mail* declared '**The Border Loses Again**'. Civic dignity was hurt with the exclusion of Wodonga and Albury from the itinerary for a proposed Royal Visit in 1948. It was proposed that the Royals would go instead to Benalla and Wagga Wagga, as Queen Elizabeth did in the visit delayed until 1954.

More threatening were the ways in which Housing Commission homes were allocated. Unlike the Rural Reconstruction Commission, which had visited the border, the Commonwealth Housing Commission had, instead, visited Wagga Wagga and Wangaratta. By 1949 Albury had been allocated 50 homes, but Wagga Wagga 137; Wodonga had 30, but Wangaratta 307. Further south Shepparton got 157, Seymour 60 and Benalla 50. Nearby Yarrawonga only scored 19, Beechworth 15, Myrtleford 12 and Rutherglen 10. Those reckonings of housing need clearly indicated the part each place was expected by the State Government to play in the urban settlement of the area. The multiplier effect was well understood. People would go to the places where they could get houses. One Canberra housing official boasted that a supply of 600 houses to Wangaratta would increase its population by 50 per cent within two years.²⁹

²⁶*Weekly Times* 17 November 1943.

²⁷*BMM* 15, 19 and 20 and 22 June 1946.

²⁸*BMM* 11 October 1945.

²⁹*Canberra Times* 9 December 1947

Furthermore, there was argument about whether the waters of the Snowy should be diverted only into the Murrumbidgee River, or into both the Murrumbidgee and the Murray. This was a matter of dispute between Victoria and New South Wales. Both states joined in what was dubbed the '**Battle for the Snowy**'. The *Argus* told its Victorian readers in 1948 that the Hume Dam continued to harness the Murray River, 'One of Australia's Greatest Assets'. Post-war, the dam, along with the other works, demonstrated to 'land hungry nations that Australia did have the will and ability to undertake projects to use all the water available to it more effectively'.³⁰ The interests of Wodonga and Albury were obviously better served by the proposal that the waters be shared and townspeople agreed with the Victorian premier in pressing that view. This was in direct opposition to the New South Wales proposal put most vigorously by Eddie Graham, the Minister for Agriculture, who was also the local member for Wagga Wagga, which sat, of course, on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. A Commonwealth report in 1947 found merit in the New South Wales proposal, but in 1948 a compromise agreement was reached in which two thirds of the water would go to the Murrumbidgee and one third to the Murray.

The local urban settlement pattern was complicated with the rapid rise of Lavington which was declared an urban development area of 1 200 within Hume Shire. There was a daily interchange of workers between all three. Some argued that Lavington and Wodonga were suburbs of Albury. They were all three mutually dependent and formed **an urban conglomerate with distinct parts**. Together they had a population of 18 000 people and enjoyed some of the higher order urban, usually centred in Albury. Albury was proclaimed a city in 1947.

The principal advocate of a close regional identity of Albury Wodonga was *Border Morning Mail*. It created and sustained **a cross-border print community**.³¹ It constantly promoted Albury's links with Victoria assuming readers' preferences for Victorian news as well as beer and football. Prompted by some observations made by Lionel Griffith on the need for greater cooperation between Wodonga and Albury, the *Border Morning Mail* published a long editorial calling on the two councils to work together to win post-war reconstruction projects. Both Councils worked together but failed to win a killing centre for Wodonga. Both Councils tried to get an additional stock bridge over the Murray to relieve the traffic on Union Bridge and to upgrade the road across the causeway, but they were struggles that continued after the war.

³⁰G Williams and P Knox, 'Report on the Murray' in 12 parts in the *Argus* (Melbourne) October, 1948.

³¹For example, *BMM* 2 August 1944.

3: Social change

War had long-term, lingering impacts on the ways in which people lived within families and within communities. It gave opportunity for previously little heeded attitudes to be voiced and even win some acceptance. So, for example, during and after the Second World War there were challenges to the notions of socially acceptable gender roles and to ideas about race/ethnic differences. The big military and later migrant presence gave the people of Wodonga opportunities to re-consider attitudes to such social divides.

Gender

Australia-wide women were expected during the war to undertake a wide variety of new roles, particularly in paid employment. However, at the end of the war women were generally expected to resume the traditional domestic roles of a married woman as mother/housewife. The metropolitan and local media traced and commented on the way women had entered the workforce in a number of different ways during the war. They also made plain post-war expectations of their primary domestic role. The views expressed in *Border Morning Mail* may or may not have had much influence, however, they seem to have gone uncontested. Not all women shaped their lives around such expectations.

War and its aftermath saw changes in community expectations of how women would involve themselves in the workforce and how they might live within families.

Supporting the war effort. The editor of the *Border Morning Mail* approved of the way women became more '**public spirited**' during the war. His post-war observation was as applicable to the women of Wodonga just as much as the women of Albury.

Those most competent to assess the difference between the pre-war Albury and the post-war Albury agree that during the interval the town logged half a century of history in public spiritedness... People, especially women, scarcely knowing how to cultivate an interest outside their own homes found themselves overtaken by the urge to perform some act of community service. They revelled in stall conducting, dance and sports organisation, rest room waiting to, parcels preparing, house to house collecting, troop train victualling - all of the hundred and one patriotic channels through which the town's voluntary war efforts gushed.³²

Managing alone. The support role women played was important, but some women found they had to do far more. They, along with children, had to take up responsibilities for the family farm, business or house in the absence of family members. At Towong Elyne Mitchell had to meet the challenges of running a big pastoral station with only a few male employees.³³ At Walla Walla two neighbours, Harry McCrum and Eric Gaspero, enlisted, leaving the two McCrum boys, Dick aged 16 and John aged 14, carry on both farms.³⁴ The injunction to 'keep the home fires burning' made popular with a song from the First World War, still applied in the 1940s: someone had to gather, cut and splinter firewood.

³²BMM 30 August 1947.

³³ 5 December 1944.

³⁴BMM 12 March 1942



Entering new avenues of paid employment. In Wodonga, as elsewhere, women also entered paid employment to fill the jobs for which there were no men. So for example, married women were encouraged to keep teaching. *Border Morning Mail* approved women taking up factory work, as they did in other countries, to advance the war effort. It was later to explain such work was likely to continue after the war.³⁶ Young women in Wodonga found factory work at the textile and clothing factories in Wodonga and Albury, though work at the munitions factory in Albury seems to have reserved for skilled operatives who were housed nearby. The 1947 Census found that the number of women and the proportion of women in Wodonga's workforce engaged in manufacturing had doubled since 1933. The pre-war and post-war electoral rolls for the Wodonga polling place show increases in the number of women employed not only in manufacturing but also in office work, as clerks bookkeepers, typists, cashiers and telephonists, and in retail, as salespersons, shop assistants. There were, too, more women employed as nurses and teachers. The wider range of work opportunities made town life more attractive for young women. The 1947 Census showed increase in the 15-25 year old age cohort of women in Wodonga. That was a significant indicator of the attractiveness of town living which would invigorate town growth.

Being directed into work. *Border Morning Mail* reported favourably on the way women were 'manpowered' into useful occupations such as the Women's Land Army in 1943 and 1944. Those who were '**lounge lizards**', it said, should be pushed into taking up positions in canneries, like those in Shepparton or Leeton.³⁷

Joining the defence forces. Some Wodonga young women took up jobs directly related to defence. Initially they responded to advertisements to provide clerical and other duties as civilian employees at Bandiana and Bonegilla. Some joined the Australian Army Nursing Service or the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS). Initially about 500 young women, primarily from country Victoria, joined the AWAS and served at Bandiana and Bonegilla. They were recruited under the slogan of '**releasing a fit man for front-line service**'. By 1944 there were 2 000 AWAS in the district. They took up a wide range of administrative and clerical duties, for example as telephonists, typists and cashiers. At the Signals Corps in Bonegilla, they were wireless, teleprinter and cypher operators or training other women for such duties. At the Ordnance Depot they were storewomen, dealing with food, equipment, guns, ammunition and vehicles. At the Engineering Workshops they served as fitters and mechanics or repaired electrical and optical equipment. At the Vehicle Park they drove and maintained a variety of military vehicles. They were often used to drive vehicles in convoys interstate.³⁸

³⁶As in Britain, the mother country, *BMM* 28 April 1943.

³⁷*BMM* 2 March 1943

³⁸Desmond Martin ed. *Backing up the Boys*, The Army Women's Service Club, Bandiana, 1988.



BMM 10 June 1943

'Fine types of Australian womanhood'.



Town interaction with the servicewomen was generally limited to encounters when the servicewomen were on leave or participating in town sporting competitions. Special efforts were made to cater for their recreation needs. *Border Morning Mail* expressed concern that the women who joined the forces might find adjustment to civilian life difficult. One editorial worried that a servicewoman's experience of independence from family obligations might blight her post-war marriage prospects. No man it argued wanted a 'terrifically tough' or 'hard-boiled bride'. Such views were contested. The AWAS produced a play 'These Same People' that explored attitudes to women in the forces and the ways gender roles were defined.

Returning to post-war domesticity.

The domestic role expected of married women was reinforced with post-war concerns about the decline in the Australian birth rate. Government worried about '**the empty cradle**'. Women were encouraged to have children.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding that encouragement, a sure way to ensure that Australia's population increased was with immigration.



However, the arrival of displaced women from Europe complicated public understandings of the work roles of women. All migrants, female and male, were expected to join the Australian work-force. Broadly, women were expected be domestics and men to be labourers. Married migrant women were expected to work unless they had children requiring their care. This was a departure from the pre-war, even immediate post-war norm. More and more married women moved into or stayed in paid employment.

Race/ethnicity

The war widened horizons for many Australians. Newspaper readers became more familiar with the geography of Europe and the South-west Pacific. They were aware that Australia had a role to play in international affairs. They began to think more deeply about how people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds related to each other.

British Wodonga. Wodonga, like Australia, was proudly British. Britain was at war, therefore Australia was at war. Local and metropolitan newspapers and magazines expected their readers to want stories about the war in Britain, the Royal Family, British film stars and British cars. Wodonga, like the rest of Australia, rallied to the call to send 'Food for Britain' parcels.

Aboriginal peoples. The involvement of Aboriginal people in the defence force got some local notice. Post-war there were expressions of concern about the housing conditions of Aboriginal people. Always, it seemed, these were concerns to be met down river rather than in Wodonga, itself.

⁴⁰BMM 26 June 1944; 28 January 1946; 21 February 1948.

Enemy peoples.

Enemy people were suspect. Locally there were people of German origin, particularly in Baranduda and further to the north at Walla Walla and Henty. Again, as in the First World War, there was some local German-baiting. Alexander Mair, the Member for Albury, called for all aliens to be interned for the duration of the war. In this war, however, anti-German propaganda was not presented vigorously in the media as there was a more immediate enemy. Locally, it seems, people with German origin were less likely to face hurtful jibes and discrimination than their parents faced on the home front in the First World War. This was a war against Japan as well as Germany. Indeed, *Border Morning Mail* declared it a war for White Australia. The newspaper wrote of the 'yellow hordes' and produced racist images.⁴¹ Post-war newspaper stories pictured the German concentration camps and relayed the testimony from the Nuremberg trials. The newspaper also reproduced stories of the horror of Japanese prison camps, which were endured by local men.⁴²

Wodonga townspeople were very aware of the Italian prisoners-of-war accommodated in the POW Control Centre Hume at Bonegilla and at Hume Camp, across river. Because of the lack of shipping to repatriate them the Italians remained stationed in the area until at least the beginning of 1947. For Wodonga and Thurgoona residents, close to those POW Control Centres, the Italians became a familiar sight, wandering the countryside in their distinctive burgundy-dyed uniforms.



An unnamed Italian Prisoner-of-War helps stack jeep trailers at the Bandiana Vehicle Park, 1946, AWM 131361.

To overcome the dearth of rural labour some Italians were assigned to farmers to help work their farms. Some were allocated to jobs at Bandiana, where they stacked and covered stores, painted, cleaned, cleared grass, dug water storage tanks, drains and even a swimming pool. Bandiana, staff were given instructions not to 'fraternise' with them: staff were not to address the Italians except to give an order or to discuss matters related to the operations of the camp. Farmers were warned not to become too friendly with their prisoner labourers

⁴¹For example, BMM 4 June 1943.

⁴²BMM 19 April 1945.

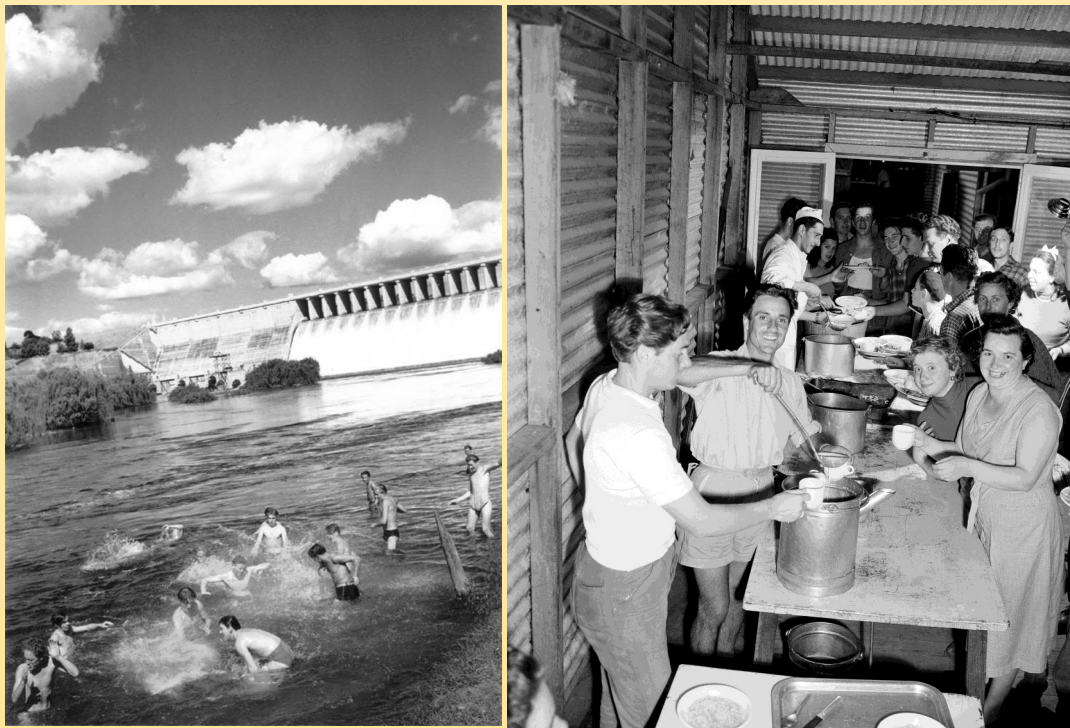
Non-British soldiers. Townspeople remained aloof from the war-time presence of one set of strangers from other countries. A group of what were called 'Friendly Aliens' enlisted in the 4th Employment Company were deployed on railway transshipment duties both sides of the border.



Australian Railways Historical Society

They were non-British citizens, classified as refugee aliens rather than enemy aliens and permitted to join the Australian army, but denied access to weaponry. They were **soldiers without guns**. On the border, they were stationed in Albury and worked there and also at Baranduda, loading and unloading army supplies. The 'Friendly Aliens' participated in sporting competitions, presented concerts and encountered local people in streets and public places. They wore Australian army uniforms and were only distinguishable by the way they spoke languages other than English.

Non-British immigrants. Bonegilla Army Camp was converted into an immigration reception and training centre to receive displaced people from Europe at the end of 1947. That involved preparing the camp, the migrants and the community for their arrival.



Caption: National Australian Archives A12111, 1/1949/24/8 and 1/1947/3/9.

OLD SERVICE CAMPS USED TO ACCOMMODATE NEW ARRIVALS

One of the greatest problems in large-scale European migration to Australia was providing accommodation for the newcomers on arrival and when they were later dispersed to work throughout the Commonwealth. The accommodation had to be provided without detriment to the chances of Australian people for houses.

Preparing the camp. Minimal changes were made to prepare the camp for the arrival of the newcomers. Photographs and picture poster of Australia were put on display. There was a copious supply of Union Jack and Australian flags. Funding for normal army rations was increased by 2.5 pence to reach 31 pence per person per day. The Army provided not only military styled accommodation with military furnishings and food, but also transport, security and catering services. It was thought that displaced persons, who had lived in refugee camps in Europe, would be accustomed to the military character of the lodgings at Bonegilla.

Preparing the displaced persons. Immigration publicists circulated pamphlets and showed a film featuring Bonegilla in European refugee camps as they tried to entice people to come to a country with 'jobs, houses, sunshine and happiness'. In the pictures they circulated the newcomers were invariably smiling. At Bonegilla they were often swimming in Lake Hume. They were portrayed as being welcomed by the local community.

Preparing the community. The Department of Information thought it necessary to prepare the local community for the arrival of a large number of people from overseas. It wanted the mass migration scheme to work well. It anticipated that the community would be worried about the increased demand for houses and jobs. It worried that the community might not accept large numbers of non-British people who strangely did not speak English. The Department's publicists gave reassurances that the 'Balts' who arrived at Bonegilla in 1947 were '**handsome**' and '**pretty**' with '**good complexions**' and '**fulsome figures**'. **Such 'good humoured' folk with 'attractive smiles' and 'splendidly formed white teeth'** were to be made feel welcome. Moreover, the Department explained that the task of victualling them would be mostly a local one and yield in the vicinity of £36 000 per year. In the longer term this migrant presence might mean that the community had the opportunity to develop firsthand better understanding of ethnic diversity. *Border Morning Mail* thought the community was in for '**a cosmopolitan adventure**', even if the newcomers were going to spend only a few weeks at Bonegilla before they were to be dispatched to jobs all over Australia.⁴³

By 1949 the initial sparkle had gone out of the mass migration scheme. More ships had become available to bring more of the displaced to Australia. **Bonegilla was rapidly expanded**, but even so had to house some of the newcomers in tents rather than huts. The Department of Immigration required the whole of the camp. The Army agreed to vacate it and to discontinue military activities, but retained ownership in case the camp was needed again for military purposes.

The rapid increase in the number of new arrivals proved stressful. The camp had to be emptied as quickly as possible to make way for an increasing stream of new arrivals. Job interviews were curt and people were allocated jobs and dispatched as quickly as possible. Non-working women and children were sent from Bonegilla to specially 'holding centres' if there no accommodation could be found for them at the head of family's workplace. This **separation of families** brought great distress.

Border Morning Mail broke with its customary praise on how the scheme was working at Bonegilla to air complaints about separation. Further it began rare uncomplimentary investigations of conditions at the camp. It unearthed a major health scandal which caught national attention when it reported that a large number of newly arrived infants had died.

⁴³*BMM* 9 December 1947 and more generally in Bruce Pennay, *Albury Wodonga's Bonegilla*, ALM 2001.

Beyond the 1940s Wodonga was to experience **a widening mix of people from different European cultural backgrounds**. Long-term residents encountered the newcomers fleetingly in streets, on buses, in hospitals and parks. They were not likely to meet them as neighbours for some time. The migrants were impoverished refugees. Those who decided to settle in Wodonga created crude housing near Bonegilla at Killara, near the showgrounds, or on the river flats. Some moved across river to erect temporary dwellings in Lavington. At school, Wodonga school children had a wider and deeper contact with the newcomers than their parents did.

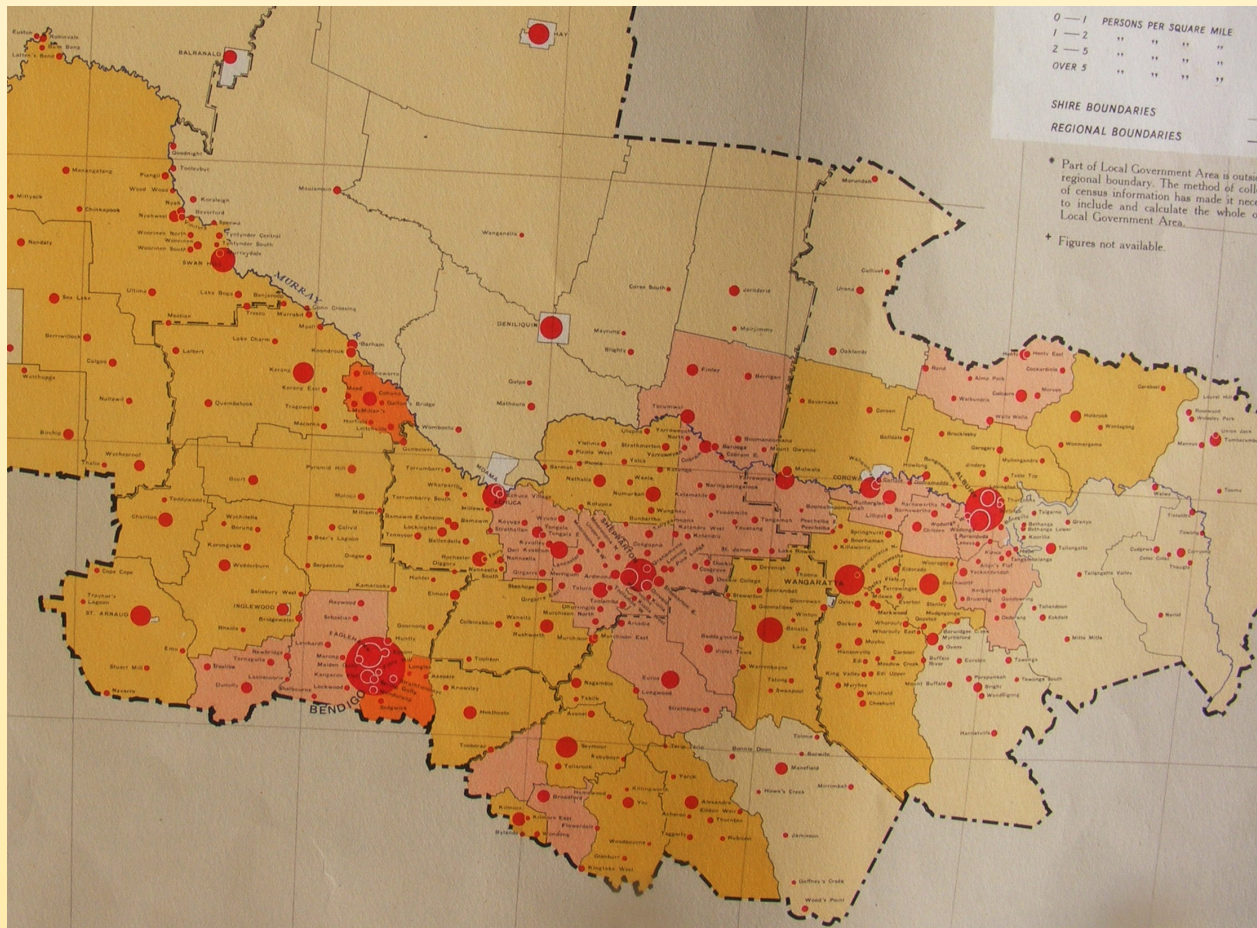
Immigration department publicists worried about retaining popular support for the mass migration scheme and released a story through *Border Morning Mail* and other newspapers on how the newcomers were enriching the communities where they were placed. To help meet the difficulties the newcomers were encountering and to advance integration, Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, decided that the term 'Balt' or 'DP' had become offensive. He asked the media to refer to them as **'New Australians'**. Community attitudes to the presence of people of non-British backgrounds were formed usually on the basis of personal encounters. Media portrayals show official concern that the attitudes were not always positive.

Conclusion

The population of the town of Wodonga had doubled by the end of the war. As at the end of the First World War, there were claims that Wodonga was **'no longer a Struggle Town'**.⁴⁴ It had become 'a prosperous and progressive country town', with improving roads, drains and water supply, a sewerage system and the prospects of its own hospital. The town serviced a productive farming district enjoying favourable seasons and prices.⁴⁵ War had stimulated the local economy by establishing a military presence that continued long after the war had ended.

⁴⁴W&TS 5 September 1919; 11 April 1947.

⁴⁵Wodonga, *Branch managers' half yearly reports*, Bank of NSW, Westpac Archives, April 1949.



Maps detailing the relative size of the towns in the local government areas in the Murray Valley and the distribution of primary production resources were prepared by the Commonwealth. Albury and Wodonga were shown apart and together, smaller than Bendigo to the south. Sheep and wool production prevailed on both sides of the river. Wheat and grain production prevailed principally north of the river. Dairy and Beef cattle were in the Upper Murray both sides of the river and close to Wodonga. Source: Department of National Development, *The Resources and Development of the Murray Valley*, Canberra, c.1948.



War insinuated itself into everyday life and thinking. A sense of common purpose had fostered a spirit of togetherness. Wodonga was proud of its war efforts. However, there was a growing community readiness to accept the advantages of working with Albury, its big cross-border neighbour as a **'sister town'**.⁴⁶ More intimately, women had seized on the unprecedented opportunities to take on new roles within families and within the community. War and its aftermath had increased the presence of strangers from other lands. By the end of the 1940s Wodonga was appeared to be becoming more inclusive. War had caused havoc. For many combatants it had brought death, injury and long-lasting misery. For many non-combatants on the home front it brought anxiety, bereavement or some other form of loss. The impact of war, however, had been multi-faceted. The journey from war to peace during the 1940s indicated something of ways war both cramped and enriched life in Wodonga and its surrounds. As a principal speaker at the local Victory Day ceremonies in 1946 declared, the Second World War had been **'a people's war' and must make way for 'a people's peace'**.

⁴⁶DG Padman, Mayor of Albury, quoted *BMM* 1 March 1941.