



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

PLACES AND STORIES

Part 3. Story Investigations



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.

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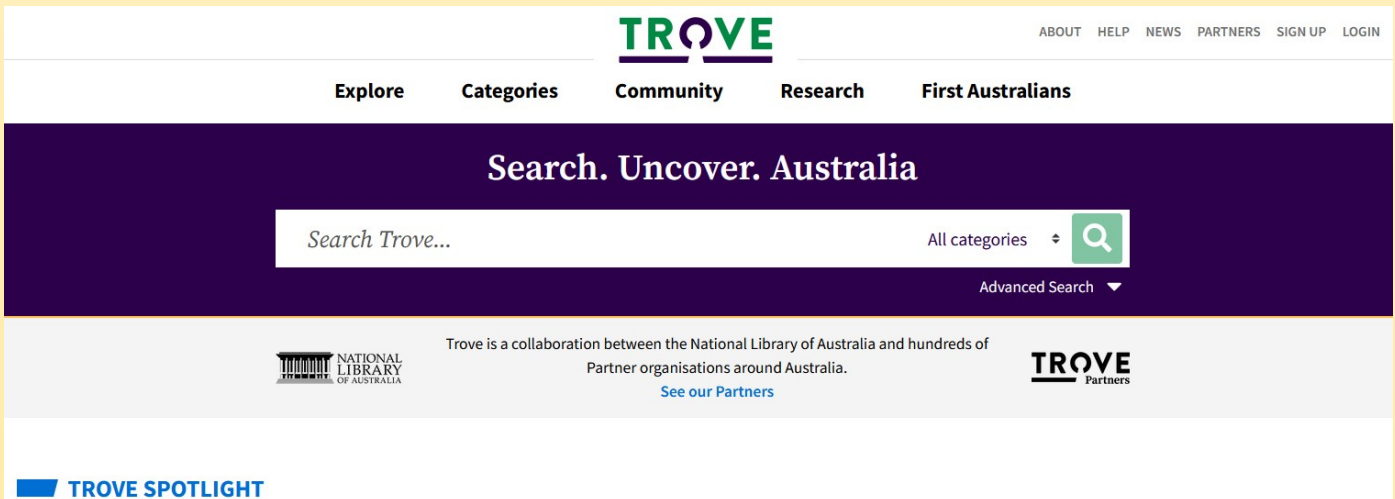
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Part 3: STORY INVESTIGATIONS

Eight cluster investigations contain 64 stories drawn from contemporary newspaper and magazine articles accessible on Trove, www.trove.nla.gov.au. The stories include local newspaper reports, editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor, metropolitan press observations, popular magazine human interest stories and a speech from the Victorian parliament. Together these stories capture something of the thinking and feeling of the times. They trigger further investigations. Furthermore they raise important questions about how assessments of the impact of war are made.



The easiest way to access them is by moving into the 'Advanced Search' under the Search icon on the home page, then go, as directed, to either 'Newspapers and Gazettes' or 'Magazines and Newsletters'. Type the headline words into 'all of these words' or 'key word', select the newspaper or magazine title and, if required, the date. The titles and places most frequently cited from the Newspapers and Gazettes are: *Wodonga and Towong Sentinel* (Vic 1885-1954); *Border Morning Mail* (Albury NSW 1938-1946); *The Argus* (Melbourne Vic 1848-1957) and *The Australian Women's Weekly* (1933-1982). Pix is available within 'Magazines and Newsletters'. Help is provided at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/help/searching/advanced-search/newspapers-and-gazettes-advanced-search>

FIGHTING THE WAR ON THE HOME FRONT

1. Depicting the beginnings of the war

Even before the war started the town was put on a war footing.

- 'National Service' W&TS 2 January 1939.

At the beginning of 1939 Wodonga began to prepare for any emergency. Men, women and children marched behind a band to a meeting which was addressed by an air warden.

- Big Cranes at Wodonga, BMM 30 August 1941.

Work started early on improving the transfer of people and goods at the break-of-gauge.



- D'arcy Mau's Cartoon, 'A bland little man with a nasty long shadow', BMM 6 June 1940. Cartoonists expressed concern about the threat Japan posed, even before it entered the war. The *Border Morning Mail* thought Japan was a 'potential assailant' and predicted the possibility of 'a war for White Australia', BMM 2 May 1938, 7 May 1941. Critics of the racist nature of propaganda were to complain that Australia was doing more than engaging in a war of hate. It distrusted rather than hated the Japanese, BMM 10 April 1942.

2. Garrison Town

- 'New Camp Site named Bonegilla' W&TS 12 September 1940.
- 'The Bonegilla Camp' W&TS 2 August 1940.

Wodonga Shire Council was pleased to be selected for a large hutted military camp. It was also pleased that the site had not been named 'Albury Military Camp' as Albury proposed.

Supplementary stories: Picture stories of the camp's beginnings appeared in the *Border Morning Mail*. BMM 10 July 1940; BMM 2 August 1940, 'Bare Hills make way for the foundation of a tin city', BMM 31 July 1940; '2/23rd battalion marches into new camp', BMM 26 September 1940; 'How the 2/24th arrived and settled in new home yesterday' BMM 1 October 1940.

Planning post-war reconstruction

3. Preparing for peace

Attempts were made at the local and the national level to anticipate what those who were serving would need on demobilisation. Jobs, houses, health care and personal support were high on the list.

- 'Soldier's Conference' BMM 11 February 1942.
- 'Just let your prisoner talk', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 9 October 1945.

The border district welcomed a visit by the Rural Reconstruction Commission for vital discussions.

- 'Rural Reconstruction Commission', BMM 10 December 1943.

4 Planning a Murray Valley Region

- 'Advance the Murray Valley', *BMM* 15 August 1944

A local government conference at Yarrawonga was hailed as visionary and received wide notice, particularly but not only, in the Victorian press. It established the Murray Valley Development League.

Supplementary stories: 'Men of faith and vision', *The Argus* (Victoria) 18 August 1944; 'A memorable conference', *The Age*, (Victoria) 18 August 1944; 'Murray may have a TVA' *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 August 1944.

Moving from war to peace

5 Reconstructing Wodonga

Celebrating Victory. Wodonga and Albury joined in the official nation-wide celebrations of victory in 1946. Mighty Matilda and General Grant tanks clanked down High Street with a parade of military vehicles and personnel. Girls from the Supreme Hosiery factory decorated and appeared on floral floats representing 'Peace', 'Britannia' and 'Legacy'. In both Wodonga and Albury special attention was 'proud parades' of youth.

- 'Wodonga's Grand Show', *BMM* 11 June 1946.
- 'Attractive Wodonga girls in victory pageant', *BMM* 11 June 1946.
- 'Dull day ushers in Victory celebrations' *BMM* 11 June 1946.



BMM 11 June 1946—Across the border in Wodonga school children marched in an impressive procession, which included decorated floats, and a cross-section of army mechanised equipment from tanks to amphibious trucks. View of the children passing down High Street

BMM 11 June 1946

ATTRACTIVE GIRLS IN VICTORY PAGEANT

These attractive Wodonga girls, who took part in Victory Day celebrations at Wodonga yesterday, did not seem to mind the cold in the pleasure of the occasion. Note the emphasis on hats.



Post-war ambitions. Ambitions for a more prosperous town and its surrounds were high in the post-war years

- 'The Member of Benambra moves the Address in Reply', *W&TS* 24 December 1947.

Tom Mitchell, the newly elected Member for Benambra, gave a wide ranging analysis of what needed to be done in the post-war years. As a Country Party representative he, not unexpectedly, touched on the importance of railways, agriculture, land settlement and water storage. Mitchell hoped to improve not only country living but its image. He wanted to expand educational opportunities, particularly at Bonegilla.

Supplementary stories. The local economy was strengthened by the on-going military commitment to Baranduda, but the community worried about what might happen to the empty Bonegilla camp.

- 'Valley of What it Takes', *Herald* (Melbourne) 11 August 1945.
- 'Will Bonegilla Camp be used again', *BMM* 5 February 1947.

The two state governments agreed to support the border district.

- 'Governments promise help in establishing border industries', *BMM* 17 March 1946.

Road, rail and river ambitions.

Industrial strife drew attention to the importance of the road and rail interchange between the two states. A Privy Council ruling against a High Court decision upheld the argument that state regulations relating to interstate road traffic were in breach of the Constitution, but through the 1940s the regulations prevailed.

- 'The railway hold up changes Albury to a road town', *Daily Telegraph* (NSW) 28 October 1946.



Sir Harold Clapp, the Director-General for Land Transport produced a plan for standardising the rail gauge throughout Australia. Clapp argued that railways were primarily for developmental purposes, but they also served as a fighting weapon, which had to be improved in case of any future conflict. The plan was not accepted at the Premiers Conference which preferred to give priority to improving water storage.

- 'Clapp's rail gauge plan', *Pix* (Magazines and Newsletters) 23 November 1946

Ambitions for expanding Hume Dam and its reservoir ran high especially in Victoria where it was hoped that the Murray Valley might have a million people. These ambitions were tested by plan to divert waters from the Snowy to the Murrumbidgee rather than the Murray. A compromise agreement diverted one third of the waters to the Murray.

- 'Could the Murray divide or unite us?' *Argus* 8 December 1948.

Pix Magazine, 23 November 1946

Supplementary stories. "Murray Valley aims in million people", *Argus* 21 May 1945; 'Report on the Murray 1: One of Australia's Greatest Assets', *Argus* 4 October 1948.

Wodonga Albury - cross border solidarity.

War-time suggestions that Wodonga and Albury shared a common interest in securing developmental projects fostered development of a cross-border regional identity as Wodonga Albury. Melbourne newspapers were sure that Albury was a Victorian city. The Melbourne-based state government favoured Wangaratta as the key to the North-East. The Sydney-based government favoured Wagga Wagga as the administrative centre for the Riverina.

- 'A call to the brains of Albury and Wodonga', *BMM* 20 September 1943

Supplementary stories: 'Inland killing centre Wagga or Wodonga' *BMM* 9 September 1944; 'The border loses again', *BMM* 31 October 1945; 'Albury over the border but it's looking our way', *Argus* 23 January 1953; 'Scope for development in the North-east', *Weekly Times* 17 November 1943.

Improving town and rural housing.

Wodonga Shire Council received many suggestions on ways to improve life in the shire. It held hard to the priority it had given to extending the sewerage service in the town. More and better houses with access to basic amenities were needed in the town and the rural surrounds. The Shire Council welcomed the first state-provided housing commission homes. The connection with Albury's gas supply was expected to improve town housing, but rural housing in the surrounds remained a problem best addressed by providing electricity and water. Mrs Cozens, the president of the Albury branch of the CWA welcomed post-war planning to improve housing for people farming in the border district.

- "An interesting display: what gas can do" *W&TS* 14 November 1947.
- 'Woman on the farm', *BMM* 24 May 1946.

Supplementary story: 'Wodonga Housing Project: 20 buildings' *W&TS* 12 July 1946.

6. Planning an Immigration Reception and Training Centre at Bonegilla

Government publicity officers prepared the local community and the nation for the arrival of large numbers of immigrants and carefully stage managed the arrival of the first contingent at Bonegilla. Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, used the opening of the Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre to explain the necessity of having a large-scale immigration program. He argued that Australia had to populate or perish. *Border Morning Mail* was initially wary of the camp being used to process migrants but encouraged the local community to welcome the new arrivals.

- 'Romance in the air at Bonegilla migrant's camp', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 3 January 1948.

Vol. 15, No. 30 36 Pages January 3, 1948 108 Chesham Street, SYDNEY LETTERS: Box 408WW, G.P.O. The Australian Women's Weekly 9 4d.

Romance in air at Bonegilla migrants' camp

Baltic men and women are fine types, already love Australia

By MARY COLES, staff reporter

Romance is in the air at the Commonwealth Immigration Reception and Training Centre at Bonegilla, near Albury, New South Wales, where the first of 12,000 displaced persons to settle here are learning the Australian way of life.

When some of the girls were asked whether they would care to Anglicise or shorten their almost universally unpronounceable surnames, they shook their heads and grinned. "No! It wouldn't be worth while. We will probably change them soon."

AFTER falling under the spell of the lovely looks and fine, courageous personalities of these girls, all I can say is that Australian men will be very unenterprising if they don't seek those changes.

Dr. Ralph Crossley, who is in charge of the Centre, tells the story that one girl to whom he had remarked, encouragingly, "You'll soon settle into the Australian way of life," knowingly agreed, "Yes! Yes! Of course, I will find them."

But Australian men will find strong competition in the girls' own countrymen, who vastly outnumber the girls at the Centre.

Already there has been one marriage among Baltic men and women, who are in the first group of displaced persons to come here. A week after their arrival in Australia 23-year-old Lithuanian Erica Eiken married 24-year-old Estonian Werner Baumann.

The men are also most enthusiastic about Australian women and feel great pleasure that the girls in the district are invited to social functions at the Centre.

But their countrywomen will probably beat them to the matrimonial mark.

Heaven to be here

JUST being in Australia is heaven itself to these migrants, and they feel they can best show their gratitude by taking the jobs Australia wants them to fill, but most of all they long to settle down, marry, and

SCENT of gum-leaves is a dream turned into reality for Eli Poldre, former Latvian typist working with UNRRA in Germany, who sought permission to come to Australia from Minister for Immigration (Mr. Calwell) when he visited Displaced Persons' Camp near Bremen a few months ago.

The friendly attitude of Australians to each other and the migrants is more startling to them than the fruit and white bread which these

END OF THE RAINBOW for lovely 23-year-old Lithuanian typist Erica Eiken and 24-year-old Estonian Werner Baumann was reached when they were married at the Bonegilla Centre a week after their arrival.

FORMER BALLERINA Antonia Baranowski, of Latvia, hopes to dance again for a living some day in Australia, but meanwhile she will be a waitress at Canberra.

being asked, by a member of her class, how much it would cost to buy a sewing machine, after she had told the girls that the average Australian girl makes a lot of her clothes with the aid of paper patterns.

Metres into yards

ENTHRALLED, they fingered little bundles of material patterns, which Miss Heney used to illustrate her talk and accustomed themselves

TYPISTS AND WAITRESSES-ELECT for Canberra had just attended a lecture on the geographical features and layout of the Federal capital.

Australian Women's Weekly 3 January 1948

MINISTER'S VISIT TO ALBURY AND BONEGILLA

Mr. Calwell Expects Another Jap. Upsurge

"WE MUST HAVE 20 MILLION MORE PEOPLE"

Speaking at an informal reception given in his honor by the Mayor (Ald. Bunton) at the Albury Town Hall yesterday, the Minister for Immigration and Information (Mr. A. Calwell) said if Australia did not get 20,000,000 immigrants within the next two generations she could not expect to hold the country against the Japanese.

Mr. Calwell, who during the afternoon inspected portion of Bonegilla camp where 800 Balts are being "Australianised," said he was more than satisfied with the way they were settling down.

BMM 24 November 1947

Supplementary stories: 'Mr. Calwell expects another Jap. upsurge', *BMM* 20 November 1947; 'Balts like their new country', *BMM* 9 December 1947; 'Bonegilla Camp for displaced persons from Europe' *BMM* 11 October 47; 'New Tenants at Bonegilla', *BMM* 14 October 1947; 'The New Australians', *BMM* 19 January 1948.

SOCIAL CHANGE

7. Gender roles

Views expressed in popular magazines and in the local paper on the roles expected of women may have insidious influence. They seem to have gone uncontested. Not all women shaped their lives around such expectations.

Popular magazines featured stories about how women faced the challenges of the war and post-war years.

- 'Husband a war, prisoner woman runs big fat stock station', *Pix* (Magazines and Newsletters) 5 December 1944.

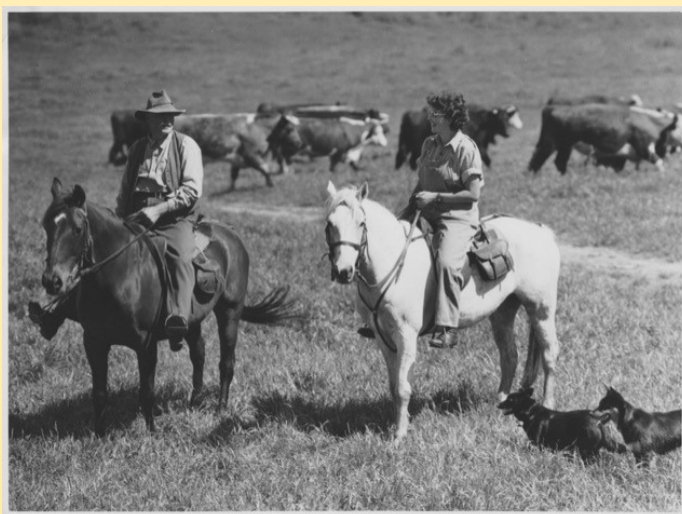


Photo Honor Auchinlek



Local girl Betty Colclough trained as an army nurse at Bonegilla. Nance Holloway served at Bonegilla helping to provide medical services to members of AWAS stationed in the district. Both photographs from their family albums.

Supplementary story: 'Civvy Street Army Girl Imagines', Australian Women's Weekly 2 September 1944.

Several times the editor of *Border Morning Mail* thought it appropriate to explain what he thought women should or should not do. He asserted and re-asserted what he believed were traditional core family values

- 'The "hard-boiled" woman in the post-war world' *BMM* 6/11/43.
- 'The Happiness of the Humble', *BMM* 19 July 1945.

8. Living in a mix of people with different racial or ethnic backgrounds

Aboriginal peoples. Little heed was taken of Aboriginal people in the local newspapers. The stories that did emerge were usually placed further down river at Lake Moodemere/Wahgunyah or Mooroopna/Shepparton. A meeting in Wodonga of the CWA branches in the North-east protested against dropping atomic bombs on Aboriginal territory and voiced the view that Australia had not treated Aboriginal people very well. Wodonga CWA representatives attending the 1947 state conference of their organisation heard a plea by Shadrach James for attention to be given to the problems faced by Aboriginal people.

- 'CWA', *BMM* 19 August 1947.
- 'Problems of the Aborigines', *Shepparton Advertiser* (Vic 1914-1953) 2 September 1947.

Supplementary stories: A *Border Morning Mail* editorial called for 'Better deal for Aborigines' 29 October 1946. The newspaper had noted the arrival of Aboriginal recruits at the showground camp: 'Make music wherever they go wash up time', *BMM* 17 July 1940; 'Lavington patriotic concert', *BMM* 24 August 1940.

Enemy peoples. The newspaper showed sympathy for the plight of the Italians stranded in Australia long after their war had ended. The editor of the *Border Morning Mail* printed two letters from Italians still at a place they called 'Bonagilla'. The Italians rejected complaints that they were causing a nuisance and threatening local women. They wanted to return to Italy as soon as possible. Some even attempted to escape.

- 'Italian prisoners at Bonegilla', *BMM* 19 August 1946.

Supplementary story: The newspaper respected the funeral of one of Italians as the death of another nation's soldier, 'Funeral of Italian POW at Albury' *BMM* 8 April 1945.

Non-British Displaced Persons. Through 1949 the local community became increasingly concerned about the treatment of the displaced persons at Bonegilla. By way of contrast government publicists tried to counter the negative stories with one on the economic and cultural impact the newcomers were having on the local community. The difference in story telling showed a jumble of official and community attitudes and indicates the huge impact the new arrivals had on the local society.

- 'Survey reveals migrant's housing is only reasonable comfortable' *BMM* 23 January 1949.

Supplementary stories: 'D.P.'s at Bonegilla are complaining about the cold' *BMM* 8 July 1949; 'Treatment of migrants' *BMM* 12 July 1949; 'Sensational disclosures in hospital board's report', *BMM* 6 September 1949; 'Migrants bring valuable business to Albury' *BMM* 18 October 1949. The language used in the national press in observations of developments at Bonegilla and more generally reveals general community attitudes: 'Tense drama of fight for migrant babies lives, *Australian Women's Weekly* 17 September 1949; 'D.P.s to have only "unattractive" jobs', *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW 1842-1954) 18 June 1949; 'On naming the New Australians', *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW 1842-1954) 11 August 1949.



Howard Jones



Border Morning Mail pictured responses to a local community Santa Claus in 1949.

Conclusion

- 'Wodonga Folk', *Weekly Times* 3/4/46 p.7

Weekly Times chose images for its readers illustrative of the kind of place Wodonga was in 1946. Two groups, the CWA and the Red Cross, were energetic service organisations through and beyond the war. Two groups, the Welcome Home Committee and the Food for Britain Committee undertook war-related support work in its aftermath. One image showed school children while another showed the Public School Mothers Club which worked to support their education. The commercial well-being of the town was represented with the main street, the post office personnel and the Chamber of Commerce. The CWA Younger Set and the employees at the Supreme Surgical Hosiery Factory indicated how Wodonga was sufficiently attractive to retain its youth. Here was a small country town with a friendly, helpful community and good prospects of future growth.