

WWDHS NEWSLETTER No. 428 Dec. 2017 – Jan. 2017 ISSN 2207-1016

Next General Meeting:
Monday 19 February 2017,
at Museum of the Riverina,
Botanic Gardens site (note
there are no general meetings
in December and January).

Speaker: Peter Morris on the
Ladysmith Tourist Railway (ex
–Tumba Rail) and its plans for
the future—see page 6.

Events

Monday 15 January 2018,
Special **Committee** Meeting @ Wagga Wagga and District
Family History Rooms, 6:15pm to discuss the strategic plan
for 2018

Friday 2-Sunday 4 March 2018:
‘Whole Histories: Keeping the Stories Alive’: St
Clements Retreat and Conference Centre, Galong.

WE WISH ALL MEMBERS A MERRY
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

WWDHS Patron: Michael McCormack, Federal Member for Riverina

WAGGA WAGGA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.
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Committee meetings: 3rd Monday of the month
6:15pm at MOR, Willans Hill site.

General meetings: 3rd Monday of the month
7:30pm at MOR, Willans Hill site.

Annual Subscriptions: Single: \$20, Couple: \$30.
Corporate: \$50. Due 1st July each year.

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**Underground Tour of the Museum of
the Riverina, 8 December 2017
organised by Geoff Haddon**



*Above: Michelle Maddison who
conducted the tour*



Left/below: morning tea on the deck



Above: Sharon, Rhonda, Peter, Judy, Leanne and Tony waiting for the underground tour to begin

THE HONOURABLE WAL FIFE

2 October 1929 – 16 November 2017

Wallace Clyde Fife was the son of Clyde and Myrtle Fife. He was educated at South Wagga Primary School and Wagga Wagga Public School and then had one year at Wagga Wagga High School before he attended the Canberra Grammar School. He was interested in politics from an early age and while other children played cops and robbers or imitated firemen or train drivers, young Wal played elections with How to Vote cards and pretend polling booths. At the age of 17, he wrote a letter to Robert Menzies, then the leader of the Opposition, and asked for a job in the Liberal Party. He was rewarded with a clerical position.

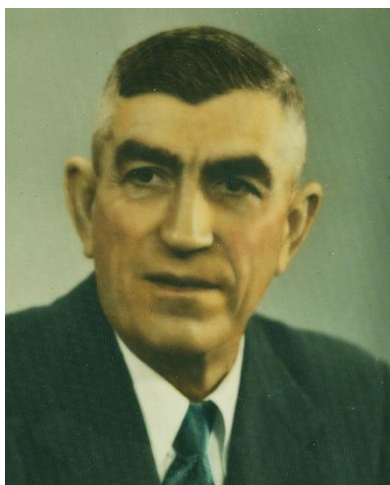
Wal, his father, Clyde, and his brother, Harold, were all interested in serving the community. Clyde was an alderman of the Wagga Wagga City Council for twenty-two years (1949-1971). Harold replaced his father on the council in March 1971 and served until September 1991. Wal entered Parliament on 14 December 1957 and retired on 8 February 1993 (a total of thirty-six years).

He served in the State Parliament until October 1975 and had several ministerial appointments:

- Assistant Minister for Education
- Minister for Mines
- Minister for Mines and Conservation
- Minister for Mines and Power and Assistant Treasurer
- Minister for Transport and Highways

He then served in the Federal Parliament until 1993 with many ministerial appointments:

- Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs
- Minister for Education
- Minister for Aviation
- Minister Assisting the Prime Minister in Federal Affairs
- Minister Assisting the Prime Minister in Public Service matters
- Deputy Leader in the House



Above: Clyde Fife (left) and his son, Wal Fife (right)

Wal was particularly proud of his role in the attainment of Government financial assistance for non-Government Schools (State Aid) and his role in the establishment of a university for Wagga Wagga.

Only a few hours before his death, he was told he had been made a life member of the Liberal Party in recognition of his service.

Wal Fife married Marcia Hargreaves Stanley on 31 May 1952 and had four children. He made many friends on both sides of politics including former Labor Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. He also formed a firm friendship with a young Roman Catholic priest, Father Frank Carroll whom he met in Rome, in 1964. The friendship lasted fifty-three years and Frank Carroll (later Archbishop) officiated at his funeral on 23 November 2017 in St John's Anglican Church.

He was an avid collector of history and memorabilia. Part of his collection is housed in the small parlour at Mount Erin (the Wal Fife Room). It includes hundreds of documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, family history, keepsakes and books. The Advisory Committee appointed to maintain the collection includes members of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society, Judy Buik, Geoff Burch, Leanne Diessel, Peter Gissing and Sherry Morris as well as Rob Walker and Wayne Doubleday (Chairman).

Wal Fife was also a Patron of our society.

He was highly regarded in the community and a true statesman who will be sadly missed.



Above left: Wal with his wife, Marcia. Above right: Wal with Father Frank Carroll in Rome.

JOE SCHIPP (21 March 1932 – 23 November 2017)

Joseph John Schipp was born in Mudgee and was educated at Mudgee, Temora and Wagga Wagga and qualified as a primary school teacher in 1954. He later became a businessman and finally a farmer at Gumly Gumly. He married Rhonda Daisy Lange on 13 November 1954 and had two sons.

When Wal Fife moved from State to Federal Politics in 1975, Joe Schipp replaced him as the Member for Wagga Wagga. He was the Minister for Housing 1988-1992 and Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing 1992-1993. He retired in March 1999.

Joe Schipp died on 23 November 2017 while getting ready to attend Wal Fife's funeral where he was expected to give the eulogy.



Above: Joe Schipp, Member for Wagga Wagga, unveiling the plaque at the Official Opening of the Centenary Wing extensions at the Historical Society's Museum (now the Museum of the Riverina, Botanic Gardens site) at the Society's annual fete on 21 April 1990.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING 19 February 2018

Peter Morris, President of our society, will be talking about the aims of the Ladysmith Tourist Railway (formerly Tumba Rail) which is a sub-committee of the Regional Heritage Transport Association (June Roundhouse). He plans to give us 'a bit of a history of Ladysmith Railway with a pictorial presentation of experiences over the last twelve months'. He will also explain how the Railway Sleeper Insertor and the Weed Knocker work (see following page) and outline plans for the future including the carriage of passengers on fettlers' trikes and perhaps the establishment of a fettlers camp..

CENTENARY OF LADYSMITH RAILWAY, 14 May 2017

On 24 May 2017, Member for Wagga Wagga, Daryl Maguire unveiled the new Ladysmith Station sign and a Commemorative Plaque. The event was hosted by Ladysmith Tourist Railway (formerly Tumba Rail) which is a sub-committee of the Regional Heritage Transport Association (Junee Roundhouse). Daryl Maguire praised the Ladysmith group for their tireless work while Dick Goodman, Chairman of the Group, outlined plans for future development including the operation of Fettler Trikes which will be available for the public to ride on the rail tracks within the site.

Right: Member for Wagga Wagga, Daryl Maguire, about to unveil the new Ladysmith sign (covered) with Dick Goodman, the Chairman of the Ladysmith Tourist Railway.



Above left: Daryl Maguire and Dick Goodman riding in one of the trikes

Above right: The new Sleeper Inserter arriving at Ladysmith Railway Station

Left: The Weed Knocker

SYLVIA MACDONALD (Part 1)

By Sherry Morris

Sylvia Esther Macdonald was passionate about singing. A talented soprano, she was very popular in Wagga Wagga particularly in the 1940s. After service in the Australian Women's Army Service during the Second World War, she moved to Sydney to study singing and then in the 1950s moved to England and later the United States to follow her passion.

Sylvia was the oldest of five children and only daughter of Thomas Ince Macdonald and Annie Madeline Cross who had married in Mentone, Victoria, in August 1912. Tom and Annie had moved to Wagga Wagga in 1912 and bought a seven-acre (almost a three-hectare) property with a homestead on the edge of town (later Ashmont Avenue) when it was subdivided. Sylvia was born on 5 July 1913. Her four brothers were Ronald Leslie (born in 1916), Keith William (1918), John Neil (1920) and Barry Thomas (1936).

Sylvia was educated at Mt Erin school and then attended the Wagga Wagga Commercial College to learn shorthand, typing and bookkeeping. She loved swimming, horse-riding, bicycle riding and tennis and enjoyed parties, dances and balls, but her great passion was singing.



Above: Sylvia involved in some of her favourite activities

Sylvia remained associated with Mount Erin and the Commercial College. She returned to Mount Erin where she was taught singing, one hour's lesson per week, by Sister Philippa with whom she remained firm friends. She averaged about half an hour practice per day and passed Grade III Singing (Australian Music Examinations Board) in 1936. She also performed at some of their entertainments, for example, for visiting prelates in 1940 when she sang Schubert's *Serenade* with contralto, I Callaghan, three violins, cello and piano. She became a member of the Wagga Commercial College Ex-students Association.¹



Left: Sylvia competing in a horse race

Although passionate about her singing, the financial position of her family did not permit her to devote her whole time to study. She obtained work as an office worker and later a stenographer with a variety of local companies. She was with Wagga Motor Garage briefly and then stock and station agents, AML&F Company (RJ Blake), John Graham and Company and Dalgetys.

Sylvia was a member of the Wagga Wagga Methodist Choir and frequently the soloist. In April 1938, Maunder's cantata *Olivet to Calvary* was rendered by the choir under the direction of Arthur Broadhurst with Mrs AJ Boswell playing the organ. It included a quartette involving Sylvia with Miss Ada Lloyd and Messrs Ray Jenkins and H Roberts who 'sang beautifully'. In the following year *The Messiah* was again presented in the Methodist Church and Sylvia gave 'a finely declaimed performance of the recitation and a very smooth and impressive singing of *Come unto him.*' In 1940, Elgar's arrangement of *The Messiah* was beautifully sung by an augmented choir with six soloists including Sylvia who sang *There Were Shepherds, And Lo The Angel of the Lord, The Angel Said Unto Them and Come Unto Him.*²

Sylvia sang at tea meetings and concerts for the Methodist Church, St John's Anglican Church and St Andrew's Presbyterian Church and for Salvation Army Harvest Festival Thanksgivings.³ She also sang at many wedding ceremonies, usually during the signing of the register at Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic and Anglican churches singing such songs as *Until the Dawn, Because, Prayer Perfect, Ave Maria and I'll Walk Beside you.*⁴ She was also associated with the Wagga Wagga Gilbert and Sullivan Operatic Society which put on a brilliant performance of the *Gondoliers* and *Pirates of Penzance* and a complete performance of the musical farce *Trial by Jury* in November 1937. Sylvia played the role of Fiametta in *Gondoliers* and one of the bridesmaids in *Trial by Jury.*⁵ She also sang at Wagga Wagga Musical Society socials.⁶

Sylvia entered Eisteddfods in Wagga Wagga, Albury, Tumut and Canberra and won many prizes including the Ladies Vocal Champion at Tumut in 1939 and in Wagga Wagga in 1942. At the Eisteddfod Concert, she was enthusiastically received by the audience and had to respond to a recall after her fine singing of *The Feast of the Lanterns* and sang *The Green Hills of Ireland* as an encore.⁷ She had to withdraw from the Eisteddfod in Wagga Wagga in 1940

because she was suffering inflammation of the larynx and was unable to sing for some time. She underwent an operation to her throat and was completely recovered by December 1940.⁸

Her voice was often heard at various patriotic, religious and charitable functions in Wagga Wagga and district – balls, concerts, dances, afternoon teas and a mannequin parade - raising funds, for example, for the Mayor's Patriotic Fund at St John's Hall, for Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) equipment at St Andrew's Hall and for the Wagga Wagga branch of the Russian Medical Aid and Comforts Committee at the All Services Palais in Kincaid Street. Whenever she walked on the stage she was warmly applauded.⁹ At the Massed Bands Festival at the Cricket Ground she delighted the spectators by singing *It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow* and *My Hero*.¹⁰ Sylvia and Miss H Dunn were joint secretaries for a special Wagga Wagga war effort when the agents held a special stock day (stock sale, stalls, dancing and cards) on 29 August 1940.¹¹

During the war she was indefatigable. She volunteered her services for rallies including the Win the War Rally in June 1940 (an appeal for men and money for the war effort) at the Wonderland Theatre and Cocoanut Grove; and many loan rallies. At the huge rally of women for Lady Wakehurst's address on the Women's Australian National Services (WANS) at the Capitol Theatre, she sang *There'll Always Be An England* and *Annie Laurie* and presented Lady Wakehurst with a basket of beautiful flowers.¹² She particularly enjoyed entertaining the troops at such venues as the AIF camp at the Wagga Showground and the Plaza Theatre. She usually sang such popular favorites as *Danny Boy*, *Tipperary*, *There's a Long Long Trail*, *Pack Up your troubles, Australia will be there*, *Keep the Home Fires Burning* and *There'll Always Be an England*.¹³ To a huge crowd, she sang at the Church of England Rest Hut Dedication, singing *My Hero*, the *Chocolate Soldier* and *It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow*.

In August 1941, Sylvia partook in a Queen Competition to raise funds for the Mayor's Patriotic and War Fund. She represented the police, agents and licensed victuallers and was known as the Queen of Commerce. She and her committee sold badges and arranged numerous events usually involving dancing, singing, novelties, cards and suppers or afternoon teas.



Her special nights were 'A Night in Bohemia' held at the Union Club Hotel, 'A Night at the Wagga Races' a delightful cabaret dance at the Cocoanut Grove and Wonderland Theatre and 'A Night in Toyland' in the Wagga Hotel. Numerous card parties were held at hotels, halls or private homes. Many sporting events were organised including a tennis tournament, a golf tournament, a novelty football match and a mystery cycle hike. One of the most spectacular events was a challenge football match and sports day at the Wagga Cricket Ground. This began with a procession with Sylvia travelling in a giant battleship *HMS Commerce* (mounted on a large transport) complete with guns fore and aft, funnels, bridge and lifebuoys. Sylvia was the captain complete in white uniform with gold braiding with her crew on the deck including Mrs McNickle, J Norman, M Commings, H Dunn and E Cunningham.

Mount Erin held a Victory Matinee for Sylvia and the Kyeamba Shire Queen, Miss Daisy Stapleton, both former students while there was a stock and produce drive, sheep sale and market day in the streets for three of the queens including Sylvia. Her final event was called

‘The Final Flutter’, a dance at the Half Holiday tennis clubhouse. Its novelties included ‘A Court of Injustice’ presided over by a bespectacled L Mathews who was ‘resplendent in wig and gown’. He imposed fines on many well-known citizens for alleged offences.¹⁴



Above: Coronation of Sylvia Macdonald (Queen of Commerce) as the Patriotic Queen, winner of the Mayor's Patriotic and War Committee Competition, August 1941

When Sylvia was announced as the winner by the Mayor HE Gissing, there was ‘thunderous and spontaneous applause’. She was crowned by the Lord Mayor of Sydney Alderman SS Crick at the Plaza Theatre. According to the *Daily Advertiser* Sylvia was a very charming candidate who had deservedly won the honours:

There was no denying the fact that this young lady, who has given so generously of her talents in the musical world for charities and patriotic purposes had achieved a popularity that was well deserved.... There was not one in that vast audience who did not raise a cheer for Miss Macdonald and her group.¹⁵

To be continued

¹ Ron Macdonald, interview, WWDHS website; *Daily Advertiser*, 16 September 1935, 2 April 1940; *Catholic Press*, 31 December 1936; Pat and Barry Macdonald, address to the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society, 16 October 2006.

² *Daily Advertiser* (DA), 11 April 1938, 23 December 1938, 16 December 1939, 17 February 1940, 11 May 1940, 10 December 1940, 26 July 1941, 11 December 1942.

³ DA, 9 December 1939, 13, 19 April 1940, 2, 17 May 1941, 6 March 1942, 2 March 1943.

⁴ DA, 6 July 1938, 2, 15 November 1939, 29 February 1940, 10 September 1940, 17 May 1941, 19 February 1942, 21 May 1942, 22 June 1942, 12 October 1942, 11, 24 December 1942.

⁵ DA, 1, 4 December 1937.

⁶ DA, 21 December 1939, 10 May 1940, 27 July 1940.

⁷ DA, 6 August 1937, 25 September 1939, 24 October 1939, 23, 26 September 1942.

⁸ DA, 25 September 1940, 10 December 1940.

⁹ DA, 16, 18, 19 April 1940, 16 May 1940, 5, 23, 26 July 1940, 7, 21 August 1940, 18 December 1940, 31 March 1942, 11 November 1942, 20 January 1943, 18 March 1943.

¹⁰ DA, 29 March 1943.

¹¹ DA, 9 July 1940, 23 November 1944.

¹² DA, 21 June 1940, 6 July 1940, 3 November 1941, 22 September 1942, 2 December 1942.

¹³ DA, 17 Dec 1940, 24 March 1941, 22 April 1941, 28 September 1942, 1 October 1942, 11 March 1943, 4 May 1943.

¹⁴ DA, 10, 18, 30 July 1941, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 23, 26, 27, 28 August 1941.

¹⁵ DA, 29 August 1941.