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■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

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# A pioneer family

## The Gormlys – part of Wagga’s history

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



The Hon James Gormly was a passionate protectionist and Irish Catholic. Described as “small, wiry and energetic”, Gormly led an active political life. After serving as an alderman (1883 to 85) and twice mayor of Wagga (1884-85), Gormly entered state politics as the

Murrumbidgee Member of the Legislative Assembly from October 1885 until June 1894. He was subsequently re-elected in the seat of Wagga from July 1894 until he resigned in June 1904.

He then served in the Legislative Council from August 1904 until his death in May 1922. By this time Gormly was a life member of just about every institution in Wagga.

Although uneducated and not an accomplished public speaker, he was esteemed for his “honesty of purpose, truth of character and energetic purpose”.

A member of the Public Works Committee (1894-95) and a strong advocate of land reform and the protectionist cause, Gormly’s career included representation in the Wagga Wagga Free Selectors’ Association, Mechanics’ School of Arts, Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association, Murrumbidgee Turf Club, Wagga Wagga and District Horse-breeders’ Association and the Library Association of Australia.

He also played an instrumental role in securing the Hampden Bridge, the Court House, the Experiment Farm, the conservation of Lake Albert from Swampy Plain and the Wagga to Tumbarumba Railway Line.

Gormly was born on July 24, 1836 in Elphin, County Roscommon, Ireland, and arrived with his family in Sydney as a bounty immigrant on board the *Crusader* in February 1840.

Four years later the family moved to Nangus, along the Murrumbidgee River, and settled later at Gundagai in 1849.

In the devastating 1852 flood which ravaged Gundagai, most of the Gormly family perished, except for James and his brother, Thomas, who survived by clinging to the limbs of a tree for over 24 hours until the floodwaters subsided. This tragic event left an indelible mark on the brothers.

The following year, however, James and Thomas enjoyed some success, selling stock at the Victorian markets and finding gold on the Victorian goldfields.

James settled at Wagga in 1854, and married Mary Jane Cox at Holbrook in December 1858, and successfully operated a government mail run until 1872.

Gormly’s pastoral interests continued when he bought land at The Rock in 1873, leased Coronga Peak in the Bourke district in 1875, then sold and took up Wilga Downs, on the West Bogan.

After selling Wilga Downs for a nice profit, he returned to Wagga in 1882, and bought urban real estate.

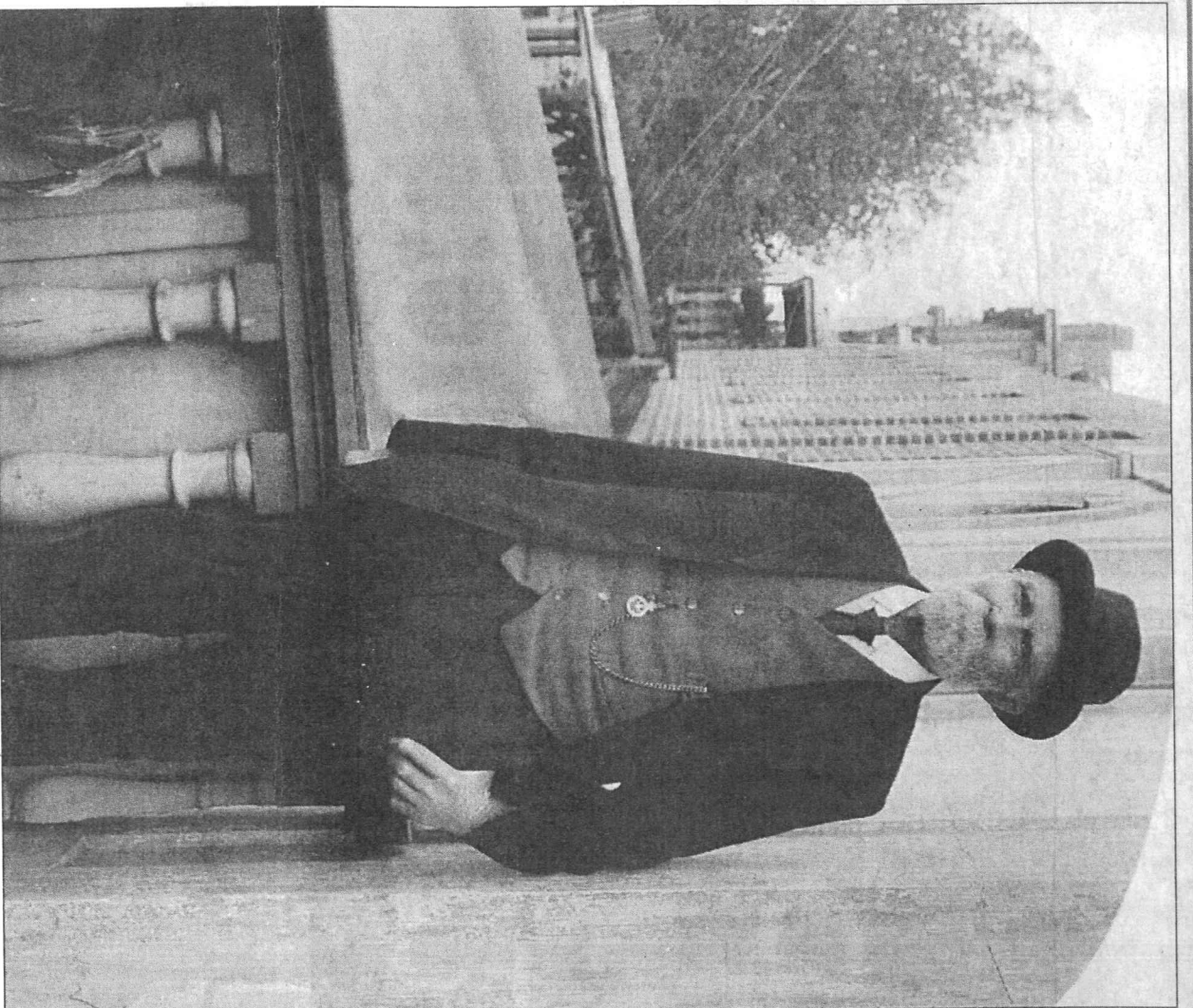
Apart from politics and farming, Gormly enjoyed writing small pieces for the local press about the history of the Wagga district.

(Many of these articles have been collected in a scrapbook and are available at the CSU Regional Archives [RW1753/2]).

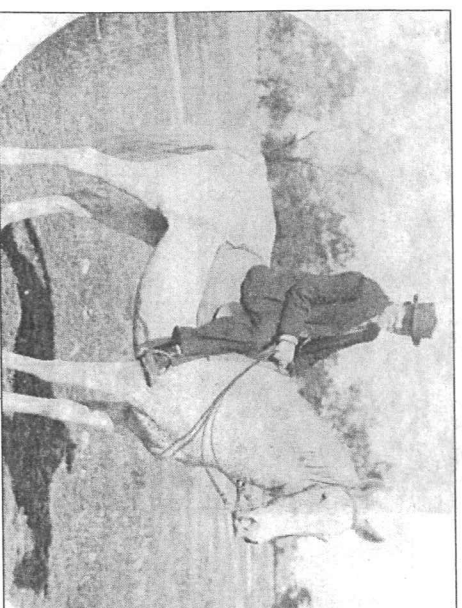
He was the author of *Exploration and Settlement on the Murray and Murrumbidgee* (1909), *The Discovery of Yass Plains* (1921), *The Flea-bitten Grey* (1921) and *Exploration and Settlement in Australia* (1921).

Gormly’s other great love was horses. He was one of the marathon jockeys who participated in the infamous Ten Mile Race held at Wagga on November 20, 1868.

Gormly died in Wagga on May 19, 1922 at the age of 86. His son, Richard Joseph Ernest Gormly, was



Above: The Hon James Gormly standing on the balcony of his Wagga home, Victoria House, Hunters Hill, Fitzmaurice Street, purchased in 1882 for £8000 from William Love.



Left: James Gormly on horseback.

born in the family home at Marshall’s Point, Wagga, on June 12, 1868.

The third son in a family of six boys and three girls, Richard was educated at St Ignatius’ College, Riverview, but spent most of his early life in Wagga.

An avid sportsman and chess player, Richard also took an interest in the public affairs of the town.

He served two terms as alderman on the Wagga City Council (1900-01, 1922-25).

After his first term, Richard relocated to Cootamundra and then to Wallendbeen, but returned to Wagga after World War I.

An officer of the Department of Lands, Richard worked for approximately 30 years, before retiring at Pymble in 1925.

Like his father, Richard enjoyed researching the local and district history of Wagga.

He published many articles in Riverina newspapers, and was planning to publish his own history of Wagga.

Richard’s extensive card index is currently

held in the Mitchell Wing of the State Library of New South Wales, where, after his retirement, he spent an average of 50 hours a week on his research.

Richard died in Sydney on August 23, 1961 at the age of 93.

The Wagga street, Gormly Avenue, was named by Richard in memory of his family’s contribution to the local area.

(Compiled by James Logan)

■ **References:** Gordon Buxton, *James Gormly (1836-1922)*, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 4, 1851-1890, D-J, pp. 273-274, Radi, Heather, *Spearritt and Hinton, Elizabeth, Biographical Register of the New South Wales Parliament 1901-1970*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1979; Sherry Morris, *Wagga Wagga A History, Wagga Wagga City Council, 1999: The Daily Advertiser*, October 1, 1877 & August 26, 1961; Gormly Family Papers, RW98, CSU Regional Archives; Sherry Morris, *Biographical Index of Wagga Wagga*.