

CSU Regional Archives Scholarship 2017

The Histories of the Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support Group,
Dixieland
and The Riverina Conservatorium of Music

By

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This project focused on three very different subjects and time periods. It began with accessioning a small collection of materials from the Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support Group, most active in the early 1990's. Then, it shifted to analysing a scrapbook of clippings and ephemera from the ethereal, early twentieth century Dixieland jazz club. It finished with the re-organisation, examination and cleansing of materials from the region's Conservatorium of Music which was established in the late 1970s. These activities involved utilising the collections within the CSU Regional Archives and doing outside research with Trove and other researchers/individuals connected to the collections. Brief histories were created for each collection based on this research from various streams and were added to the Archives' system to enable better access for future users.

The Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support Group (RGLSG)

The RGLSG collection consisted of a wide range of items including self-published newsletters, badges and other ephemera, educational and promotional pamphlets, in addition to personal writings from the person who donated the materials, Wayne Ditchfield. Wayne established the group in Wagga Wagga, around 1992, and helped it grow to reach surrounding towns in the region. The group aimed to provide a safe space for Riverina residents who identified as LGBTQ+ to learn about important issues such as HIV/AIDS, discrimination and safe sex. Additionally, the group served as a social hub for its members and held annual functions to raise money for resources and trips to Sydney Mardi Gras, conferences and educational events such as anti-violence seminars. Wayne was President of the group from 1995-96 and worked to solidify relationships with organisations like ACON and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby. This helped RGLSG to maintain a steady stream of resources and communication with larger institutions.

Wayne helped to establish pertinent resources for the local LGBTQ+ community including the Wagga Wagga AIDS Taskforce and the RGLSG telephone line. This helpline was advertised in Wagga Wagga and surrounding areas of the Riverina. It became the beacon of the group's mission to provide support and visibility for fellow LGBTQ+ people. Wayne left the group in 1996 and it is unclear in the collection if it continued without his leadership. In 2016, portions of this collection were displayed as part of the Museum of the Riverina's "We are Here" exhibition which focused on the region's LGBTQ+ community throughout recent history (1980-present).

Challenge

This collection was small and relatively straight forward in terms of dates and groupings of items (i.e. meeting minutes, newsletters and correspondence). However, there was an envelope labelled “confidential” that required some special attention. After discovering this envelope, the Archives’ staff contacted Wayne to confirm what was in it and if it could be opened. He was unaware of its contents and gave the go-ahead. Inside were personal letters written to the group from local community members. The letters’ subjects ranged from wishes to be added to the mailing list to stories of coming out to unaccepting family members. Since some letters were sensitive and very personal, consultation was sought with CSU lecturer, Dr. Jessie Lymn, who specialises in archives and LGBTQ+ collections. She suggested that a restriction be placed on this item (the envelope of letters) within the collection. This procedure was about protecting the identities of the letter writers until it can be ascertained whether they are still alive, living in the area and able/willing to grant public access to their writing. With Dr. Lymn’s and Jillian Kohlhausen’s (Collection Management Archivist, CSU Regional Archives) guidance, the item was placed under restriction within the now openly accessible collection.

Dixieland

On 23 November 1921, Dixieland, “Wagga’s Premier Rendezvous of Joy,” opened to the public at the City Concert Band’s Beach Carnival. Dixieland was a jazz hall and entertainment venue, located at the end of Little Gurwood Street (now Sturt Street), with a dancefloor that floated atop the Murrumbidgee River. During the illustrious Jazz Age (1920-1933), Wagga residents flocked to the riverbank to enjoy a wide range of recreational delights and dance the night away. The popular dance spot, turned commercial venue in 1923, was directed, maintained and often entertained by the Wagga Brass Band. In addition to the band, visiting performers including Long Tack Sam Company, Frank Speerin and a young Bill Kerr (“Wee Billy Kerr”) brought their acts to Dixieland. The venue was integral to Wagga’s entertainment district which included the Wonderland Theatre, Strand Theatre and Palais Skating Rink. World records were broken, New Year’s Eve celebrations were had and dancing competitions were held at Dixieland throughout the 20s and 30s.

Floods caused the venue to close and re-open many times, and may have caused its permanent closure in 1934 when more performances were held at inland venues. Residents

had to watch the newspaper to find out where shows would be held in the event of a flood and when the hall would reopen for business once the river waters receded.

Most of the materials in the Archives' scrapbook are newspaper clippings, tickets and flyers for performances and activities held at Dixieland. They provide a sound and unique glimpse into the types of entertainment that came to town and how important the entertainment scene was to the region. However, there was no indication in the archival material of when the venue shut down or when efforts to keep it open ceased.

Challenge

The aim of this project was to form a brief history of Dixieland and try to figure out when and why it shut down. The scrapbook was not helpful with this because it contains items relevant to the entertainment that came to the venue, not necessarily its governance or function as a business. Long searches through Trove revealed that there was tension between the Wagga Brass Band (who generally managed Dixieland) and other local bands about who received funding and how ratepayers would or would not support Dixieland. Other articles revealed the venue's troubles with safety including drunken fights and late night swimming habits. The Archives' records of Wagga Wagga City Council meetings from the early 1930s, when Dixieland activities slowed down, did not prove anything except that the Brass Band experienced some financial hardship and sought council support. It was frustrating to keep encountering dead ends in this search, but it seems Dixieland burnt out due to various causes related to lack of support, funding and enthusiasm. Its closing date may have never been recorded. The brief history based on the contents of the Archives' scrapbook is now accessible and provides a snapshot of the vibrant jazz club that once graced Wagga's riverbank.

Riverina Conservatorium of Music

This project's last instalment was to re-arrange the growing collection of materials from the Riverina Conservatorium of Music. The items in the collection are primarily governance papers including board agendas, minutes, financial reports and correspondence. There was a large collection of promotional posters as well. The difference between this collection and the other two is that the Conservatorium is still active (since late 1970s) and consistently donating material to the Archives. Therefore, the collection needed a cleansing

of duplicates and a general consolidation of its items so everything was in one place. Since the Conservatorium is an active entity and has maintained similar practices since its establishment, there was not much of a range of materials, being mainly governance papers. There were a few audio recordings, photographs and miscellaneous ephemera, but overall, much of the items pertained to the growth of the Conservatorium as a professional institution.

The aim of this activity was to consolidate the collection and figure out when the Conservatorium broke its ties with the Riverina College of Advanced Education and became its own entity. The materials in the collection did not indicate explicitly when the Conservatorium separated from the College and it is still unclear after further research. There were gaps in the collection of board papers during the 2000s decade. So, it is possible something may have happened during that time, however further consultation with the current Conservatorium team is needed to help define this event more clearly.

Challenge

The main challenge with this part of the project was understanding how to manage a collection of this size (roughly 1.8 metres), the largest of the three in this project. It took an initial, secondary and third sorting to find groupings that made sense. Also, the materials within this collection were very similar. It was difficult to remain focused when organising twenty years of board meeting minutes. However, it made sorting the materials into items easier because there were clear indications of dates, down to the month and day. Lastly, there were photos of five individuals that were of little use to users without the subjects' identifications. So, while not a particularly complex challenge, it was necessary to visit the Conservatorium (conveniently located next door to the Archives) and see who could be identified. Luckily, all but one of the five were successfully named.

Concluding thoughts

This project allowed for the exploration of three different types of collections and the opportunity to learn from the Archives' staff. I most enjoyed interacting with staff members, Jill, Wayne, Paul and Tom, in addition to regular visitors, Nancy and June. Their experience, insight and patience encouraged me to approach each collection with care and an open mind. Also, it was fun to see their passion for sharing history and helping other users in their searches. I was able to shift my assumption that archivists are usually tucked away in the

collections to a more interactive role of doing a bit of everything from working in the collection room to assisting with events to working with cultural institutions and to helping visitors and hanging artworks on the wall. It seemed quiet days were a rare occurrence.

In terms of the collections, I liked something different about working with each one. With the RGLSG, I enjoyed learning about the group, working with Dr. Lymn and making this important collection accessible; it was particularly significant given this year's debate on same-sex marriage. Since I started learning about Wagga Wagga's history, Dixieland has always interested me in its Gatsby-like mystery, so working with the scrapbook and hunting for more information was exciting. Handling the older materials and seeing the artistic design of the past was a highlight as well. Finally, I had reservations about the Conservatorium collection because of its size and abundance of board papers, but it turned out to be the part of the project where I learned the most about working with archives. At times it was monotonous work, but it taught me that, while not every collection is super interesting to me, every collection has its place and contribution to the region's history.



Charles Sturt University Regional Archives

Accession List By Item

Agency: Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support Group

RW 3264

Box No	Item No	Item	Date	Loc
1	1	Meeting minutes, annual reports, resources, stationery	1995 - 1996	B
1	2	General correspondence, media releases, correspondence from members [RESTRICTED]	1994 - 1997	B
1	3	"South West" - newsletter of the Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support Group	1992 - 1997	B
1	4	Records of activities, eg. party flyers, events, programmes	1994 - 1996	B
1	5	Phone directories: RGLSG Info-Line, Sydney, VIC, TAS	1994 - 1996	B
1	6	Resources (booklets/pamphlets): STDs, safety, gender, health promotion, reading list, magnets	c.1995	B
1	7	Wayne Ditchfield: newspaper clippings, receipts, Andrew Bishop Award	1992 - 1996	B
2	8	Mardi Gras: annual reports, Extraordinary General Meeting	1995 - 1997	B
2	9	Mardi Gras: newspaper, correspondence, membership details, programme	1995 - 1997	B
2	10	HIV/AIDS: correspondence, HIV Herald, HIV Briefs, Rural Gaze, Wagga Wagga AIDS Task Force, ACON, health promotion	1992 - 1997	B
2	11	Rural HIV/AIDS Conference: correspondence, notes, programme, workshop records	1994 - 1996	B
2	12	Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Inc.: annual report, newsletter, correspondence	1994 - 1996	B
2	13	Anti-violence and discrimination: local issues, Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project	1995 - 1997	B
2	14	Promotion and newspaper clippings: World AIDS Day, "Sprung in Wagga Wagga"	1994 - 1996	B
2	15	Newsletters: BGS, Metropolitan Community Church, Victory over Viruses, Hume Phoenix Inc., TABOO	1992 - 1996	B
3	16	Photographs: "Rio in the Riverina" - Mardi Gras float and parade	c.1996	P

Dixieland: A Short History

CSU Regional Archives, RW1143

On 23 November, 1921, Dixieland, “Wagga’s Premier Rendezvous of Joy,” opened to the public at the City Concert Band’s Beach Carnival. Dixieland was a jazz hall and entertainment venue, located at the end of Little Gurwood Street (now Sturt Street), with a dancefloor that floated atop the Murrumbidgee River. During the illustrious Jazz Age (1920-1933), Wagga residents flocked to the riverbank to enjoy a wide range of recreational delights and dance the night away. The popular dance spot, turned commercial venue in 1923, was directed, maintained and often entertained by the Wagga Brass Band.

The Brass Band consisted of local musicians and a committee that liaised with Wagga Municipal Council and visiting performers. For a time, the Brass Band was subsidised by the local Council to perform at charity events for local entities including the hospital, ambulance service and Wagga Grammar School. Also, they were the official band of the War Service Committee. They played WWI soldiers out of Wagga upon deployment and back into Sydney on their return. In addition to their Council subsidy, the band’s other sources of funding were donations and entry fees from Dixieland patrons. These funds helped pay for uniforms, instruments and a fee for a professional band director.

The local band and entertainment scene were integral to the community’s livelihood during the roaring twenties. Dixieland was only a part of Wagga’s active nightlife, other venues included Wonderland Theatre/Café, the Masonic Hall (later known as the Oxford Theatre), The Strand picture theatre and Dixieland Roller-skating Palais. These proved popular with their exciting programmes, Dixieland’s highest recorded attendance was 2,300, in 1929. The entertainment at Dixieland ranged from competitive activities (i.e. Euchre tournaments and dancing competitions) and successful efforts to smash world records to jazz acts and vaudeville performances. Wagga residents and visiting tourists enjoyed the talents of saxophonist RJ Homann, Long Tack Sam and Wee Billy Kerr. Additionally, visiting rugby clubs, cricketers and, in 1925, members of the US fleet were brought to the jazz hall and treated to local acts: the Lyric Orchestra, Wagga Melody Makers, Riverina Revellers and the Wagga Brass Band.

The venue thrived throughout the twenties and endured several floods, but, after continuous damage, it was decided that a more stable floor, on brick supports, needed to be

installed; an improved, steady and spacious venue was installed in 1925. Floods caused Dixieland to close and re-open many times, and may have caused its permanent closure in 1934 when more performances were held at inland venues such as the Town Hall Gardens and Wonderland Theatre. Residents had to watch the newspaper to find out where shows would be held in the event of a flood and when the hall would reopen for business once the river waters receded.

It is still unclear when and why Dixieland permanently closed its doors. It seems it held steady as the “Brightest Show in Town” throughout the Jazz Age, with its most active years between 1923 and 1931. The venue reached its peak in 1931 when it hosted its most famous foreign act, Long Tack Sam Company, world-record-breaking dancing from Frank Speerin, the first Miss Wagga pageant and the venue’s own 10-year anniversary. After that, the Wagga Brass Band started to dissolve as members left the Riverina due to increased unemployment and the beckoning of another world war. In 1932, after the most recent flood, considerable support was behind the rejuvenation and expansion of the Bathing Beach Reserve, which extended to the Sturt Street entrance to Wagga Beach. This could have eventually absorbed Dixieland’s space as interest faded in Jazz and grew in community health/recreation. Eventually, in 1936, Wagga Municipal Council and community members ruled that the remaining Brass Band would combine with the Wagga City Band to form the Wagga Citizens’ Band. There is no evidence of the Citizens’ Band making an effort to maintain the jazz hall, perhaps it was not an option without Council and community support.



Charles Sturt University Regional Archives

Accession List By Item

Agency: **Riverina Conservatorium of Music**

RW 3299

Box No	Item No	Item	Date	Loc
Riverina Conservatorium of Music Board				
1	1	Enclosures and notices to Board	01/04/1984 - 31/12/1984	B
1	2	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/05/1984 - 30/09/1984	B
1	3	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/03/1987 - 31/12/1989	B
1	4	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/06/1991 - 30/11/1992	B
1	5	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/03/1997 - 31/12/1997	B
1	6	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/09/1998 - 31/12/1998	B
1	7	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/01/1999 - 31/05/1999	B
1	8	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/06/1999 - 31/12/1999	B
1	9	Board minutes book	01/12/1997 - 31/10/2001	B
1	10	Board minutes book	01/01/1998 - 31/03/2002	B
2	11	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/01/2000 - 31/05/2000	B
2	12	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/06/2000 - 31/12/2000	B
2	13	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/02/2001 - 31/12/2001	B
2	14	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/02/2002 - 31/07/2002	B
2	15	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/08/2002 - 31/12/2002	B
2	16	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/02/2003 - 30/06/2003	B
2	17	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/07/2003 - 31/12/2003	B
2	18	Board minutes book	01/04/2003 - 30/04/2005	B
3	19	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/02/2004 - 30/04/2004	B
3	20	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/05/2004 - 31/08/2004	B
3	21	Board minutes and agenda papers	01/09/2004 - 28/02/2005	B
3	22	Annual General Meeting minutes	01/01/1998 - 31/12/2003	B
Administrative files, correspondence, staff management				
3	23	Scholarships	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1983	B
3	24	Scholarships	01/01/1984 - 31/12/1986	B
3	25	Principal's correspondence	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1981	B
3	26	Principal's correspondence	01/01/1982 - 31/12/1984	B
4	27	Registrar's correspondence	01/01/1980 - 31/12/1985	B
4	28	General correspondence	01/01/1980 - 12/31/1982	B
4	29	General correspondence	01/01/1983 - 31/12/1987	B
4	30	General correspondence and appreciation certificates	01/01/1989 - 31/12/2013	B

Box No	Item No	Item	Date	Loc
4	31	Annual reports and constitution	01/01/1982 - 31/12/2002	B
4	32	Establishment and promotion	c.1980	B
4	33	Organisational structure	n.d.	B
4	34	Staffing	n.d.	B
4	35	Staff meeting minutes	01/01/1986 - 31/12/2002	B
4	36	Interim Management Committee minutes	01/01/1980 - 31/12/1985	B
5	37	Albury-Wodonga branch establishment	01/01/1977 - 31/12/1983	B
5	38	Albury-Wodonga branch expenditure	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1982	B
5	39	Albury-Wodonga branch expenditure and scholarships	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1984	B
5	40	Albury-Wodonga branch management: receipts and other documents	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1983	B
Programmes, Groups, Promotion and ephemera				
5	41	Workshops and programmes	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1984	B
5	42	Programmes	01/01/1982 - 31/12/1986	B
5	43	Programmes	01/01/1980 - 31/12/1990	B
5	44	Performing artists	01/01/1981 - 31/12/1985	B
5	45	Inservice information and courses	01/01/1982 - 31/12/1983	B
5	46	Concert and recital reports	01/01/1982 - 31/12/1983	B
5	47	Riverina Concert/Brass Band	01/01/1980 - 31/12/1985	B
5	48	Riverina Trio	01/01/1982 - 31/12/1988	B
6	49	Stephen O'Connell "Bird of the Day" score	c.2012	B
6	50	Sheet music: Democratic Dirge, Elegy, Five South Australian Coastal Images	01/01/2011 - 31/12/2012	B
6	51	Promotion: flyers, pamphlets, advertising	01/01/1982 - 31/12/2012	B
6	52	Newspaper clippings	01/01/1982 - 31/12/2001	B
6	53	Photographs: teachers, student, Sydney Quartet	n.d.	B
7	54	Promotional posters	n.d.	OO
7	55	Australian composers scrapbook	n.d.	OO
7	56	Australian Music Examinations Boards: Lorraine Campbell	n.d.	OO
7	57	Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London: Lorraine Campbell	c.1936	OO
8	58	Student compositions and "Music from the Centre" on 2AAA [x4 audio reels]	01/01/1973 - 31/12/1986	AV