More than a law man

Wayne Doubleday

Edwin Fenn Lusher was a strong member of the Wagga community. Most would remember him as one of our city’s prominent politicians, but he had many interests and was heavily involved in Wagga’s political and cultural life.

Lusher arrived in Wagga with his wife Jean and two daughters on December 1, 1926, from Sydney, where he had been employed in the Crown Law Office. He became business partners with Charles Thomas Young and Fredrick Charles Stellway, creating Lusher, Young and Stellway Solicitors. Their offices were situated in Fitzmaurice Street, next door to the Union Bank of Australia (what is now Boyce Chartered Accountants).

Political life

IN FEBRUARY 1928, Edwin Fenn Lusher was elected to the Wagga Municipal Council after the resignation of alderman Chandler. He was then chosen to be deputy mayor in December 1928. Lusher served on council for nearly 10 years, choosing not to stand for re-election in 1937. However, his role in local government was not yet over as he became solicitor for the Wagga Council from 1941 until his death in 1952.

Lusher played a pivotal part in the political movements of the Riverina in the 1930s. In 1931 he was chairman of the “Great Riverbank Meeting.” This meeting was attended by an estimated 8000 people from the Wagga region to protest against the government’s response to the effects of economic depression. Lusher made passionate speeches on the rights of the primary and secondary industries and the faults of the government.

Three options were put forward at the meeting:

1. To call on state and commonwealth governments to immediately effect drastic reductions in the cost of government, to relieve industry, both primary and secondary, from statutory burdens, to give immediate financial relief to primary producers; to prepare proposals to enable future interest charges to be reduced, and so lower the costs of production.

2. That, in the event of such governments refusing to recognise or failing to give effect to such resolutions by March 31, 1931, immediate steps be taken to hold a referendum on the question of the right of Riverina to determine its own affairs and control its own destiny as a free people under the British Crown, if necessary by succession, with its consequent diversion of taxation from existing governments.

3. That the committee which arranged this meeting be and hereby is appointed to conduct any such referendum in a fair and proper manner, with power to appoint returning officers and do all, such further and other things in their opinion necessary to give effect to the will of this meeting.

This meant that if the state and commonwealth governments did not agree to their first proposal, the appointed committee would begin to take actions to secede from the NSW government and create their own state. However, with the change in government the following year, the economic environment improved and The New State Movement petered out in the Riverina.

Lusher continued to exert political influence in Wagga and district for many years. He was president of the Wagga branch of the United Australia Party, a forerunner of the National Party and was a member of the NSW Country Party State Executive. From 1944, he was a vocal member of the Mumburraga Regional Convention on post-war planning and was chairman for many years. After visiting England in 1948 he pursued many constructive ideas on the betterment of Wagga.

Cultural Life

EDWIN Fenn Lusher was elected to the School of Arts committee in 1934 and was president from 1935 until his death in 1952. Under his leadership, many significant changes were made to the school. Previously, the main purpose of the School of Arts had been as a library, but in 1946 the school donated all of its books and fittings to the Wagga Council to establish a public library. In 1944, the School of Arts Literary and Dramatic Society was established and the musical society joined the School of Arts to become the Wagga Variety Club. In 1945, the society performed its first play for the general public.

In 1936, Lusher was granted its membership of the School of Arts. The Wagga Express reported on July 18, the following words: “Mr. J. N. Small in seconding the motion ... remarked on the enthusiasm of the president, which had lifted the institution out of a rut. He had seen how the office had been very impressive and convincing and the institute was placed on such a plane that it was easy for the public to fall behind for its future advancement.”

Through the School of Arts, Lusher was able to enhance Wagga’s creative environment. He organised for public figures and famous artists, such as the soprano, Joan Sutherland, to visit Wagga. He also encouraged play competitions and sponsored art exhibitions. Lusher was also involved in the Rotary Club and was president from 1954 to 1956.

In his youth, Lusher had a successful career as an amateur boxer and weight lifter. He was runner-up NSW champion in 1936, in 1937 he won the NSW Championship, the Interstate Championship and the Australian Championship and in 1958 he won the NSW Championship but was runner-up in the Australian Championship.

After his death on June 8, 1952, the following tribute by Mr. Quiggin SM was recorded in The Daily Advertiser: “It may be, indeed, that Mr. Lusher in the highest esteem, I was impressed, along with other magistrates, by his skill as an advocate and great knowledge of the law, but above all by his keen sense of humour. This sense of humour made him the very formidable advocate in court.”


Compiled by Alice Callin