

COLONEL JOHN WILKINSON V.D (1854-1941)

Edited version of presentation by Joe Wooding (A&DHS General Meeting, February 2009 and reprinted from A&DHS Bulletin No 490)

If you were tasked to select the Albury citizen who has made the greatest contribution to his community, John Wilkinson would be on the short list.

Born on the Isle of Sheppey at the mouth of the Thames on 22 June 1854, Wilkinson came to Australia with his doctor father Henry and mother Mary, at the age of three, disembarking in Sydney. The doctor practiced in Bathurst and Young before the family, consisting of three sons and three daughters moved to Albury in 1862 but relocated to Sale, Victoria some three years later.

In the following year, Dr Wilkinson died, and subsequently his widow and children returned to Albury.

Aged 15, John Wilkinson left school to study law. The "Albury Banner" of January 10, 1941 records:

He commenced his career by being articled to the late V. F. Nagle, father of two other well-known Albury solicitors, Mr. V. Flood Nagle and Mr. Charles Nagle, and after his articles expired he worked for some time in the office of the late Joseph Dwyer, another Albury solicitor. He gained his necessary qualifications in Sydney, and his name was placed on the roll of solicitors on March 26, 1881, and in 1901 his name was also entered on the Victorian roll of solicitors. Until about four years ago he practiced continuously in Albury.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/138907996>

The records show his studies were successful as in March 1881, he established a successful Albury legal practice, which 128 years later, we know as Kell Moore Solicitors. For an unbroken period of 53 years, Wilkinson had been at the helm.

Long before Federation, Wilkinson showed an interest in local defence matters, joining the Albury Reserve Corps, Volunteer Infantry. On his 34th birthday of 22 June 1888, he was commissioned Captain and took command of that organisation. With modernization occurring, Captain Wilkinson succeeded to the command of H. Company 1st Regiment Volunteer Infantry. On 9 June 1896, he rose to the field rank of Major.

Under the Federal Plan, country units were converted to Light Horse and Artillery units, so in 1903 the infantry company became an artillery unit when the Major became first officer commanding No 4 NSW Battery Australian Field Artillery. Wilkinson maintained his military interest, eventually rising to the rank of Colonel.

He was then given command of all senior and junior cadets in a vast area of the Riverina, extending from Germanton (Holbrook) to Harden, Hay and Deniliquin, with the Murray River as its southern boundary.

His military service was recognized when, as a Major, he was awarded the Volunteer Officer's Decoration (VD). This was a long service medal for officers in the Volunteer Defence Forces with a minimum 20 years of service. He retired with the rank of Colonel shortly before World War I.

Politics were also a challenge. In January 1889, he unseated the sitting member, Mr George Day, to become MLA for Albury. Wilkinson successfully contested three elections.



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The Mechanics Institute was another organisation which benefited from his involvement, being President for 46 years until it was incorporated by the Council. Only twice in all that time, was his position challenged. He held the confidence of the members on each occasion.

He was President of the Lawn Tennis Association for a number of years. Billiards and Snooker were also among his sporting interests. The Albury Club records show him as a member from 1894 until his death.

He was the father of three sons and a daughter, two of whom, Charles John and Laurie (Mrs A S Mitchell) pre-deceased him. His wife Elspeth, died on April 4, 1928.

Perhaps his greatest interest was cricket, giving nearly 70 years of service and commitment. In 1877, Wilkinson had joined the committee of the Albury Cricket Club where Mr C H Dight was Vice-President. Something of a big hitting 'all rounder' with considerable wicket keeping skills, the Colonel is credited with hitting a ball from the Albury Sportsground into the property known as 'Ranelagh' on the Hume Street corner.

Some might say his greatest legacy is his years of service as President of the Cricket Association which during his lifetime, was constituted on 35 occasions with the Colonel President on 32 on them. He was also President of the Albury Cricket Club for something like 12 years when the Association was not formed.

The highlights of his association presidency include the formation of the Albury Cricket Association in 1894, formation of the ABCA in 1909, visits by New Zealand in 1914, Warwick Armstrong's Victorian XI in 1920, John Douglas' England XI in 1921, West Australia in 1925 and Bradman's NSW XI in 1933, as well as the inaugural ABCA Melbourne Country Week venture in 1934.

John Wilkinson died in Albury on August 28, 1941.