

November 2022

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Next Meeting

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

7.30 pm, Commercial Club

Topic: Hume & Hovell

Expedition Bicentenary

Speaker: Peter Harper

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM

**Spy—Espionage in Aust
Opens Saturday Nov 12**

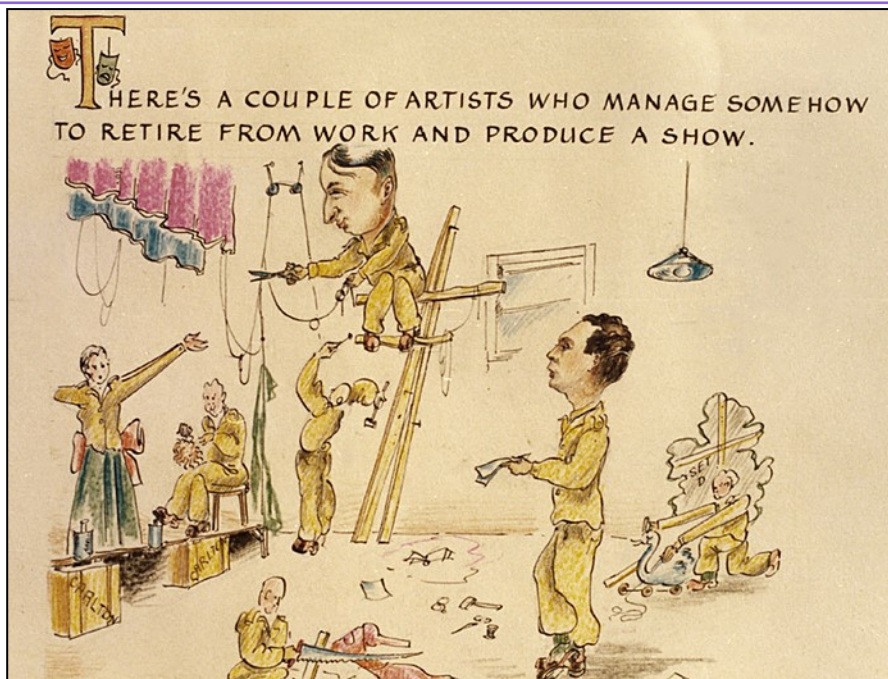


Illustration from 'A Day in Camp' (Cary Roth & Tim Walton).
Created for 4th Employment Company,
first anniversary, March 9, 1943

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ALM Volunteers

PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR NOVEMBER

Despite the cold and rainy night, a good representation of our members attended our October meeting to hear Dr June Factor give a very interesting talk on the subject of her recent book 'Soldiers and Aliens.' Her address elicited some probing and insightful questions from our members and in some cases provided information which had not been revealed by the research Dr Factor undertook in preparing her text.

One of the most pleasing things about our meetings is the active engagement of our members with our guest speaker. Our speakers love the fact that we are listening and questioning.

The ranks of our members continue to swell. A warm welcome to Michael Dunn. Well done to Connor Fedorowytch, who brought along his friend Neil Coulston who provided an interesting step back in time by displaying many objects unearthed by the use of his high tech metal detecting equipment.

November 2024 will be the bicentenary of the Hume and Hovell Expedition. It is hoped the occasion is well celebrated for Albury's beginnings started with the explorers' arrival at our very 'fine river'. The date was 16 Nov 1824.

Peter Harper, a Society member and a keen cyclist, will explain his plan to provide an activity that combines his passion for cycling and the history of all the Victorian 1924 Hume and Hovell monuments. He hopes his ride that travels across Victoria from Albury will feature in many bicentenary celebrations. Peter will be looking for assistance from our Society to launch his ride proposal.

Dr June Factor is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and the University of London, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, and an Honorary Associate, Museum Victoria. She is a well-known and highly-respected folklorist, social historian and writer, with a special interest in children's folklore and language. She has authored much loved children's books including 'Far Out, Brussel Sprout!' 'All Right, Vegemite!'

Dr June Factor has undertaken research into a part of World War 2 Military History that is not well known or documented. Her book telling the story about alien soldiers called "Soldiers and Aliens" was released in June 2022. The story is about how the Australian Army took into its ranks men who were nationals of Germany, Italy, Austria, Greece, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and many other countries. Some of these countries were enemies of Australia.



June's father, Saul Factor on the *Moreton Bay*

June realised very little has been written about the branch of the Military that was made up of conscript alien soldiers whose contribution to the war effort in Australia was vital. June regards it as her good fortune that she had the opportunity to meet and interview a number of the alien soldiers in her quest to document their story.

June explained that 'Aliens' is a legal term. During the second world war it meant anyone who was a non-British citizen. In explaining this term, she highlighted that all Australian born citizens were also classed as British citizens. Aliens were people living in Australia but born in another country other than Britain or Australia. In 1942 there were 59 registered alien nationalities in Australia. Not all of them were from enemy countries. Of those from enemy countries many of them were either Jewish or fleeing the rise of fascism in their home countries.

June's father arrived by boat, the *Moreton Bay*, in Melbourne in July 1938. June sadly remarked that she did not think to ask her father before he passed away about his trip to Australia and his life on board the ship, so she had to hope it was enjoyable.

The story begins with her father's conscription into the Army. He was Jewish and he took the developments in Germany in the 1930s seriously. He persuaded his wife that staying in Europe was dangerous. He fled Poland, his country of birth and he travelled to Australia because it was about as far away from Europe as was possible. June's father was conscripted into the 6th Employment Company in 1942 along with many other Polish Jews. One of the 6th Company's deployments was at Tocomwal. Another was at Mangalore.



Members of the 6th Employment Company Left: at Tocomwal. Saul Factor is bottom right.



Right: in Mangalore Victoria with military ordnance, relaxing and having a bit of fun.

Two of the requirements for joining the military was being over 18 years of age and of good character but the number of volunteers for the army and for service overseas proportionate to the population during WWII was much lower than in WWI and conscription was introduced to fill the gaps especially after Japan joined into the war and the threat moved closer to home. It was feared that the Japanese had submarines patrolling the Australian coastline so coastal shipping to move goods around Australia became too risky. Goods needed for the

civilian population and goods needed to support the Armed forces had to be moved overland by rail. There was a shortage of able-bodied men to do the work of loading and unloading of the trains, and the solution was to form a division in the Army called “Employment Companies”. It was the alien soldiers who made up the ‘Employment Company’ workforce.

In the 1940s there were 53,057 registered aliens in the Army many of whom were Jewish, but June stressed that being Jewish was not a nationality, so they had the nationality of their country of birth. All of Employment Company soldiers were conscripted. They were not volunteers. The Employment Company soldiers were trained in the same way and had the same uniform as the volunteer soldiers being trained to serve overseas with the exception, they were not trained in handling guns, and were not issued with guns. They did not serve overseas.

The Employment Company soldiers were issued with identification tags and were granted the honour of wearing Colours. It was an Honourable Insignia. It was the symbol of the spirit of the Employment Company soldiers. The wearing of colours for the conscript Employment Company soldiers was much debated but eventually they were awarded their own specific Colours. Being in the army, they wore the same uniform as regular soldiers, received the same privileges as regular soldiers including personal items like cigarettes. Their mail was censored. They had to send their mail via the special military mailbox just the same as regular soldiers.

In 1942 a petition was signed in Queensland, and it stated:

“To the end we wish to call attention to the menace of the Enemy Alien in Australia.” And it goes on to demand: “The undersigned are firmly of the opinion that it is time for the Enemy Alien without exception should be interred ...”

The government was more discerning and differentiated between friendly aliens, enemy aliens and POWs and could see an economic and logistical benefit for the war effort by conscripting the friendly aliens into a much-needed workforce. Enemy aliens were interred in special detention camps.

Not all alien men were conscripted or interred. The government recognised the need to keep businesses and factories operating. Grocery shops were an essential service for the civilian population. If there was more than one male family member, the alien families often were able to nominate which family member went into the army especially if the family operated a business essential to the civilian population. In her research June could not find evidence of a conscription procedure or protocol to be followed. Much of the conscription was being processed by people outside the military and many of the decisions were left to the individual’s personal judgement.

After the war many of the Employment Company soldiers decided to stay in Australia and became Australian citizens. June’s parents eventually settled in Carlton which at that time was a working-class immigrant suburb of Melbourne.



The ID tags and colours of Employment Company soldiers.

ALBURY’S FRIENDLY ALIENS

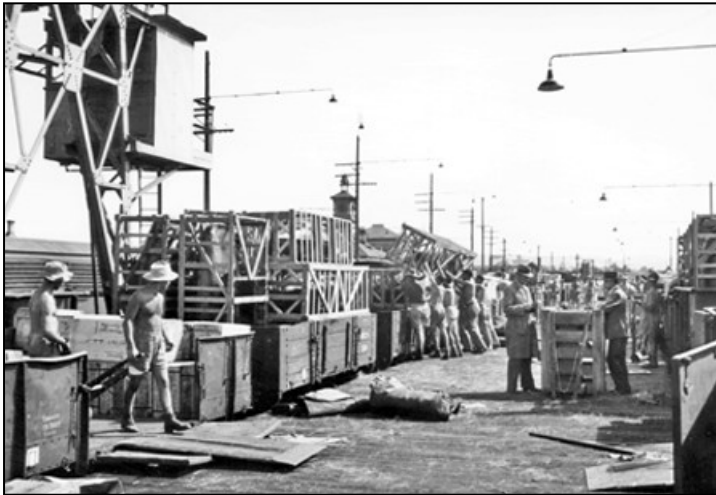
Bruce Pennay

The 4th Employment Company (Aliens) was formed in March 1942 when Australia was desperately trying to increase its manpower to defend itself against a possible Japanese invasion. Hitherto military authorities had shunned the service of unnaturalised people born overseas. But from 1942 on it called on its resident refugees to meet essential labour needs by serving in uniformed employment companies.

The 4th Employment Company was posted to Albury where it was to tranship munitions and military equipment at the very busy and strategically sensitive railway break-of-gauge.

Railway traffic was heavy during the war when coastal shipping was restricted. Each day, the Friendly Aliens moved huge quantities of materials from one train to another. Most frequently, they moved war materials including ammunition, bombs, and telegraph poles. Sometimes, they were called on to shift more general cargo, such as fruit and vegetables. On occasions, they acted as stretcher bearers for the wounded travelling by ambulance trains.

They worked at the military platform in the far east of the Albury Station Yard. In 1944 a covered platform was built so that transhipment could more easily continue 24 hours per day and through all kinds of weather. The platforms took trains on the NSW standard gauge to the east and the Victorian broad gauge to the west.



Transferring aircraft fuel tanks in Albury



Stretcher bearers on Albury platform

Occasionally some platoons were deployed to tranship equipment at the massive ordnance depot and vehicle park at Bandiana. They also interchanged with other employment units doing similar work from Camp Pell in Melbourne or at Tocumwal and Oaklands.

An article in *Border Morning Mail* in June 1942 drew the attention of readers to the unglamorous but important work the unit was doing. It asked readers to welcome the men, who were for the most part recently arrived refugees who had recently fled Europe. They were dubbed 'Friendly Aliens'. Many of the newcomers, it said, felt lonely.



The soldiers were accommodated in 45 tents fitted with floorboards and kerosene lamps at the old Albury Showground, now part of Scots School. When it rained heavily, they slept in the grandstand. In 1945 a better camp site became vacant at the rear of Woodstock School in East Albury and they moved there as it was closer to their workplace.

and highly valued recreation hut. The Jewish community of Melbourne equipped the hut with a radio. The Greek community of Melbourne provided a billiard table.

Hospitality came from different directions. The Catholic United Service Auxiliary provided a much used

The Melbourne Jewish Community arranged for a rabbi to attend the camp every three months. It offered support to the wives left behind. It sent special food to the camp to help them observe the Passover. Melbourne Greeks provided similar services. The Greeks sent the unit fare to help celebrate Christmas, including £1 in threepences for a plum pudding. On one special occasion 125 Greek men from the unit marched to St Matthews Church to provide a guard of honour for visiting Greek Orthodox dignitaries.

Townpeople encountered the Friendly Aliens most frequently on the street, at the river and in the cinema. They saw them competing with other units on the sporting field where they excelled in football.

In general, townspeople remained aloof from the unit which seemed different from others. They were aware that the accommodation at the old showground, which the unit had been allocated, was inadequate as a permanent army camp. They were very conscious of the way the men spoke languages other than English.

Captain Stanley Walker, the company commander, and his NCOs warned the soldiers against singing rowdy songs in European languages in the street. They told them not to yell from their trucks at passing pedestrians, particularly women. The newspaper noted their noisy support for a Communist candidate in the election of 1943. Rowdiness and noise in another language was suspect.

Still, friendships were formed and respect established. Via the *Border Morning Mail*, townspeople learnt of the soldiers' skills in chess, bridge and football. Along with other service people stationed in the town, townspeople attended the concerts and musicals that the men produced in the recreation hut. Albury Scouts appreciated the assistance that the soldiers gave then for their own fund-raising theatre productions. Townspeople saw some of the Friendly Aliens going to the beginner or advanced English or Arithmetic classes at Albury High School two nights a week. Some were neighbours or landlords to the half-dozen or so wives who moved to Albury to be with their husbands.

Remembering the Friendly Aliens

At the end of the war, the much used and much-loved recreation hut was moved across Young Street. It served the Catholic community of Albury as St Joseph's Church for the next fifty years. Abraham Kurtz, a member of the Labour Service Unit, accidentally drowned in the Murray River. He is buried in the only Jewish grave in the Albury War Memorial Cemetery.



The covered transshipment shed still stands in the Albury Railway Station Yard. It is no longer used. It has become a grimy grey, nondescript part of the paraphernalia of the yard. Yet it is a war relic. A reminder of how and when the Second World War came to Albury.



Albury has been proud of its railway heritage, its war history and its multicultural past and present. There are signs explaining the importance of passenger traffic at the break-of-gauge at the Albury Railway Station and at the Station Master's house, now operating as a tourism centre. High on Harold Mair bridge (from where the photo below was taken), there is a picture board that explains transshipment in the yard at its busiest times during and immediately after the World War. It salutes the service of the Friendly Aliens and is one of the rare employment company commemorations.

June Factor dedicated her book *Soldiers and Aliens* (2022) to all who served in employment companies and to those who offered them friendship and support, then and now. That dedication embraces Albury townspeople of yesteryear and of today. Albury respects the service of the non-combatant soldiers who fought what was dubbed 'the Battle of Albury' – shifting goods from one train to another.



A panoramic view of Albury's railway precinct with the covered transshipment shed on the left.

Photo credits:

- 1 Military platform, c.1943, Australian Railway History Society (NSW);
- 2 Australian War Memorial, 114759, 1945;
- 3 Covered platform c.1956, NSW State Archives;
- 4 Albury Showground Camp, c.1943, Paul Bartrop, *The Dunera*;
- 7 ARTC Inland Rail 2021;
- 9 Greg Ryan.

Society member Barb McDermott (née Azzi) is a keen user of the Trove website. Currently the site covers Albury newspapers from 1860 to 1949 (with some gaps). The Society recently ordered scanning of the 'Border Morning Mail' for 1950-51. Barb shares with us below a small glimpse of some of the previously forgotten family stories that she has gathered from the trove of treasures at Trove.

Solving a family puzzle

According to their marriage certificate my maternal grandparents, Edward and Sarah Delaney were married at Perry Vale, East Brocklesby. The location of Perry Vale remained a mystery for several years. However, a search on Trove solved the puzzle. Perryvale (not Perry Vale) was a property near Brocklesby. According to a sale of stock report, the property was owned by a Mr Perry and managed by a Mr McGrath. W McGrath and his wife, Emily were named as witnesses to the marriage.

Newspapers
of Albury on
TROVE
1860-1949



Norm Azzi at his piano

Another source of information about life at Perryvale were letters written to 'Uncle Jeff' at the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* by their daughter, Ruby. One of these letters records that she and her brothers had to walk four miles to school in Brocklesby. My grandparents would have lived in a tent at Perryvale early in their marriage.

Catching a Glimpse into My Aunt Rose's Life

Letters written to 'Uncle Jeff' at the *Banner* also gave a glimpse into the childhood of my Aunt Rose Azzi as she also wrote several letters to Uncle Jeff. These letters are especially important to me as Rose died before I was born.

Setting the record straight

My Uncle Norm (Azzi) was well known locally as being a brilliant pianist. He had graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in the late 1920s.

We had always known that his sister Josephine (Auntie Jo) could play the piano but we had only ever heard her play simple tunes. Through music exam reports in the *Wagga Advertiser* we discovered that as a child her music grades were equal to Uncle Norm's if not better. As an adult, she often played at district social functions with glowing newspaper reports. Our quiet, stay-at-home Auntie Jo was in actual fact an accomplished pianist.

Bringing to light untold family stories

A well written and entertaining article in the *Banner* reports how my 20 year old father caused a disturbance in Brocklesby when driving his father's new car.

This was just one of my untold family stories found on Trove. Business dealings of my grandfather, Norman Azzi and his brother George are also enlightening. Through Trove articles, it has been possible to follow their journey from hawkers to respected business owners with two stores, one in Brocklesby and one in Balldale. One interesting article records how dances were held in the barn behind their first store in Walbundrie.



Two Brocklesby street scenes: General Store, Norm Azzi proprietor;
Newly harvested grain waiting for transport by rail.

BLUE PLAQUES

The Blue Plaques program “aims to capture public interest and fascination in people, events and places which form the story of NSW.” Heritage NSW has informed us that the Blue Plaque for Betro Abicare (Abikhair) will be installed on November 2 at ‘The Australian Building’ which he opened in 1912 as ‘The Big Store.’ Also recognised on the plaque is the Regent Theatre across the road which Betro opened in 1927. You can read more about Betro’s nomination at blueplaques.nsw.gov.au

Heritage NSW also points out that consideration will be given to other nominees for a plaque from the first round of nominations – our other nominee was long time mayor of Albury, Alf Waugh.

Please consider other worthwhile nominees for the second round of nominations which will be called for soon. Keep in mind that there must be an appropriate site related to the nominee for attachment of a plaque. Possible nominations have been discussed by our committee – suggestions include Dr Arthur Andrews (local medical practitioner and historian) and Raie Langley (fund raising for local causes, especially during WWII).

Below is a copy of an email received from Heritage NSW:

“We are pleased to announce that 10 of the first 21 Blue Plaques have now been installed across NSW. The plaques installed to date are:

1. Brett Whiteley (Lavender Bay) – Australian artist
2. Camden Red Cross patriotic wartime sewing circles (Camden) – Voluntary patriotic activities during WW1 and WW2
3. David Lennox (Parramatta) – Colonial engineer and master stonemason
4. Duke Kahanamoku (Freshwater) – Competition swimmer who popularised surfing in Australia
5. Ethel Turner (Killara) – Australian novelist
6. Dr Mark Lidwill (Beecroft) – Medical innovator
7. Nancy Bird Walton (Kew) – First Australian woman to fly commercially
8. Caroline Chisholm (Maitland) – Advocate for women and immigrant families
9. May Gibbs (Neutral Bay) – Author and illustrator of children’s books
10. Sir Edward Hallstrom (Mosman) – Inventor, businessman and philanthropist

The remaining 11 plaques will continue to be installed over the coming weeks.” [October 18, 2022]



HotHouse Theatre presents a World Premiere Production

ALL THE SHINING LIGHTS

CREATED BY: Carm Hogan & Brendan Hogan

WRITTEN BY: Brendan Hogan

DIRECTED BY: Karla Conway

WHEN: 10th - 19th November

VENUE: Butter Factory Theatre, Gateway Island

The world is full of ordinary people in ordinary towns.

But ordinary people, with courage, can do extraordinary things.

This is a story about courage and wisdom. A story about Charli and John and an aeroplane – one young, one old, all lost.

HotHouse
THEATRE

[Click here for more information](#)



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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDzIPypinJegksrO-l2ssVg>



PADDLE STEAMER RUBY

A photo of the 'PS Ruby' in our September Bulletin prompted this message from Society member Wendy Moriarty.

The Ruby was built by David Lowe Milne, my great grandfather, in 1907 at Morgan. It had three decks, whale boat stern, straight stem. Carvel built with a light draught. He built approximately 10 boats and worked on many more during his lifetime spent in Echuca and Goolwa plus numerous other places.

David had migrated from Scotland and married Elizabeth Kelly in Maldon Victoria in 1874 at the Kangaroo Hotel. They had 10 children. He was grandfather of Tom Miller and Fred Scott, both residents of Albury for many years.



[Albury LibraryMuseum](#) is a community hub bringing together a range of facilities and services including a year-round program of exhibitions and a collection of more than 20,000 objects.

We have a range of volunteer opportunities available to people who are passionate about museums and local history, including:

- ◆ Cataloguing newly acquired objects onto our database
- ◆ Research for exhibition topics or on specific objects
- ◆ Object photography and scanning.

Albury LibraryMuseum
Volunteer with us
and make a difference!

Some are ongoing and others are for defined periods relating to specific exhibitions.

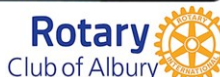
If you would like to know more please contact Emma.Williams@alburycity.nsw.gov.au. New volunteers would commence in early 2023.

Emma Williams, Museum Coordinator

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Meetings: Second Wednesday of the month
at 7.30 pm usually at the Commercial Club
Albury.

The Committee meets on the third
Wednesday of the month at 3 pm
at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

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