• New acquisitions

From Billinudgel to Yalgogrin, and from Girilambone to Vincentia . . .

When the call went out in August 1914, following the outbreak of World War I, for the establishment of an Australian Red Cross Society, the response was almost instantaneous. Local Red Cross groups sprang up across Australia and by November 1914, 88 urban branches and 249 country branches had been established throughout New South Wales. By late 1939 there were 605 New South Wales branches. As the third tier of the Society, below the national and state bodies, the focus of the local branches was on fundraising and on making and collecting goods to be sent to the troops at the front. During uncertain and anxious times, the regular meetings and activities also provided welcome opportunities for those in more isolated areas to socialise and bolster each other’s spirits while making a real contribution to the war effort.

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Outside of wartime, fundraising remained an important branch activity, with branch members also taking on other roles including staffing blood banks, visiting hospital and nursing home patients, working with returned servicemen in repatriation hospitals, and running hospital libraries, rest rooms, canteens, kiosks and trolley services. A general decline in Red Cross membership from the 1960s onwards has been reflected in the closure of many branches. By 2014, the Australian Red Cross Society’s centenary year, there were around 240 active branches and clubs within the state, of which 23 had 100 years of continuous service and many more had 100 years of broken service.
Ariah Park (near West Wyalong) Branch records, including minute books, catering ledgers and honour certificates, Box 5.

Wanting to mark its centenary with a ‘gift to the nation’, the Australian Red Cross Society donated its rich archive and heritage collection to relevant public institutions in each state, with the records of the New South Wales Division being transferred progressively to the State Library of New South Wales. The first consignment, comprising 344 archive boxes of branch records, reveals the range of activities undertaken by urban and rural branches across the state over the last century.

These records had been transferred from individual branches over time, and stored at the Sydney Red Cross office, where they were arranged by branch name, listed and housed in archival boxes by volunteers. Included are minutes of meetings, correspondence, branch histories, photographs, news clippings and ephemera items, all of which provide a rich source of information for researchers, students, family historians and those with an interest in social history. The catalogue record for the Australian Red Cross Society, New South Wales Division, branch records, 1914-2014 can be viewed here [3].

Ann Peck, Librarian, Collection Access & Description

Reference

Find out more about the Red Cross Archive. [4]

Source URL: https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/blogs/red-cross-calling

Links