

THE JOURNAL OF  
PATERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
INCORPORATED  
**MUSEUM NEWS**



MABS KEPPIE  
GLENLOSSIE - PATERSON NSW

AUGUST 1995 - VOLUME 2 #4

ISSN - 1321 - 4438

PATERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Affiliated with the ROYAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: Cameron Archer

PATRONS:

SECRETARY: Pauline Clements

MR M MORRIS OA

ASS. SECRETARY: Geof. Keppie

MR R HORNE

TREASURER: Shirley Threlfo

MR P BLACKMORE

VICE PRESIDENT: Maurice Dunlop

MR A FAIRHALL

JOURNAL: Pauline Clements - Val Anderson

MR L KIDD

MUSEUM CURATOR: Val Anderson - Committee

MR G SEMKIN

PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR: Bill Anderson

RECORDER: Mabs Keppie

SURVEILLANCE OFFICER: Clive Corbett

RESEARCH OFFICERS: P CLEMENTS S THRELFO M KEPPIE V ANDERSON

PATERSON COURT HOUSE MUSEUM is open regularly on SUNDAYS - 1pm-5pm

MEETINGS: Paterson Historical Society Inc. meets the first Thursday of the month - 7.30pm at the Paterson Court House Museum (except December and January)

JOURNAL: "MUSEUM NEWS" is published five times a year - February April June August October

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION DUE: February each year

Family: \$5.00      Single: \$3.00      Student; \$1.00

LOCAL HISTORY PUBLICATIONS: List available from Secretary.

ALL CORRESPONDENCE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO: The Secretary  
PATERSON POST OFFICE  
PATERSON NSW 2421

(c) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

COMING EVENTS:

SEPTEMBER 7 - MEETING - GUEST SPEAKER - JACK SULLIVAN  
FIELD RESEARCH - SLIDE EVENING

9 - OUTING - "ANNANDALE", PATERSON  
"ABERGLASSLYN", RUTHERFORD

OCTOBER 5 - MEETING - GENERAL BUSINESS

7 - WORKING BEE AT MUSEUM - All Welcome!

SALOME KEPPIE'S DIARY - EXTRACTS - MABS KEPPIE

1886 - Bob Welsh drowned Sunday night - found Wednesday  
1st Dec was first man buried in new burying ground

1892 - 23rd Nov - Governor Jersey visited Paterson

1896 - 13th Nov - P Higgins house, Vacy - W Sherwood's shop and  
contents burned down

1898 - 4th Nov wrote to Lang and Woods about selling Red House  
(Brooklyn Arms)

OUR COVER: Mabs Keppie, Life Member P H S joined the Australian Womens Land Army in August, 1942 and was discharged at the end of the War in December, 1945.

THE AUSTRALIAN WOMENS LAND ARMY

The Australian Womens Land Army whose members assisted in keeping farms and properties functioning during the Second World War, has this year received official recognition by way of a medal for each member. Their work released men from the farms to join the services and also their labour kept the food flowing to the civilian population and the armed forces. Theirs was an important job and recognition was slow in coming.

The Land Army was formed in 1942 out of the necessity for food production to be kept going and to enable girls to take the place of men on the land. At first the farmers and others including some Politicians had doubts about the girls' ability to do the heavy work and handle horses which did most of the farm work but during the next four years the Land Army women proved their worth and their capabilities to the Country. Unfortunately in 1942 the Land Army was not given any Official status like the other Womens Services and although they tried at the time to be recognised 1942 was not the time to persist as the Government had more pressing War matters. However, this lack of status was to have its effect at the end of the War.

Our member Mabs Keppie was a Land Army girl, joining in August, 1942 and discharged at the end of the War in December, 1945 a period of 3 years and 4 months. She joined with her two sisters Ivy and Charlotte and their experiences were typical of most girls who decided to leave the comfort of their homes and families and their jobs, often in the City, to take on a very different life as their contribution to the War effort.

Although it was called 'Army' its structure was different to the usual Army services. It had no Officers only Supervisors and where applicable Matrons, all the girls were on the one level. They were supplied with work uniforms and a Khaki Dress uniform which was similar to the Australian Womens Army Service (AWAS) but with a different hat badge. Stars on the uniform showed years of service and Chevrons indicated an experienced worker but did not create a higher rank. Discipline was administered but that too was done in a different way. The main difference, however, was the girls were paid by the farmers and this too caused a stumbling block to their official recognition after the War.

When Mabs and her two sisters joined the Land Army they were asked "Can you milk a cow?" As they were country girls reared on the land at Woodburn they chorused "Yes, we can". They were assigned to a Sheep Station 'Booabula' at Wanganella halfway between Deniliquin and Hay, a far cry from the Dairy Farm they expected. The Manager was a shy man and on the arrival of the three young women he took to his bed rather than face them. His father, the owner of the property, settled the girls to their tasks until Mr. Wilfred recovered and took over.

The Station covered 66,000 acres with 43 paddocks, all named which the girls had to quickly learn. Ivy milked the house cows and looked after the garden while Charlotte and Mabs worked with the Sheep, each girl having 4 horses as they rode long distances. The thunder of the horses hooves early in the morning as the rouseabout on the great Welsh Cob, Mickey, brought the horses in was the signal for the days work to begin.

The owner of this property was reputed to be quite well off, his wife lived in Melbourne and he would drive his Rolls Royce with a charcoal burner on it down to visit her. Mabs also remembers a visit on New Years Eve of General Blaimy and his Chaplain.

Ivy was there for six months and then transferred to a mixed Station at Harden where she stayed until January, 1946, after the War. A few months after Ivy had gone the owner's wife visited from Melbourne and seemed to think Mr. Wilfred (her only son) was a bit too friendly with the Land Army girls so they were no longer required. Charlotte was sent to the Canberra area but unfortunately became ill and was later discharged on medical grounds.

The girls, on joining the Land Army, were given a Service book which set out their entitlements, clothing and equipment issued as well as a record of their service, dates sent to various positions, holidays etc. Mabs still has parts of her uniform issued while a member. This Book instructed the girls on their conduct and their duties which were outside rural work on farms although they could perform other work connected with Rural production, and in fact some Land Army girls worked indoors such as at the Sydney Egg Board.

The Farmers also had responsibilities as to the hours and type of work, 48 hours per week, no housekeeping work was to be included, accommodation was to be a required minimum standard and at least one other woman had to live on the property.

Most of the girls billeted on the farms were treated like one of the family but unfortunately there were employers who did not appreciate the workers and expected far too much from them, more than the regulations stated and treated the girls more like servants particularly regarding household chores.

Mabs discovered this after she left Wanganella and was sent to a mixed Station 'Arrowfield' at Jerry's Plains. There were sheep, 500 pigs and wheat and the work was very hard. The two previous Land Army girls only lasted three months because of the conditions. Mabs also complained and Headquarters sent her a rail ticket with instructions to leave immediately. No other Land Army member was sent to that Jerry's Plains property.

Brisbane Grove, Paterson was the next place for Mabs in November 1943 working for the Parish family while Mrs. Parish had a baby. This was a dairy farm and Mabs handmilked the cows, worked with draught horses and did all the things usually done on a dairy farm including a vegetable garden. There was a big milk strike on while Mabs was there but they still had to milk the cows by hand and pour the milk down the drain after all the hard work. Daylight saving was in so many late evenings were spent getting the hay in. Typical of a day at Brisbane Grove is the following entry in her diary. 'Boss away this morning. Mrs. Parish and I milked. I took the milk to the road on the slide with old Bloss. Cut a load of corn. Chipped melon vines. Beans are up. Cut another load of corn after tea' Anyone familiar with the farm at Brisbane Grove would know to get the milk out includes crossing the Railway line, down the hill, over Tuckers Creek and up the hill to the corner where the milk stand used to be, all with horse and slide - no tractor in those days, and making sure no milk spilled from the cans.

Meat, Bread and other supplies were obtained from Paterson but to get to Paterson Mabs would ride a horse to the end of the Railway

Bridge, walk across the Bridge and up to the Bakehouse to get four large tin loaves. Then to the Butchers putting all her purchases in a sugar bag to carry back over the Bridge. The boy at the Railway gates would know when a train was due and if it was safe to cross so it was a slower trip going back but coming over to Paterson had to be a bit speedy as there was nowhere to go if a train came onto the Bridge.

Free time for the Land Army girls was Saturday afternoon and Sunday and was usually spent doing their washing and tidying their rooms etc. There were usually Pictures to go to or tennis to play. Some places had dances or other functions to raise money for the War effort.

When Mrs. Parish was again fit for work Mabs was sent to a Sheep and Cattle Station at Lake Cargelligo. They were very kind people and no heavy work was expected of her. She looked after chooks, milked the house cows and gardening. Again her diary reveals the type of work done 'Filled wheat bin, got logs. Planted out 108 lettuce plants, chipped around peas and onions. Cut a bit of wood. Ploughed out rabbit burrows'

Mabs' story is typical of the many Land Army girls and like some others she remained in the Country, married Bill Keppie and settled at 'Glen Lossie'

After the War ended the Land Army girls were almost forgotten. The Victory March took place throughout the Country on 10th June, 1946 and in Sydney the girls marched behind the Boy Scouts. In Brisbane they were refused permission to March. Other places such as Newcastle they did march. For forty years they were refused permission to march in the Sydney Anzac Day Procession but in 1985 permission to march was finally given.

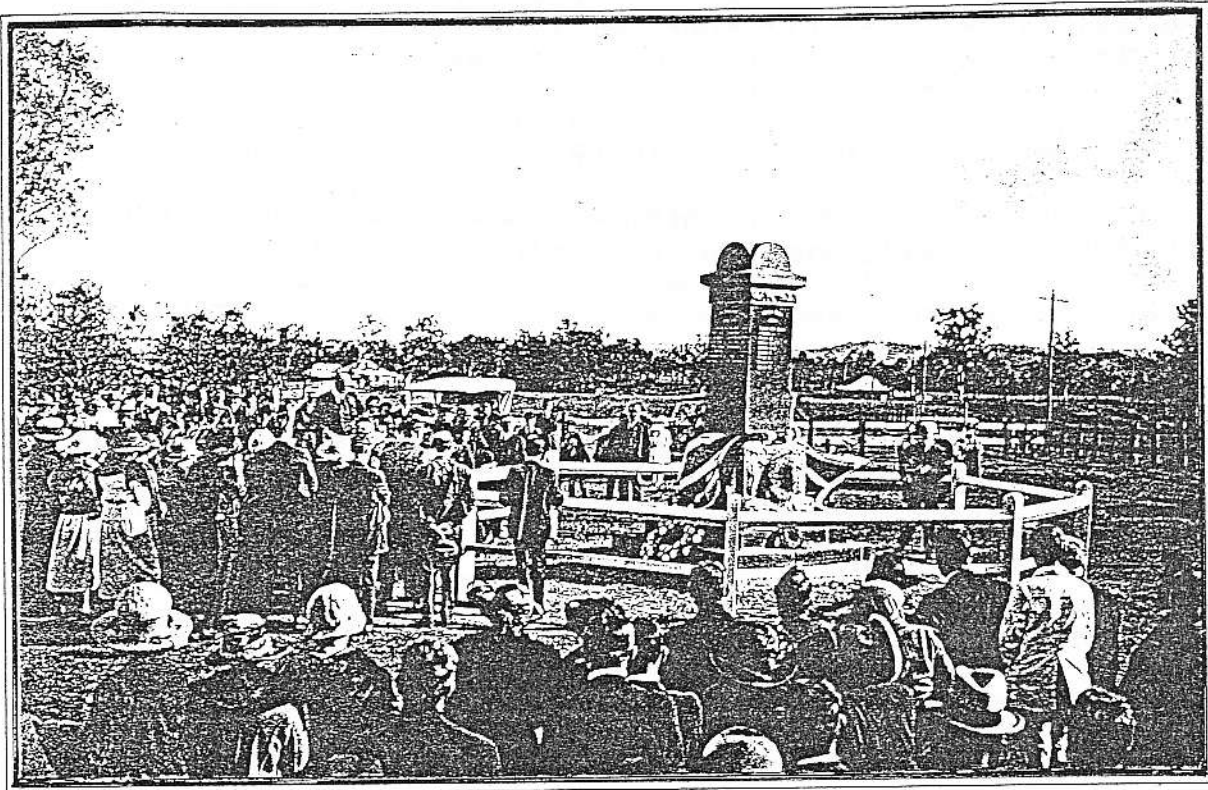
Ten years later in 1995 - Fifty years after the end of the War the Land Army women are proud to receive and wear a Medal in recognition of their service to their country in its time of greatest need. Unfortunately it has come too late for those girls who have passed on.

We, too, are proud that our Country has at last acknowledged this contribution made by Mabs, her sisters Ivy and Charlotte and the thousands of girls like them and the Australian Womens Land Army will be remembered with gratitude along with the other Services.

Source: Girls with Grit Jean Scott (Allen & Unwin)

SHIRLEY THRELFO





FROM OUR ARCHIVES:

Above photo shows the unveiling of the SOLDIERS WAR MEMORIAL, PATERSON by Mr W Keppie Snr commemorating those who had served in WW1 1914-18

MAITLAND MERCURY 17.8.1922 - THURSDAY - JACK SULLIVAN

Historical highlights from a very comprehensive coverage of the event.

- \* Official unveiling took place Sunday 13.8.1922
- \* Weather good - Attendance "fully 500 people"
- \* Monument erected on eastern portion of Paterson Park Ht.15feet
- \* Mr Henry Corner, President of Soldiers' Memorial Committee presided.
- \* Music supplied by Maitland Federal Band
- \* Mr William Keppie Snr removed veil (Mr W Keppie was father of Pte Arthur E Keppie who was the first local lad to enlist. He was also the first local soldier to be killed in action 26.4.1915 the day after the landing at Gallipoli)
- \* Monument erected by Messrs J J Edstein & Sons with credit
- \* The monument, including the new surrounding fence cost about £320, this debt cleared before the unveiling ceremony closed
- \* Project took over two years to complete
- \* Honour Roll on the northern face being headed with the name of Sister Cann ( Sister Amy Cann of Vacy)
- \* A Memorial Service was held that night at St Paul's to a capacity congregation
- \* A list of all subscribers to the building fund was listed