

HOWARD JONES writes about his latest book, *Wodonga City: A Jubilee History*, to be launched by the city council on Monday week.

wodonga: the city of **visionaries**



● **People of vision...**Main picture: the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and State Premiers Robert Askin and Rupert Hamer pose before signing the National Growth Centre agreement in 1973. And former civic leaders (clockwise from top) Les Boyes, Harold Draper, Pam Stone and Les Stone.



HISTORY is full of dreamers and Wodonga had plenty of them in the 1960s.

One vision was to create a city of 40,000 people in what was then a shire of 13,000, about 5000 of them post-war migrants.

The other visions were about getting the very best for Wodonga in health, education, recreation and roads.

The idea of Wodonga becoming a university city must have seemed crazy - almost as crazy as trying to get the highway, the railway and the saleyards out of the central area.

But where there's a will...

The visionaries knew nothing much would be possible without getting jobs, and they bent over backwards to get new industries to set up.

Uncle Ben's of Australia established in Wodonga in 1967 and has

been the greatest boon to Wodonga of any private employer.

Only the Army has been more important in employment terms.

Donga Meats also set up in 1967, followed quickly by Sarah Coventy and Sunicrust, which joined older industries like Bradford Kendall, Moore Paragon and Rocla.

All this happened while Wodonga was still a rural shire, with a township regarded by many as a poorer suburb of Albury that just happened to be in Victoria.

It was people like Crs Les Stone and John Schubert and the shire engineer, Mr Bill Page, who pushed not only for development, but also a very special quality of life.

Cr Schubert proposed making Wodonga not merely a city, but a rural city that would preserve rural charm and character while being more than another country town.

The idea coincided with the Whit-

lam Government decision to work with NSW and Victoria to establish the Albury-Wodonga National Growth Centre.

The three governments announced their proposals on January 25, 1973, and the Victorian Governor proclaimed a rural city on March 30.

Writing a city history of the 25 momentous years since then posed many problems.

What should you put in, and what should you leave out?

I finally decided this should firstly be about the achievements of Wodonga people, rather than simply a recital of how many factories opened, roads built or houses erected.

While the growth story and the work of the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation is explained, so too are the rich social life and sporting achievements of Wodonga

people. The caring role of the hospital and emergency service volunteers, and groups like Aware Industries and Murray Valley Centre, is an essential ingredient of Wodonga, for instance.

And what would Wodonga be without its saleyards, which have made it the greatest cattle selling centre in Australia?

Surprisingly, no one had yet written a history of the Army presence in Wodonga.

However, much of the history of former units may be seen exhibited in the Bandiana Museum.

The Fraser Government's decision to build Latchford Barracks and relocate the Army Apprentices School there in 1982-83, together with other units, was as important to Wodonga as Uncle Ben's arrival.

More recently, the creation of the Bandiana Logistic Group and the Army Logistic Training Centre,

have strengthened Wodonga's role in the nation's defence.

La Trobe University and Wodonga TAFE Institute are now taken for granted as core institutions but they took a long time from the dreams of the 1960s to become realities.

Finally, the book gives potted biographies of the mayors who led the city, and mentions watchdog councillors such as Mrs Betty McLean and Mr Les Cheesley, who have earned a special place in the city's history.

Until now, there has been no permanent record of Wodonga's city councillors, citizens and young citizens of the year and recipients of community service awards.

The book fills that gap by listing more than 100 names.

● *Wodonga City: A Jubilee History*, is published in hardback, price \$20.