A PICTURE FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Cummeragunga and its Historical connections with Coranderrk from written and oral sources.

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WAYNE ATKINSON
Melbourne,
February, 1981.
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**ORAL HISTORY: A HISTORY OF CUMMERAGUNGA AS TOLD BY ITS PEOPLE**

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ABORIGINAL CONTRIBUTORS contd.

*Judith Monk


*Contributed material and information in relation to Coranderrk's background history.
INTRODUCTION

The idea of this project first came to me while I was a student with the Aboriginal Task Force Training Program, at the Institute of Technology in Adelaide between 1975 and 1977. Our English and History teacher Rosemary Burden used to encourage us to find out more from our own communities about our history from the Aboriginal viewpoint. So during the end of year break, myself and other students used to collect information from our own places which we would share and discuss in our history classes. These discussions helped to answer a lot of the questions we had as Aboriginal people about our backgrounds, identity and the history behind us as a people.

I became especially interested in the history behind Aboriginal missions and reserves. At that point I already knew some of the history which was told to me by my parents and grandparents who lived on Cummeragunga. However I wanted to find out more for myself about the Aboriginal experience of reserve life.

The first place I looked for answers was in books, which I found very solid work. Most of the books were written by non-Aboriginal people who had never lived on a reserve, and their accounts were so far removed from actual life experience as to be quite unreal. The language was complicated and there was no feeling, no emotion in it. In all, these books didn't answer the questions I was asking.

Then I decided to go back to the people and talk to them. It was from there that I became involved in recording and documenting Aboriginal peoples' recollections of reserve life and their own life experience, or in short "A Picture from the Other Side," which became the central theme of my project because I thought the non-Aboriginal side of the story had been well covered.

When I first took the idea to the elder Aboriginal people I got various reactions: some felt it was a "big job" to take on; some felt it was something that should have been done a long time ago; and in general they supported it and thought it was a "good idea". So the next thing was to set about the task of doing it.

The material in this document comes from 50 taped interviews with older Aboriginal people who themselves lived on reserves, and from numerous written documents which record happenings previous to living memory. It is arranged in two parts:

CHAPTERS 1 - 4 : Background history of Coranderrk & Cummera from non-Aboriginal documents (to 1880)
CHAPTERS 5 - 12 : Oral History of Cummera, told by its people (1880-1980).

Some readers may want to skip the first 4 chapters and come right on to the people's history in chapter 5.

The background history covers research into the beginnings of two Aboriginal reserves, Cummeragunga and Coranderrk. Both reserves, although some 130 miles apart, were closely related from pre contact times to the present day. Cummeragunga in N.S.W. on the Vic/NSW border, and Coranderrk near Healesville in Victoria, were populated by the survivors of the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang tribes of the Murray River, and the Kulin nation of central and southern Victoria.

In order to explain the inter relationship between the reserve communities, I have traced their histories back to traditional times, and then through to the period when the people were first granted reserve lands by the Government. From there my main focus has been on the story of Cummeragunga people from the beginning of the community to the present day.

In doing this I have used both written and oral sources. The written sources document events through the eyes of the early squatters, protectors and missionaries, and the records of Government reports, together with more recent studies by anthropologists and historians. The oral sources are Aboriginal peoples' recollections of their experiences of reserve life.

I have combined these sources to give a picture of reserve life, using written sources to show the background of Government policies and administration against which people lived their lives.

The oral history as I see it is a PEOPLE'S HISTORY. It is the history of a people who have been able to withstand the oppressive laws, restrictions and conditions of reserve life and survive - still retaining their identity, pride, sense of humour and wisdom. It is therefore important for all Australians to understand and appreciate this experience.

Cummeragunga history as told by its people covers the struggles and hardships they experienced, and the good times they shared together as a community who were able to weather the storms as they came. And their spirit remained strong. Many attempts were made by Governments, through restrictive laws and policies, to try and wipe out Aboriginal culture; but the spirit of the people although sometimes badly shattered, recovered and became strong again.

The chapters follow the historical developments and major events that took
place on Cummeragunga as people experienced them. These accounts as to the achievements and failures of developments are interwoven with statements about Government policies towards the reserve. This gives a picture of the behind the scenes powers, decisions, and governing factors which determined its achievements and failures.

Oral history to Aboriginal people isn't anything new, as a matter of fact written history is the new thing because only when missions and reserves were first set up were pen and paper introduced. Before that oral history, or oral tradition, was part of their culture, and their history was passed on that way. The reader will get a feel of my people's gift for story telling, humour, and philosophy, and their extraordinary memories of past events through this manuscript.

There is an urgency about recording and documenting oral history today because over the years, particularly after people were forced to move away from reserves under the assimilation policy, we've lost a lot of the oral history. When people were living together on the reserve in a larger community it was passed on more. Since the movement away and the dispersal of people in the general community it has become fragmented, which is why we must work at recording it now so that it can be retained and passed on to our following generations.

The Aboriginal people I consulted in this project are the sources from which Aboriginal history should be coming. I therefore recommend that interested people go and consult with these people who have a lot of answers to questions that are not answered elsewhere. Besides that, they enjoy it and feel good about sharing their experiences, knowledge and wisdom with those who are interested in learning.
BACKGROUND HISTORY OF CUMMERAGUNGA

AND CORANDERRK

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CHAPTER 1. ORIGINS

TRIBES AND THEIR TERRITORIES

The Aboriginal people who formed the population of Cummeragunga* and Coranderrk were descendents of tribes belonging to the Kulin nation of southern and central Victoria and the Jotijota, Pangerang and Kwatkwat tribes of the Goulburn Valley and Murray River area.

According to Tindale's estimates of the area occupied by these tribes in Victoria, the total area would have been approximately 29,800 square miles (Tindale 1974). This area geographically would be about a third of the total territories occupied by Aborigines in Victoria before the coming of Europeans. It takes in the lands from Melbourne, extending south and both sides of Port Phillip Bay to the coast, pushing north over the Great Dividing Range along the main river systems - Campaspe, Goulburn, Broken and Ovens Rivers - to the Murray, and into New South Wales.

The tribes who occupied the Goulburn Valley and Murray River area were the Pangerang, Jotijota and Kwatkwat (Tindale 1974). The first European observations of these tribes was by Edmund Curr, who took up a squatter's run in that area in 1841 in the territory of the Bangerang (Curr).

Curr lived there for 10 years (1841-51) and was able to document the names of tribes, their customs and various aspects of traditional culture. His observations were that there was only one major tribe in that area being the Bangerang which had two independant sections, the Wongatpan and Towroonban, and eight sub tribes, i.e.

BANGERANG TRIBE

Independent Sections: WONGATPAN
TOWROONBAN

Sub Sections: WOLLITHICA
KAILTHIBAN ...contd.

*(This spelling is used by Aboriginal people today, who also refer to it affectionately as "Cummera". "Cumeroogunga" was the spelling used by the NSW Protection and Welfare Boards.*)
Curr states that the Pikkolatpan (or Kwatkwat:Tindale) who occupied the territory on the N.S.W. side north to Tocumwal used to speak of the Bangerang as Yoorta or No Blacks but he never heard them use that term themselves. (Curr 1887:567-9)

The late Ronald Morgan talks about the Yorta Yorta tribe in his book "Reminiscences of the Aboriginal Station at Cummeragunga and its Aboriginal People", 1952. He was born in Cummera and lived there most of his life. His father was Bagot Morgan who was born in 1849 and belonged to the Yorta Yorta tribe and his mother was Elizabeth Walker of the Yullaba Yullaba tribe (Pangerang:Tindale) which, he says, extended from the Moira Lakes on the Murray upstream beyond what is now the town of Tocumwal. The tribe known as the Yorta Yorta adjoined the Yullaba Yullaba and extended down the River Murray to Echuca and out to join some of the Goulburn River tribes.

Throughout this historical outline, I shall use the following names to refer to these tribes. Tindale names three separate tribes in the region around Cummera:

1. JOTIJOTA ...
   This is pronounced the same as Ronald Morgan's Yorta Yorta, which is the spelling I shall use rather than the Anthropological spelling.

2. PANGERANG )

3. KWATKWAT ) ...
   These two tribes were related, and I shall refer to them simply as the Bangerang as used by Curr from the Aboriginal pronunciation.
Going by Tindale's research in which he has drawn together all of the primary sources relating to tribal boundaries in Australia, providing a more comprehensive up to date version of tribal boundaries in Victoria, we can say that the original territories occupied by the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang were:

From Kow Swamp in the west near Cohuna to Beechworth in eastern Victoria covering both sides of the Murray in Yorta Yorta territory spreading north to Deniliquin. The total area takes in the Moira forest and Lakes up to Ulupna near Tocumwal, and the major rivers Campaspe, Goulburn, Broken and Ovens rivers where they run through Yorta Yorta/Bangerang territories into the Murray. This total area is some 5,600 square miles.

Tindale's estimation of the areas the Kulin tribes occupied is in total some 24,200 square miles. So this brings us to the total area as previously mentioned occupied by the original people of Cummeragunga and Coranderrk as being some 29,800 square miles of territory.

**ORIGINAL POPULATION**

For estimates of the original populations of tribes occupying these territories one has to rely on the enumerations made by squatters, Crown Land Commissioners, protectors, missionaries, and the Protection Board (1835-1863). Estimates in 1839-41 showed the Bangerang/Yorta Yorta tribes to number not less than 1200 and their southern neighbours the Kulin tribes numbered approximately 1,505 (Barwick 1972:14). By that time considerable numbers had died from small pox. During the spreading out of Europeans and the wool/gold industries in Victoria between 1835-1860, another rapid decrease took place among these 2,705 tribesmen, for by 1863 the Victorian Aborigines Protection Board enumerated only 365 survivors, a decline of 85% in 25 years.
The total Aboriginal population in Victoria before the invasion of Europeans and their stock was estimated to be 15,000 (Curr 1883:107), and during the same period this number was reduced to less than 3,000, less than a quarter of the original population. This massive reduction is attributed by Christie (1979) to the effects of introduced diseases and resistance warfare which I will discuss later on.

TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE

The tribes of the Kulin nation and Bangerang each occupied a recognised area, which was marked by specific boundaries of rivers, trees, mountains, creeks, rocks and many other things that had a special meaning and relationship to each tribe and its territories. Each tribe abided by a strict code of laws that governed them within their own territories, and there was no invasion of another's territory by a tribe to increase their own. If entry into another tribe's territory was made without invitation, then that person could be faced with punishment or death. Certain occasions occurred throughout the year where tribes would come together to settle social and ceremonial matters and uphold the law.

There were also trade links established between the Murray River tribes and the mountain people and it has also been established by earlier observers that intermarriage and migration existed between the Yorta Yorta, Bangerang and the Kulin tribes. "Through intermarriage and migration they have formed one population from precontact times to the present day" (Barwick 1972:15).

This is illustrated by George Augustus Robinson's report to the 1845 Select Committee where he describes the tribes of the Kulin Nation and the Bangerang of the Murray meeting together on friendly terms at frequent periods. During his period as Chief Protector 1838-49 there was a meeting of eight or nine hundred from these tribes which took place near Melbourne.
TRADE

Traditional people of the Murray needed stone for their axes to cut canoe trees, coolamons, and other artefacts, so somewhere along the line they developed a trade system with the Wurundjeri people who were the custodians of Mount Williams stone quarry near Lancefield.

"The Murray and Goulburn river natives traded with each other, exchanging large bundles of spears for diorite (stone) from the quarry at Mt. William. The pieces of stone were carried in "possum cloaks" and "stone axes were used many miles north of the Murray River. Shields, spears, skins etc. were bartered for them." (Smythe 1978: 181,359).

Isabel McBryde supports this in her studies of the distribution of stone axes in South East Australia (McBryde 1976).

The reeds that were traded came from the extensive reed beds of the Murray around Lake Moira near Barmah and Swan Hill.

There is still plenty of evidence today in the Barmah and Moira forests with the scared trees that remain there. You can see where canoes have been cut out, and notches for climbing in pursuit of one of their main sources of food, the possum.

FOOD

The Bangerang territory could have supported twice the number of Aborigines Curr found there in his time. They lived well all year round and there was an abundance of food - plenty of fish, possums, kangaroos, emu, fruit and vegetable plants which provided well for them. The same applied to their southern neighbours who were supplied with the same food resources along the rivers, creeks and rich pasture lands of central and southern Victoria.

INTER TRIBAL COMMUNICATION

Curr observed that there was a system of communication which existed between tribes who used to have messengers who went from one tribe to another to arrange the times and places of meetings and corroborees, and also to gather news.
Messengers occasionally brought with them a small stick on which there were several notches, which they call yiletta (letters) to pass information on to other tribes. These men who Curr called postmen, kept tribes informed of what was happening in their neighbourhood and on this principal Curr believes strongly "that the first settlement of whites at Sydney was known for 2-300 miles around before many months elapsed." (Curr 1883:132,133).

As well as "the postman", there were links between certain languages. Louise Hercus from her research found 3 major language subdivisions: the Kulin, the Gippsland, and the Upper Murray/Coulburn Valley. Languages within these subdivisions had similarities which helped overcome the barriers of language. In many cases, people understood their neighbour's languages.

Non-verbal communication by an elaborate system of hand signals and facial expressions was also used in inter-tribal communication.

FEUDS AND ALLIANCES

The relationship between the Murray and Goulburn tribes became somewhat hostile at times which resulted in tribal fights and what was called paybacks. This sort of conflict arose from the traditional belief that when a member of a tribe died there was some unnatural cause behind it which was associated with the neighbouring tribe and had to be paid back or dealt with by a combat taking place between the revenging and the accused tribes.

Early Europeans, e.g. Albert Le Souef (a squatter at Tallygaroopna 1855) and Curr, observed fights taking place between the Bangerang and Ngooraialum (Taungerong).

A Bangerang tribesman had lost a son and, suspecting that the death had been caused by one of the Ngooraialum, he went there in an attempt to avenge his son's death. This resulted in a fight between the two tribes. Le Souef remarks "when the fight commenced I got behind a tree and watched the combat. I thought that some would have been killed; but when quiet was restored, I found that no great damage had been done; one man was severely cut in the throat by a boomerang, another had a spear through his leg and a few broken heads made up the sum total of casualties."
"That night a grand corroboree was held, and the tribes seem to have forgotten their quarrel, and to be on the best possible terms again." (West 1962:15).

Curr points out that when he first settled in their country the Bangerang tribes were all in close alliance and in a chronic state of war with the Ngooralalum and other tribes which surrounded them." (Curr 1883:146).

Having established the interrelationship between the Kulin, Yorta Yorta and Bangerang tribes, I want to now focus on the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang and discuss more of their traditional history. I will come back to the Kulin in the Protectorate period 1838-49.

YORTA YORTA/BANGERANG COUNTRY

When one drives through the Barrah and Moira Forests it's hard to picture the history relating to the area and how just over 140 years ago in the period of my Great Grandparents, there was a population of some 1,200 Aborigines occupying that area. There are two oven mounds located in the Barrah Forest on either side of a lagoon and, as told to me by Aboriginal descendants, this was a place where food used to be supplied to the people, from the Murray. When it filled up the lagoon it provided fish, crayfish, and a nesting ground for the turtle which is regarded as a delicacy by Aborigines.

When standing on the top of one of these mounds which have accumulated over thousands of years, you can get a feeling of the life and activities that would have been going on. The men and women carrying out their respective duties in preparation for the feast while the children played and waited anxiously for food to be cooked. After the feast, then they would gather around while the wise old men would tell the stories that were handed down to them by their forefathers of the dreamtime and how the rivers, trees, animals, were all created by the great spirit Biami.

THE CREATOR

"Biami was the creator of the great river Tongala, (Murray). He sent his old lubra down out of the high country, with her yam stick and her dogs to journey.."
across the flat and waterless plain.

Biami had sent his giant snake after her to keep an eye on her. She had walked for many miles, drawing a line in the sand with her stick, and behind her came the snake, following in and out all about, making the curves of the river bed with his body. Then Biami spoke in a voice of thunder, and lightning flashed above the high rock that was his place. Rain fell and water came flowing down the track the old woman and the snake had made. After many moons she came to the sea, and went to sleep in a cave: while her dogs ran off and kicked up the sandhills about the river mouth." (Cato 1975:4).

Places of historical significance still existing today in the Barmah/Moira forest are still told to people by descendants of the original people.

THE MOIRA

Ronald Morgan who I previously mentioned recorded some of these historical places like the Moira Lakes which was once a meeting place of tribes and later supplied the gold fields and Melbourne markets with plenty of fish and wild ducks. The lakes on both sides of the river were known to the older people as the Moira Lakes but in recent years those in Victoria have been called the Barmah Lakes, while those in NSW still retain the original name of Moira Lakes. (morgan 1952:4).

"Moira" was the Yorta Yorta name for a tract of country on the south side of the Murray just upstream from Barmah Creek (Curr 1883:76). It is my opinion that Moira Station, which was established on the opposite side, took its name from this rich area of country.

Above the lakes the Murray river was referred to in the early days as the narrow river, and in later years became known as "the narrows".

WAR CREEK

Another historical site further up the Murray from the lakes on the Victoria side is known as "War Creek" where the legend is that the two tribes met, from the Murray and from further north, who were hostile towards each other, and a tribal war was fought there. The story has it that many were killed in the battle and were buried there. So it became known as War Creek to following generations.
ALGABONYAH

Further down the river Ronald Morgan talks about a very beautiful long green grassed plain which was known as Algabonyah "a word often used by Aborigines when speaking of some young miss blessed with the fortune of being good looking and handsome. The place was very often referred to by old Aborigines as Miss Algabonyah". (Morgan 1952:5). This could well be the place Daniel Mathews refers to in Mr. Maloga "where Aborigines told him there was a grand gathering of between 400 and 500 of the Blacks at Easter time" (Cato 1976:29).

THE BOUGHYARD

Another of the significant places further down the river towards Barmah is "the Boughyard" - "a place where Aborigines built a yard of boughs and brambles in the dry months and in the flood time they would go out in their canoes and spotting a shoal of fish drive them as one would a herd of cattle into the yard where they would be an easier target to spear." (Morgan 1952:6). Aborigines adapted later on to a different method of fishing with the introduction of nets and fishing lines, which replaced fish traps and spears.

THE BUNYIP HOLE

Near the present day Barmah Caravan Park there was one very special place that Aborigines were extra sensitive to - "the Bunyip Hole".

Ronald Morgan says that he had heard many people speak of the Bunyip. "Some people believe such an animal, whatever it was, existed; others think it was a superstitious belief of the Aborigines. For my part, I believe there was such an animal. If asked to describe it, I would say it was like nothing so much as a pig, that its habits were shy and harmless and to my way of thinking it is now extinct." (Morgan 1952:6).

Whether the Bunyip was a superstitious belief or not, there was never an Aboriginal child in that area that died through drowning.

SACRED MEETING PLACE

The actual place where Daniel Mathews established his Maloga Mission "was known to be a great gathering place and corroboree ground for as long as anyone could
remember which Mathews was told by two old men of the Echuca tribe (Yorta Yorta)". (Cato 1976:28).

This same site was to cause problems for Curr when he established an out station to his run on the Victorian side, which I will elaborate on later.

CANOE TREES

I mentioned earlier about stone from Mt. Williams being used for axes and tomahawks. Today there are still scared trees remaining in the forest from where bark canoes were cut. The process and skill behind making bark canoes is best described by Curr, as the Bangerang helped to transport his sheep across the Goulburn in one, when he first arrived at his Tongala run in 1841.

MAKING A BARK CANOE

An old tree was selected, as well for its size as for the thickness of its bark, and also a little curved, in such a way that the canoe, which was to be peeled off it, might have its bow elevated a little above the water. Having roughly marked out the shape of the canoe on the tree the cutting with the tomahawk began down to the wood so as to detach from the tree an unbroken sheet of bark. To do this the tree was climbed gradually, by placing the big toe in notches that are cut before hand and were used as steps, the blackfellow holding on with one hand and one heel whilst he used the tomahawk in the other. He also assisted himself by leaning a stout branch against the tree to use as a ladder to stand on while he chopped. Having cut the bark all around the next thing was to remove it from the tree. This was done by hammering the canoe gently all over with the butt of the tomahawk to loosen it from the wood, and by forcing the end of the pole here and there under the edges of the bark and prizing steadily. Gradually in this matter it was detached from the tree and to assist in preventing the canoe falling, a piece of cord was fastened around the centre and the last bit of bark by which it was attached was cut and steadily lowered to the ground. Once landed it was placed in an upside down position and a small fire was lit to dry up the sap and toughen the bark as to allow it to be moulded into the required shape. In a minute or two the fire was burned out, the canoe was righted and two or three pieces of stick were inserted to keep the sides in shape.
The bow was permanently elevated, being forced into the required position by means of a log being placed under it. The entrance of water at the stern was prevented by placing a wall of well kneaded clay in that part. (Curr 1883:50).

The Canoe Curr describes here was about 18 feet long, 2 feet 6 inches wide, floating 8 inches clear of the water and would carry five persons; and in the case of Curr’s sheep being crossed it held six at a time, with their legs tied while an Aboriginal punted them over.

There is a canoe tree in the Shepparton Museum for interested people.

THE POSSUM TREE

Besides canoe trees there were trees marked with notches for possum hunting which was one of the main sources of food for the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang, and also clothing. Possum skin cloaks were made from skins which were pegged out and sewn together to make a cloak for the winter months. Pieces of stone that were traded for reed spears were carried in these possum cloaks.

There is a tree in the Moira forest as pointed out to me by Colin Walker, an Aboriginal descendent of the area, that still bears the marks or notches that were cut in pursuit of the possum. It would be impossible to gauge how old the tree is but there is clear evidence by the tree and the scars it was a very long time ago.

WE NEED TO KEEP OUR SACRED HERITAGE

What we have in the Baroona/Moira forest and along the rivers and lakes today in Yorta Yorta/Bangerang territory is the material evidence of a culture that lived there and survived for thousands of years before the coming of Europeans. This heritage belongs to the descendents of the Yorta Yorta / Bangerang people who still identify strongly with those areas and the legends and stories that were told to them by their ancestors. Most European people today are unaware of the history behind Maloga and Cummeragunga which stretches back into the past and links itself with these places I have talked about from both European and Aboriginal interpretations.

A lot of work is being done today by various groups interested in preservation and protection of historical buildings and places of interest which have
arisen since European history started here, so that the history can be restored and held for the following generations. The history of some of the special places I have mentioned here have a much greater right to be preserved and protected because their history stretches back some 50,000 years before the coming of white man.

My view is that these special places should be regarded as sacred, because they are part of a traditional culture that had a special relationship and affinity with these places and the whole environment around them. They marked certain events that took place every year such as the fishing places when the river was right; the meeting places where tribes met to celebrate certain social and religious events, to uphold the law and their traditional values and beliefs; the oven mounds of burnt clay, animal and fish bones, where the tribe gathered to cook their food and pass on the history to the young by way of oral tradition.

Let's try and do something urgently to preserve and protect these places and this very fragile material evidence. These sacred things are important as they are a direct link with our Aboriginal heritage, and are in danger of being destroyed by the invasion of tourists, campers and speedboats ever increasing in the area.

I want to now look at the contact situation in the area and talk about the effects European settlement had on traditional culture and lifestyle.
CHAPTER 2. FIRST INTRUDERS AND ABORIGINAL RESISTANCE

FIRST INTRUDERS

Not long after settlement took place around Sydney, expeditions into the interior began with Hume and Hovell and Major Mitchell pushing out and discovering the rich grazing country in the South East, Port Phillip districts, and along the major river systems. Their discoveries, together with overlanders Hawden, Bonney and Sturt soon gave stimulus to land seekers back in Sydney, who were quick to move out beyond the official areas of settlement around Sydney in search of grazing land in the South, to establish squatter runs for the development of the wool industry.

The first known white party to enter into the traditional homelands of the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang were Charles Bonney and Joseph Hawden in 1838 who were overlanding cattle from Mitchellstown on the Goulburn. (Incidentally, Mitchellstown was the first site of the Goulburn river Protectorate station for the Goulburn Aborigines established in 1839 under the care of assistant protector James Dredge.)

"Their purpose was to move mobs of cattle overland for sale to meat hungry Adelaide but today these men are better remembered as explorers." (Coulson 1979:6). YANIKAI! — GO AWAY!

They travelled along the Goulburn until they reached the junction of the Murray and then west along the Murray in the direction of Echuca where they came into contact with what would have been part of the Woolithiga or Yorta Yorta tribe camped on the Campaspe near its junction with the Murray.

Hawden commented "We here fell in with a tribe of Natives, consisting principally of old men, women and children. They were much alarmed on seeing us, but as open plains were on both sides of the creek they could not easily make their escape. Observing a flock of white macaws (parrots) I shot one of them and gave it to one of the old men, who received it gladly, but still
repeating the word "YANIKA" (Go away). Proceeding to the creek to a crossing place, I there found a lame old man collecting bulbous roots on the plain. He shook his stick at the men and poured forth a volley of angry language, much to their amusement, but kept gradually limping out of our way to join his tribe." (Hawdon 1953:8)

The Aboriginal reactions to Hawden's party could be seen as a response to his trespassing on tribal territories without being invited, which in fact was a serious intrusion under traditional law that governed territories and was clearly understood by other tribes. Hawden was breaking this law and was ignorant to the real reasons behind the Aborigines becoming angry and telling him to - YANIKA (Go away).

SMALL POX

The next white person to come uninvited into these territories was Sturt only 4 months after Hawden's expedition. He left Sydney in April 1838 with some 400 head of cattle and set off along the Hume (Murray) from a point near Albury on the north side bank until reaching the Edward River where they crossed the Murray with the assistance of Aborigines who were there. Sturt "noted with concern that the natives who helped him across the Murray near the Edward junction had skins "pitted as if by smallpox". He concluded, after seeing so few, that many must have died from the disease and remarked on the number of fresh graves seen in the locality." (Coulson 1979:9).

Curr, who I'm going to talk about next, also reported that the Bangerang, Pinpandoor (Ngurelbaq), Ngoorailum (Taungerong) and other neighbouring tribes bore the same marks during his early days at Tongala in 1843 and a large decrease took place through this disease.

SQUATTERS

After Hawden, Bonney and Sturt's overlanding expeditions had confirmed the earlier reports of Hume, Hovell and Mitchell, squatters were next to come with their sheep taking up runs along the major river systems where there was the best prospect of permanent water. The first squatters to move into Yorta Yorta/Bangerang
territories were Edmund Curr in 1841 and across the Murray came Henry Lewes and Charles Throsby in 1842. Both parties had direct contact with the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribe and the runs they officially took up were actually in their territories.

Lewes and Throsby's run was named Moira station (from the Aboriginal name for the area opposite), and consisted of a 14 mile frontage on the Murray and inland for five miles from the river.

curr's run was on the Victoria side of the Murray with approximately 25 miles of frontage on the Murray from the Goulburn junction to upper Barmah lakes and inland for about ten miles. He also had about a 12 mile by 4 mile stretch on the south side of the Goulburn towards what is now Tongala, and another section which he called his trans-Murray section where Maloga Mission was later established. In all Curr occupied an area of roughly 180 sq. miles of original Yorta Yorta/Bangerang territory.

The way in which land was taken up in those days was that when squatters found a piece of land, they would then apply for a licence from the Crown Land Commissioner. He had authority to issue licences for depasturing stock and also to settle any disputes between squatters and Aborigines, always in favour of the squatters. The Commissioners for Curr's run came under the Murray District of the Port Phillip District, and Lewes and Throsby's run was in the Murrumbidgee district.

Curr seemed to have developed good relations with the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang and on his first arrival he was able to make contact and was assisted by them to transport his sheep across the Goulburn River portion of his run.

However it was his instruction to his men that they should always carry guns...

"from the very beginning I kept my party armed and insisted on shepherds carrying guns and keeping them in a serviceable state. In this course I persisted for several years until danger ended." (Curr 1883:52)

.../16.
CONFLICT

Curr was only there a short time when an incident happened at the adjoining Wyuna station which was occupied by an ex-convict, ex-soldier who, a victim of his own society, shot one of the Bangerang blacks when he approached his hut. "On examining I found that he had a wound through the thick part of his arm, and, calling one of the other Blacks, I learned that Nosie - as he was named - had been that morning at the cattle station at Wyuna, about three miles off; that he had laid down his arms before going up to the hut and that the hutkeeper who was alone, had apparently ordered him off. Nosie, understanding neither his words nor gestures, remained where he was, (unaware) of danger, when suddenly a gun was protruded from the hut; then followed a great noise... and a part of his beard was torn with considerable force from his chin. Greatly frightened, the unfortunate, it seems, took to his heels and ran off as quickly as he could, but he had not gone far when he heard a repetition of the loud noise, and something which he did not see tore through his arm."

(Curr 1883:53)

Curr after attending to Nosie went across to the Wyuna station and confronted the hutkeeper who replied: "As many of them as comes here while I'm alone I'll shoot." Curr threatened to report him to the law if he did, reminding him of the consequences, he being an ex-convict.

ABORIGINAL REACTIONS

Curr's first contact with the tribesmen around the lake began shortly after his Goulburn station was established, and he started looking for more country up along the Murray around the Barmah Lakes area. He set off on a journey with his brother and came to a spot at the mouth of what he called the BAALA, which is now referred to as the Barmah creek.

Here he made contact with a group of Bangerang who occupied the Barmah creek and lakes area who he called the Wangatpan. They numbered "certainly no less than 150" at that time. (Curr 1883:103)
He was able to make friends with one of the tribesmen there, "Tommy" who offered to canoe him down the Murray to Barmah, so Curr could see the river frontage between the Barmah Creek and Barmah. "Tommy, a rather civilized Black who had often been at the head station and spoke English pretty well" embarked with Curr in a canoe "like those commonly in use at the Moira, of which there were about 30, (made) of very thick red gum, something over 20 feet long, with a small fire – on which a duck might be grilled – burning on a hearth of clay in the bows." (Curr 1883:79)

As they travelled down the river towards Barmah, Tommy pointed out the owners of the country on both sides of the river, the Moitheriban on the other side and the side they embarked from belonging to his section...the WANGATPAN. Further down the river Tommy pointed out certain places such as the fishing weir at the mouth of a creek they were passing which belonged to some old man and there was another one further on which was the property of a KOGOMOOLGA meaning recently initiated youth, then another one further up where the creek was drawing back the last of its floodwaters. The fish remaining in this trap belonged to an old man too, who Tommy pointed out. These were all very special places to the Murray people. The fishing weirs or traps that Tommy talks about here are in the same areas as the Bourgh Yard which I talked about earlier from Ronald Morgan's recollections. There must have been a direct link with one of the three that Tommy was telling him about then.

Further down the river they came into contact with a fishing party of Aborigines in the middle of the river who Curr was informed by Tommy had never seen a white fella before. The party consisting of women, old men and children, on seeing a pale faced stranger invading their territories soon headed for the shore and hurried for cover into the trees.
There was one very old man who Tommy spoke of as Warri's father who refused to retire. "He had never before seen a white man. His fishing spear quivered in his hand, and... he howled, abused, and spat at me in a fury, asking, as Tommy afterwards explained, why I came to the Moira? What I wanted? That I was a demon from the grave! That the water the fish and the ducks belonged to his tribe. That he spat at me and hated me. That I was PEKKA (a ghost), but that man or devil he would spear me!" (Curr 1883:81)

The rest of the tribe who had gone into the bush wanted him to come away and join them, as they were aware of the gun that Curr held in his hands. As Curr's boat drew further to the bank a young girl appeared from the bush and walked steadily towards the old man.

As she approached the old man to get him to come back to the tribe, Curr being "curious to test the temper of the people" raised his gun to his shoulder. The young girl only a few yards off aware of the action looked him full in the face and without altering her course, gathered her opossum-rug tightly, and passed by close to the gun to the old man. Addressing him in a low soft tone, she took his hand in hers and led him back to the tribe. Curr asked Tommy later "what name belong to young girl?" Tommy replied "UNDYARING". Mavis Thorpe Clark, in "The boy from Cummeragunga" uses this same incident to describe Aboriginal reactions to their first meeting with the white man.

This was only the start of what was to come from the Murray River tribes and their fellow tribes throughout the continent, as the invasion of Europeans and their stock pushed out into their tribal homelands destroying these sacred areas, hunting grounds, fishing weirs, and traditional way of life. The question to be asked here is how did the Aboriginal people feel about this uninvited intrusion into their territories?
THE RESISTANCE STRUGGLE

The Yorti Yorta/Bangerang didn't feel too good about it and certainly didn't walk away in passive resistance to what was happening. Past history has attempted to cover up the reality of what happened during the frontier period. The main reason as Michael Christie puts it (in his studies of the resistance struggle in Victoria (1835-1886) is because:

"It served the interests of the colonizers to define Australia as an area that had been peacefully annexed rather than invaded and stolen territory, for if it were recognised as stolen territory, then there is a case for treaties or some form of compensation for land stolen e.g. land rights."

Christie goes on to say that "the myth that Aborigines failed to fight needs to be explored not in order to say that Aborigines were as capable as Englishmen in killing others in battle; but rather to show that they cared for their homelands and did not step aside and let the invaders take it without a fight". (Christie 1979 (a)).

There is plenty of evidence of the resistance struggle that existed along the Murray, around Moira and Tongala stations in the 1840s. Aborigines during this period inflicted great stock losses to squatters and fought desperately to retain their traditional homelands against the invasion by squatters and their stock.

ATTACKS ON MOIRA STATION

During the 1840s "Aborigines continued to attack the white intruders and by September 1842 had driven some settlers off their properties. During the next two months Lewes of Moira Station noted that Gwynne brothers' herds were twice driven from their Edward River properties and brought to Moira for safety. All the men from Green's Barham station left and fled to Moira, while those surviving a raid on Wills' Morago station - where two shepherds had been murdered - also took refuge there."
"Moira station itself was attacked on 27th September 1842. Under the heading 'Attack on Moira by the natives forestalled' Lewes wrote: 'A large number of natives came, some in canoes, who commenced parleying with me, while two other lots had landed at some distance and were endeavouring to make way, unperceived, to the back of the huts. Others were making their way from tree to tree, with their long spears, through the swamps some 200 yards from the buildings. One powerful native carrying a very long spear, was approaching very stealthily to get within reach of a young man who was quietly digging some ground for a garden near the end of the swamp and to whom I made a sign to come away.'

"At this moment, when it was evident that the blacks were about to make a run upon the station, a sergeant of the Border Police who had been watching their movements from his place of concealment in the kitchen, came out and fired at the natives above alluded to. The ball fell short, but near the black, who made his escape with all speed. A panic at once seized the whole of the natives. Those who were to have attacked the station from the back were seen tearing down the high bank to escape to their canoes in the swamp, which were loaded with spears, and in their haste raising dust like that of a mob of cattle. We endeavoured to capture some of the canoes but found them too far away in the water for us to reach them. The canoe belonging to the native who had done the parleying we did not give him time to take away - in it we found portions of a freshly killed sheep. We tried very hard to capture this black, who was I have no doubt, the author and planner of this formidable attack upon the Moira station but, what with diving and swimming, he managed to get clear away and into deep water and reed beds of the lake.'" (Coulson 1979:112,113).
Moira station was later to become one of the main stations where Aborigines sought refuge when they were pushed out of their homelands. It also employed many Aboriginal people as stationhands, servants, cooks, boundary riders, and so on. My Grandfather Henry (Harry) Atkinson was an employee there as a station hand for some 35 years.

THE MURRAY CAMPAIGN

The resistance struggle continued throughout the 1840s with attacks further up the river and throughout central and north east Victoria where Michael Christie establishes that JAARA, NGURELBAN, TAUNGURONG, MINJAMBUTA, BANGERANG and KWATKWAT tribes of these areas "carried on an equally extensive campaign involving the disruption of stock routes, the harassment of shepherds and pastoral workers and the dispersion of sheep and cattle. In an area known as the Murray District a combined force of three hundred Pangerang attacked George Faithfull's overlanding party on 11th April 1838 at the Broken River near Wangaratta, killing seven of his men and scattering his flocks. Despite this setback, Faithfull, with his brother William, took up a run on the Ovens River, but the Pangerang were so persistent in their attacks that he sold out to the Rev. Joseph Docker in September 1838". (Christie 1979 (b):63).

The Yorta Yorta, Bangerang and Kwatkwat continued attacks on stations on the Murray between Echuca and Corryong and Christie talks about another incident that occurred "where these tribes made use of the extremely wet winters of 1843-44 to harass the settlers, attacking homesteads and out-stations and driving sheep into the swampy river flats where pursuit by mounted squatters or police was impossible. On 7th August 1843, six hundred Aborigines launched a series of attacks on Collyer's station near the junction of the Goulburn and Murray, killing stock and throwing spears with fire brands attached, into the huts." (Christie 1979 (b):64).

The same group also raided Green's station, which I mentioned before, where they killed upward of 500 cattle and effectively forced him from the district.
CURR'S TURN

Curr was not left out of these incidents and his station experienced harassment and attacks on his stock from the Yorta-Yorta/Bangerang, particularly when he set up an outstation to his Tongala run. The site he chose was on a piece of land which was a special meeting place for the Murray and Goulburn river tribes on the opposite side of the Murray where Maloga mission was later established. The piece of land he chose which he referred to as the trans - Murray portion of his run, was illegal because it was approved by the Crown Land Commissioner for the Murray District whose authority didn't extend to the other side of the river which was in the Murrumbidge district. However Curr says:

"nothing was ever said and I occupied the country in question until it suited me to leave it. Later on it formed a portion of Sir John O'Shamassy's Meira Station." (Curr 1883:70)

On establishing an outstation here, his shepherd was surprised by a group of Aborigines who first asked for some tobacco and then relieved him of his gun while some 70 sheep were taken - which could be seen as a measure of compensation by the Aborigines for the disruption of their ceremonial grounds and the destruction of their traditional food resources by Curr's outstation. His gun was returned to him after the Aborigines dispensed with the sheep.

The incident being reported to Curr saw the arrival of two members of the Border Police who set about their duties of restoring law and order in the bush between squatters and the Aborigines. In this case their first step as Curr describes it "was to seize a solitary blackfellow who happened to be at Tongala, and secure him with a bullock chain, one end of which was padlocked round his ankle, and the other passed through the slabs of the kitchen and made fast within. Next morning these two trooping worthies with their captive as guide, set off in search of the Blacks for the purpose
of "setting them right". It so happened, however, that when they got within a hundred yards of the Murray, their prisoner, who well knew what was in store for his tribe should he discover their retreat, made a bolt for the stream, when one of the troopers galloped after him, and, before he could reach the water, shot him down. The poor savage, I heard, dropped at once mortally wounded, close to the river bank; looked up at his slayers, and, drawing his opossum rug round him, died shortly afterwards without a word or a groan. The troopers then went on and continued the search for some time, which proving uneventful they returned to the corpse which was now cold and stiff...placed the body in a canoe which happened to be at hand, which, pushed into the current conveyed its ghastly freight down the stream. Who knows what conjectures perchance occurred to distant tribes as they saw drifting through their ancient domain this victim of the white man? I always regretted this catastrophe." (Curr 1883:90-92)

This was not the only incident where conflict between Curr and the Aborigines occurred. It was not long after that another 120 lambs were allowed to wander off by another shepherd, which were soon "observed by a party of Blacks who, unable to withstand the temptation of fat meat, drove the lambs to a secluded spot, where they killed and ate them". A message was immediately sent to the absent and neighbouring members of the tribe, who in short time gathered to the number of 100 or so and all ate the lot in three days. "Such feasting and greasing of heads had probably never been known to the Bangerang, and no doubt the tribe was merry and witty at the expense of the white fella." (Curr 1883:92).

"SETTING THEM RIGHT"

This further infringement on European property and one sided law of the land was soon reported to the responsible authorities who were soon to arrive on the scene for another so called "setting them right" expedition. This time it was arranged that a dray load of sheep would be sent ahead and located at a distance from the river to where the Aborigines
would be attracted, and would provide the troopers with an open opportunity to deal with them.

"Shortly before the police "debouched" from the timber which skirted the proposed scene of action, the other party (the Aborigines) had arrived in the proper quarter. The result of this was an immediate charge on the part of the troopers; a movement executed, as it seemed to my inexperienced eye, with more elan than regularity. Being myself with the party and armed with Sword and pistols I received a friendly hint from the officer, before charging, to abstain from the use of weapons unless called on by him to act; an injunction which, being of peaceful tendency, was quite in accordance with my feelings." (Curr 1883:93).

The results of this incident as described by Curr were never reported by the troopers in full detail, but Curr gives this eye witness account:

As the troopers charged their assailants when the Aborigines were in the designated place....

"One of the police horses bolted at the outset and carried his rider almost out of sight, whilst another trooper, lodged by his charger in the fork of a tree, very providentially escaped getting his neck broken, the chargers generally being as stated by the officer in his report, "somewhat unstable". The Blacks in the meantime passed through or round our line and fled to the river, followed by the remaining horsemen, no shots having been fired so far, or spears thrown; when as the last Aboriginal was in the very act of leaping from the bank into his native stream, someone at hand not connected with the "force", on being called upon by the officer, discharged two barrels, putting one ball through the fugitive's arm and the other through an old cap he had on. At this juncture, I recollect, the officer, who was leisurely scanning the opposite bank of the river, across which he had driven the enemy in such masterly style, received a slight wound in his sword arm from a spear hurled by a blackfellow from the opposite side." (Curr 1883:94).
After the Aborigines had dispersed from the scene and the troopers re organised themselves, there was one blackfellow who remained there who apparently had no sides with the parties and was waiting for a sheep's head he had been promised which was being butchere for supper. He was immediately seized by the party and at once placed in handcuffs, which, "being found too large for his hands, were transferred at the suggestion of Corporal Rolfe, to his ankles."

His name was Warri who must have been connected with the old man Warri who Curr made contact with before (as mentioned earlier).

"His wife who was present at his capture was allowed to escape unmolested, and when dinner was over they set off for Tongala, the troopers securing their captive by a rope, one end of which was round his neck and the other made fast to the troopers horse." (Curr 1883:95)

Warri was eventually taken to Melbourne and tried for sheep stealing. He appeared in court to face the charges but fortunately the Judge disallowed the trial to proceed until an interpreter could be found, because the prisoner was unable to understand the proceedings of European law. Warri was detained in custody for some months until Curr feeling sympathy for him, used his influence to have him released, and, later he returned to Curr's property at Tongala.

Daniel Mathews makes reference to an incident told to him by Aborigines in his early days at Maloga which could be connected with both these incidents.

His diary notes for 1864-74 under :

"Early shepherds hut at Maloga" :

"At Maloga early days (1840) - shepherds tent - Shepherds gun - theft of flour etc. - vengeance - police - ran into the Lakes, shot down" (Cato 1976:51).

The early shepherds hut at Maloga in 1840 is where Curr established his outstation on the trans-Murray portion of his run, and the story told to Mathews would have been related to either of these incidents when conflict between Aborigines and Curr appeared at its height in the 1840s.
EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

It has now been well established by research that the resistance struggle by Aborigines against European settlement was not only confined to specific areas like the Murray River district, but was widespread on a national level. Prior to this recent research, the general claim was that the major reasons for the reduction in numbers were introduced diseases, and other elements brought here by Europeans e.g. alcohol. As Michael Christie points out in his studies, the true number of Aborigines that were shot or poisoned during the settlement period will never be known but it seems reasonable to assume "on Curr's assessment that between 15 and 25% died by the rifle." As I have already shown, the total population in Victoria was reduced during the spreading out period of the wool and gold industries (1835-1860's) to less than a quarter of its original size: from 15,000 to less than 3,000.

In the resistance war then, 2,000 Aborigines lost their lives in Victoria alone (Christie 1979:78), and 400 Kulin, Yorta Yorta and Bangerang would have died in defence of their homelands. So warfare between Europeans and Aborigines must now be acknowledged as one of the major causes of population loss.

Earlier writers of the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribes such as Susan Priestley in the book "Echuca a Centenary History" claims that Aborigines of these tribes "never presented any effective barrier to white settlement of the district" (Priestley 1965:5). This is incorrect and it is now evident that a very strong and effective barrier did exist and was successful in retarding settlement and driving settlers off their properties during the 1840s.
BRITISH GOVERNMENT INTERVENES

An attempt was made to protect Aborigines from the atrocities that were being committed against them in the late 1830s. This came about after pressure was applied on the home Government by humanitarian, Christian people who were aware of what was going on in all British colonies at the time and the treatment the original people were receiving when they tried to defend their homelands.

Reports from the Australian colony of atrocities occurring, such as the near extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines and massacres of Aborigines by whites in N.S.W., together with reports from other colonies, prompted the British Government to set up a Select Committee Inquiry in 1835 to enquire into and report on the condition of indigenous people in all British colonies.

The report of 1837 condemned Britain's colonizing activities and its actions towards indigenous people which they considered was one of economic and physical exploitation, and which led to mass extermination of indigenous people when they tried to resist these forces. The recommendation made by the committee in relation to Australia was for the establishment of a system of protectorate stations, where Aborigines could be gathered to and separated from contact with whites. One of the most significant things about the report is the awareness by the committee of the resistance struggle in early 1835. One of the main purposes of the protectorate system was for the physical protection of Aborigines and the conversion to Christianity.

It must be mentioned here that although the protectorate system was the first official form of intervention taken between settlers and Aborigines by the British Government, before that there were already attempts made by Church Missionary Societies to protect Aborigines. Mission stations run by missionaries were first set up in NSW as early as 1795 (Parramatta) and by the 1830s there were mission stations established throughout NSW and Victoria (Gribble 1883). Missionaries, like
the protectors, were involved in establishing places for the purpose of physical protection and religious instruction.

PROTECTORATE SCHEME 1838-49

The protectorate system was introduced in the Port Phillip District in 1838 on the recommendations of the committee. One chief protector and four assistants were appointed to carry out the task of making contact with Aborigines and getting them to come to protectorate stations where they would be protected and issued with supplies: blankets, clothing, etc. and rations. For the purpose of the protectorate Victoria was divided up into four regional areas where each assistant protector was assigned to. Stations were established at Mt. Rouse Western District; Mt. Franklyne Loddon District, Wimmera and Northern Victoria; Narre Warren (at Dandenong) Melbourne, Mornington Peninsula, Gippsland; Goulburn River, Murchison, Nth East Vic. The Goulburn protectorate is the one that I want to concentrate on because its history is directly related to both Cummeragunga and Coranderrk people.

GOULBURN PROTECTORATE

"At the site of the former Aboriginal Protectorate the Assistant Surveyor of the colony, Phillip Chauncy, surveyed a piece of land in March 1854 and on 11 April the Governor in Council formally approved the "Village of Murchison". (Bossence 1965:57)

The village of Murchison was not only established on the site of the former protectorate but also in the territory of the Taungerong, who numbered about 600 before the settlement period, but only 95 in 1863 (Barwick 1972:20).

Before the site of Murchison was chosen it was decided by the Assistant Protector James Dredge to establish the station at Mitchellstown in May 1839. The site chosen by Dredge proved to be a bad choice because of its proximity to a busy crossing place and a Travellers Inn situated at the crossing place for travellers coming from NSW along Major Mitchell's line. Dredge was also frustrated in his work by constant holdups by the Colonial Government with supplies and rations for the station which made it impossible for him to get the Aborigines to settle there. When supplies would run out, then the
Aborigines would leave the station and resorted to spearing squatters' sheep and stealing food from surrounding settlers as a form of compensation for the loss of their own food resources.

Dredge gives an account of this in his journal where he talks about the difficulties he faced and the problems that arose when supplies were held up. His entry for Friday May 31st gives an interesting account of the district at the time. Part of the Assist. Protector's job was to firstly make contact with Aborigines and then get some idea of the numbers and conditions of Aborigines in the area. He was informed by local settlers that "blacks had murdered within the last few days - a shepherd of a Captain Hutton - whose body had been mangled and thrown into a water hole, and the overseer had just escaped with his life having had his cheek chopped off with a tomahawk (Dredge's diary Tues. May 28, 1839). Three days later he travelled to another squatter's run at King Parrot Creek "where in his absence I was received by the overseer and his wife - a scotch pair with three well behaved children After having considerable conversation with the man of the house and another inmate - rather an intelligent man - amongst other things respecting the blacks."

POISON DAMPER

"This little person, who I think they called Mr. Mans, said that such was the prejudice and ill-will existing amongst many of the settlers towards the blacks that he had reason to believe many of the Aborigines had been destroyed by them with sweet damper - viz. damper with arsenic in it." (Dredges diary Fri. May 31 1839). The sweet damper and the squatter being murdered must have had some connection and can be viewed as a pay back from the Aborigines on the whites who committed these atrocious arsenic murders in the first place.

Dredge seemed to be sympathetic towards Aborigines and tried to throw off some of his own background to try and understand their real needs. He wrote an article in which he describes the situation between Aborigines and settlers.
"He recognised that the Aborigines natural supply of food had been interfered with by the colonists, and that compensation had to be provided if the colonists' flocks and herds were to remain un-menaced. He urged the Government to adopt measures to prevent a given tribe from being dispossessed of its land and pushed onto the next tribe's territory, which was a cause of intertribal warfare, and he pointed out detribalization of the Aborigines brought about the breakdown of their moral and ethical standards" (Rossence 1965:43).

Indeed Dredge was sympathetic and seemed to have had a good understanding of what was happening and measures the Government could have taken but unfortunately he resigned his position in June 1840 after just over 12 months, and he was replaced by William Le Soüef who shifted the protectorate from Mitchellstown to Murchison and took up his duties there in November 1840.

ANOTHER PROTECTOR

Le Soüef recorded the names of all Aborigines attending the station in a monthly return to the Port Phillip Protectorate, and "the return for April 1841 lists more than 200 names and the individual length of stay at the station." (Rossence 1965:47). Amongst those at the station during that time were members of the Kailthibban (Curr) or Bangerang (Tindale) tribes.

Robinson the chief protector paid a visit to the Goulburn station in 1844 and wrote that "the station is centrally situated and can be approached by the Murray natives." (Robinson 1844).

Looking at the position of the Protectorate at Murchison its distance was only some 20 miles from Shepparton and close to the tribal border of the Bangerang. It's my belief that contact between the tribes that came to the Protectorate - the Kulin and the Yorta Yorta / Bangerang tribes - had been well established on traditional lines of trade, inter marriage and ceremonial gatherings long before the arrival of Europeans and the protectorate station served as a refuge for all these tribes who were pushed out of their traditional homelands, by settlers.
BILLY HAMILTON

The Goulburn station continued under Le Souef who seemed to have "openly shown fear of the Aborigines and would not let any of them come too close to him. He made a request that a trooper be in constant attendance for protection and in February 1843 Billy Hamilton the headman of the NERBALUK tribe was gaoled for threatening Le Souef grievous bodily harm."

"Le Souef's services were eventually dispensed in 1843, after it was reported several times that he was engaged in private enterprise whilst in the services of the Government and for running a flock of sheep on his own southern part of the reserve." (Massola 1975:4,5).

The running of the reserve was taken over by the medical officer and staff and was supervised by the Assist. Protector for the Loddon District, Edward Stone Parker, until the whole Protectorate scheme was abolished in 1849.

The reason for the abolishment of the Protectorate was because it totally failed to achieve its objectives of physical protection and religious conversion. Until an alternative system could be introduced, one of the Protectors, William Thomas, was retained to act as a guardian.

AFTER PROTECTORATE 1849-60

After the Goulburn protectorate was closed in 1849, the surviving Goulburn river tribes received no assistance from the Government. They refused to go to the Mt. Franklyn station under the care of Parker, because of traditional hostilities that existed with the Loddon tribe the Jajowurong who they were to be forced to join with later at Corranderrk, when the Mt. Franklyn station was closed in 1864. The Goulburn tribes thus resorted to their nomadic life, but by that time the country was becoming increasingly populated by Europeans who had grown to an estimated 90,000 by the 1850s. (Clark 1950:409).

By 1859 the Vic. Govt. after receiving continuous reports of further atrocities being committed by whites on Aborigines and the further reduction of Aboriginal numbers, decided to appoint a Select Committee"to enquire into and report upon the best means of alleviating their condition."
The Committee after hearing evidence and answers to a lengthy questionnaire they circulated to local correspondents, decided to set aside reserved areas of land, where Aborigines could be gathered to and issued with blankets, rations and clothing. In fact it was much the same system as the Protectorate which was abolished in 1849. So in June 1860 a Board for the Protection of Aborigines was appointed to administer the funds granted by the Government.

Before the Board was established, members of the Goulburn and Yarra tribes got together and decided to put their claim to Guardian Thomas for a stretch of land they had selected themselves so their people could settle there and farm it like Europeans.

FIRST LAND RIGHTS CLAIM (VIC.)

Thomas on meeting the deputation wrote: "A deputation of five Upper Goulburn Aborigines and two of the Melbourne tribe as interpreters waited on me at my residence the 28th February 1859, their object was to have a block of land on the Acheron River, to be set apart for them. I had two hours converse with them and being perfectly agreeably satisfied that they intended to cultivate and in a measure to vacate there, I promised to use my utmost to secure for them their request." (Barwick 1972:21)

Looking back, this 1859 deputation could be seen as the first demonstration by Aborigines in Victoria for land rights. Their Murray river neighbours were to present a similar request to the NSW Government in 1881. The 1859 deputation was met favourably by the Lands Department and they were allowed to select 4,500 acres of their own choice. Thomas on returning from a survey of the land commented on how he met groups of Taungerang making their way to their chosen site greeting him: "The aged men assuring me that" they would cultivate and set down on the land like white men". (Barwick 1972:21).

ACHERON RESERVE

Not long after the site was settled upon by some 80 Aboriginal people of the Kulin tribes, they were set back by the Government's refusal to allocate funds to equip
them with the necessary tools and supplies to cultivate the land and build houses like Europeans. "The Government eventually voted money for supplies and implements in 1860. The venture had every hope of success - it had been first proposed by the Aborigines themselves; they selected the site; and given the limited area of the reserve had opted for a realistic compromise in their use of it: 'a combination of traditional food gathering and European agriculture.' (Christie 1979 (b) : 158).

However it wasn't long before interference from outside pressures caused disruption to the Acheron venture. "Four white trustees were appointed (who were magistrates and squatters from the area) with the responsibility of overseeing the developments of the station and determining whether or not the land was being used effectively".

One of the trustees, Peter Snodgrass was found arranging for the site to be shifted four miles higher up the river, to a station occupied by Stephen Jones who claimed he should be compensated for loss of stock by Aborigines dogs and he was willing to hand it back to the Government with stock and improvements for £1,500. The run was taken over by the Government and Jones was awarded £1,000 compensation (Christie 1979 (b):159).

MOHICAN RUN

The new run was called Mohican which the Aborigines didn't like because it was some four miles from Acheron in cold country. They were bitterly disappointed in having Acheron taken from them for they believed it was theirs to settle on and live forever. Thomas later wrote "that this sort of fate of the Aborigines was enough to deter Aborigines from ever after having promises held out to them."(Barwick 1972:22)

The trustees of Acheron, it was revealed later, were never officially appointed and "by some legal chicanery were able to move the stock from the Acheron station and then gave orders to move the Aborigines to the new site." (Barwick 1972:22).
Only a few went to the new site, and the rest, angry and frustrated about the closure of their chosen site, left in mass.

**ACROSS THE DIVIDE**

The next move for the surviving people of the Kulin was across the Great Divide into Wurundjeri territory of The Yarra watershed area where a site was chosen at Woori Yallock. Barwick mentions that another site was located at Warrandyte 1850 but the Lands Department refused to gazette it. In the meantime John Green had been appointed by the Board as Inspector to superintend the welfare of Aborigines throughout the colony.

The Woori Yallock site was already occupied by the Wurundjeri and Green's wife and children stayed there while he was away travelling about the state with his job. This site was later revoked because of an influx of gold seekers into the area.

Green and his men chose another site of 3,000 acres in Wurundjeri territory which was also cancelled because of settlers protests. (Barwick 1972:24).

**CORANDERRK**

Green and forty Aborigines eventually selected a new spot between the Watts River and Badges Creek near Healsville which became Coranderrk. The Board gazetted 2,300 acres on 30th June 1863 and this eventually became the home for the surviving people of the Kulin nation.

Coranderrk was originally set up as a refuge for children who became separated from their parents when they were being moved around everywhere by Government policies. It was also intended as a place where elderly people could come and be cared for. In its early stages "there were some 105 permanent residents there including 44 children, and some Jajowrong were transferred there in 1864 when the Mt. Franklyn station was closed. Almost all the surviving Kulin were settled within three years and some 20 young Yorta Yorta/Bangerang were brought from the Murray between 1866-1870." (Barwick 1972:25).
It’s the Murray river area I want to now return to and see what was being done for the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang in the same period that the developments between the Goulburn protectorate and Coranderrk took place. Firstly, it must be said that by this stage Aborigines must have lost all trust in Government policies and decisions made for them by Europeans. The story is always the same when we look at the attempts Aborigines made in trying to adapt to our agricultural European way of life......they were always blocked, disrupted, and never given the opportunity to determine their own destiny. The squatters being the main offenders with their selfish greed for land and the policy makers having no respect or understanding of the Aboriginal way of life.

MURRAY AREA

The Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribes were almost completely neglected during the Protection era. Some of them would have received aid from the Goulburn Protectorate when it was located in their vicinity but after it closed in 1849 they would have been without any means of support from the colonial government up until 1860 when the Protectorate Board was set up.

During the 1840s it seems those tribes people who remained in the Murray area around the Moira station came to an understanding with Lewes at the Moira station to have access to their traditional hunting grounds. The Crown Land Commissioner for the Murrumbidgee District, Henry Bingham, giving evidence to the Select Committee on the Aborigines 1845, remarked on an incident that occurred there between the Aborigines and Moira Station:

"I would here remark that this gentleman, Mr. Lewes, the acting manager, has since with great consideration and judgment, permitted the blacks to hunt over their grounds in his occupation, at their season for hunting, and he keeps his stock on other pastures of his run at this period, which has established an excellent understanding between him and the blacks." (Select Committee 1845:39).

Lewes seems to have developed good relations and recognized the fact that Aborigines should have rights to their land which all belonged to them in the first place. However, the neighbouring Commissioner for the Murray District still faced conflict. He believed the conflict was reducing, (or was it the
Aborigines who were reducing?)

"but the portion of territory around the junction (of the Goulburn with the Murray) was still regarded dangerous." He went on to comment: "but this winter though I have stationed a party of police there for protection, they have not seen a necessity for acting." (Select Committee 1845:4).

He also mentioned that some of the Aborigines in the area were occasionally working for squatters - sheep washing, reaping, and stripping bark for which they received payment of food, clothing and tobacco. Curr had Aborigines doing these types of work at his Tongala station.

Another Select Committee Inquiry was held in 1849 for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the Protectorate scheme which had been operating since 1838. Recommendations were made to this enquiry by Crown Land Commissioners and the chief protector George Augustus Robinson for the establishment of reserves.

RESERVES RECOMMENDED

Robinson and the Commissioner for the Murray District recommended that reserves be established along the Murray at the junction of the Broken River with the Murray (near Barmah), Benalla, Wangaratta and Ulupna near Tocumwal.

Robinson also recommended that these reserves be used for agriculture and stock and for any other purpose required for the benefit of Aborigines. He also suggested that "Free access should be allowed the Aborigines to Lakes, Rivers, Swamps, Lagoons, etc. and their favourite hunting grounds at the season for hunting."

(Select Committee Report 1849:14).

The Select Committee failed to adhere to these recommendations, and after its assessment of the Protectorate's effectiveness, recommended it be abolished because it failed to achieve its objectives that it was set up for. So from 1849 to 1860 the Aborigines of the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribes were totally neglected by the Vic. Govt. and became dependent on what material assistance they could get from local pastoral stations in the area. These surrounding stations were to become refuges for the remaining population and later were made into supply depots for these survivors, where they could secure clothing, blankets and rations dispensed there by the Vic. Govt.
This sort of assistance came about after another Select Committee Inquiry was held in 1858-59, to enquire into the conditions of the Aborigines of the colony. Out of this enquiry as I have already mentioned, came the setting up of Government reserves which were run by managers and administered by the newly formed Protection Board. But still no reserves were established for the north east and central Murray tribes. Parker, the assistant protector of Loddon District, recommended to the enquiry that a reserve should be established at the junction of the Murray and Goulburn Rivers, but nothing was ever done.

**LOCAL GUARDIANS**

Instead, a number of local guardians were appointed who consisted of (as the committee put it) people holding standing positions in the communities where Aborigines were living, such as local squatters, police magistrates, and missionaries. Their instructions were to issue supplies and rations to the Aborigines in their area and use their powers to protect them from encroachments by whites.

These local guardians were situated at various places throughout Victoria and the YortaYorta/Bangerang ration and supply depots were first established at:

- **ECHUCA TOWNSHIP**
  - Charles Strutt (Police Magistrate)
  - George Houston (Squatter)
  - later Mr. Munro
  - W.N. Weller & later J. McKenzie (Manager)

- **GUNBOWER STATION**
  - W.N. Weller e * (Squatter)

- **WYUNA**
  - J. Rutherford (Squatter)

- **ULUPNA STATION**
  - J. Manley (Squatter)

- **TOOLAMBA Station**
  - Police Magistrate

All were local squatters except for Strutt who was the Police Magistrate at Echuca. So by the 1860s some form of assistance was provided for the Murray and neighbouring tribes. These station depots also provided local squatters with a potential labour force, and by the 1870s there were many Aborigines working on stations whose labour was exploited by local squatters and paid for by rations, tobacco and grog.

Daniel Mathews caused hostility from local squatters when he set up Maloga Mission...
in 1874 and enticed Aborigines away from the stations. Ration depots then worked in two ways; for the benefit of the Aborigines; and to the benefit of the squatters.

ABORIGINES' CONDITIONS "APPALLING"

Local guardians in their returns to a questionnaire circulated to them by the committee reported the condition of Aborigines in their areas were generally appalling which they attributed to their contact with whites. Strutt in 1859 reporting on the Aborigines around the Echuca area said they were mainly to be found by the banks of the Murray, Coulburn, Campaspe and Lake Moira and at the homesteads on the various stations. He also commented on the loss of traditional hunting grounds and food. "Since the lands have been occupied by sheep and cattle, the same facilities no longer exist; the game also has become more scarce." (Vic. Select Committee Report 1858-9:66).

ECHUCA IDENTITIES

Aboriginal names of people around Echuca at that time such as Billy Toole, King Johnny, Tally-Ho mentioned by Strutt were also at Curr's Tongala station in the 1840s where Curr says he christened the whole tribe and gave them European names. (Curr 1883:127). Billy Toole, Tally-ho were there and later Billy Toole and Tally-ho became well known around Echuca. Tally-ho ended up becoming a police blacktracker, and Billy Toole was given the royal term of King Billy Toole and was there to welcome the first steam train to Echuca when the line was connected from Bendigo in 1864.

Lewes of Moira was asked by the Committee if he could suggest any plans by which they could be saved from ultimate extinction? "He believed the Aborigines in his district would within a few years become extinct which he saw as being inevitable as a result of their contact with whites." He estimated the Population in his district then to be some 174. (Vic. Select Committee Report 1858-9:27).

On the other hand Lewes' neighbour across the Murray at Wyuna, Mr. Weller, in replying to a question of what he saw as the main causes of the reduction
in Aboriginal numbers commented it was not of any doings of the white community but was attributed to war, drink, consumption, or physical disorders, and diseases. A strange statement! Was it not through contact with whites that all these things were caused in the first place?

Weller estimated the population of Wyuna at that time to be about 30 which did not include the Murchison blacks (Taungerong), or those of the Murray and Campaspe, who occasionally visited the station.

**ABORIGINAL WORKERS**

Supplies and rations were distributed at Gunbower in Yorta Yorta territory by George Houston, the local guardian, who reported in 1866 that several of the Aborigines in his area "had been working on neighbouring stations and in the summer and autumn they hunt and fish as usual and as there is abundance of game in their neighbourhood they assemble here in considerable numbers at these seasons." (Vic. Central Board Annual Report 1866) Houston also engaged one young man, Thomas Black as a servant and two other Aborigines as stockmen. It is interesting to note here that Tommy Black must have moved to Coranderrk not long after, when Green was gathering people there from the Murray. His death was registered at Coranderrk in 1875, where his birthplace was named as Gunbower. (Massola 1975:84).

The other station I must mention was Ulupna, situated on the Murray not far from Tocumwal where James Rutherford was the local guardian. This area has been referred to as the tribal territory of the Ulupna or Yullaba Yullaba tribe by Aboriginal writers Theresa Clements and Ronald Morgan. Theresa Clements was born on Ulupna which was then owned by a Mr. McPherson. Rutherford reported in 1868 that there were about 40 adults and 20 children there, who were living on the edge of the station and receiving supplies and rations. "One of the young men Freddy is being educated and he is able to read and write a little." (B.P.A. Vic. 1869:7).
TAX ON STEAMERS

By the 1860s with the ever increasing paddle steamer trade on the Murray, Aborigines found their natural sources of river food becoming further exploited by the steamers and barges travelling up and down the river. One of the Aborigines of the Yorta Yorta tribe who accompanied a member of the Protection Board on a visit to the Murray in 1860 expressed his disappointment of the damage the steamers were causing to their chief means of support.

"He informed the Board member of the intention of himself and five other Aborigines to proceed as a deputation to His Excellency the Governor to request him to impose a tax of £10 on each steamer passing up and down the Murray, to be expended in supplying food to the natives in lieu of the fish which had been driven away." (Central Board Vic 1861:19)

Nothing more was ever said about the deputation in the Board report.

About the same time an American contractor, Joseph Rice, set up a camp near the Larmah Lakes, and formed the Murray River Fishing Company (Priestley 1965:46). They provided the Bendigo gold fields with fish from the Murray and Moira Lakes; and to assist in this enterprising venture "Rice employed the skills of Aboriginal fishermen paying them in grog for their labour." (Cato 1976:54). Rice later extended his enterprise to sidelines including catching leeches which were in much demand by the medical profession in London. "Ducks teal and other wild fowl were also trapped or shot and sent off to the Melbourne markets with the fish, which would have been bringing in to the Company up to £10,000 a year - 1862, with an outlay of no more than £2,000 for equipment and running costs." (Priestley 1965:47).

This then provides us with a picture of what was happening around the areas that originally belonged to the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribes, who by 1863 had been reduced to only 184 of their original number of 1,200. Squatters and enterprises like the Murray River Fishing Company benefited considerably from Aboriginal labour and skills during the major settlement period.
It has been recognised that during this period, Aborigines played a major role in the agricultural and pastoral developments of the Rivernia. They became skilled stockmen, shearsers, fencers and crop cultivators, and adapted easily to the types of work performed by Europeans on stations. However, their labours and skills were never recognised or rewarded by employers in these times, which can only be seen as a period of wealthy gain for one group and the economic exploitation of another.

**YORTA YORTA/BANGERANG AND RESERVES**

Recommendations were made again the 1860's to set up reserves along the Murray, but without result. In the absence of local reserves, Aboriginal children were taken down to Coranderrk Reserve. Some were "orphans", others were taken with or without their parents consent when Missionary or Protector decided this was best for them. Finally an independent concerned citizen Daniel Mathews, set up the first refuge for the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang at Maloga.

The following section talks about these events in more detail:

**Attempts to set up local reserves**

In 1861 the Victorian Protection Board asked the NSW Government to provide similar aid (i.e. reserves) to discourage movement to Victoria, but this was not introduced until 1883 when a duplication of the Victorian system of Government reserves became necessary for the remaining N.S.W. tribes.

By 1864 the Victorian Protection Board was responsible for administering five reserves:

- Lake Tyers and Ramyhuck in Gippsland;
- Framlingham and Lake Condah in the Western District;
- and Coranderrk which was its central reserve.

However, they still failed to provide refuges for the Murray/Goulburn Aborigines.

I have already shown that recommendations to set up Murray/Goulburn Reserves had consistently been made to the government. In 1849 Robinson suggested four sites to the Select Committee. Parker recommended a reserve at the junction of the Murray and Goulburn Rivers to the 1858/9 Select Committee.
By 1872 John Green, who had been visiting the area as Board Inspector for ten years again urged for reserves to be set up. In his 1872 report, he said:

"I would also recommend the Board to form two stations, as soon as possible, on the Murray; one somewhere between Echuca and Wodonga, the other below Swan Hill, and to send all the supplies to these stations" (B.P.A. Vic 1872:9).

But the Board left this task to others. In the meantime the Board had to use Coranderrk as a reserve for Yorta Yorta/Bangerang people.

**CHILDREN REMOVED TO CORANDERRK**

This Board had appointed John Green in 1861 as district Inspector whose job was to superintend the welfare of Aborigines throughout the colony. He was the manager of Coranderrk at the same time. "On the 11th November 1862 he commenced an inspection of the Aborigines located on the banks of the River Murray including Cobram, Echuca, Gumbower where he obtained the names of more than 500 Aborigines during his term of inspection". (Central Board Vic. 1863:9)

One of the main purposes of Green's visits was to gain a census of the Aboriginal population throughout Victoria and their general welfare, with specific interest in the children who were orphaned or neglected.

Green's main task was to concentrate on gathering these children and others who were willingly surrendered by their parents and take them to Coranderrk which was originally set up as a central asylum for this purpose. It was decided to concentrate on the children because it would be difficult to remove the adults because of their attachment to their traditional places which they would not leave. To enable the Board to do this more effectively special powers were introduced in 1869 with...
the Aborigines Act giving powers to the Board to remove by force if necessary any children not attending school from their parents or from settlers harbouring them.

Daniel Mathews had just moved into Echuca in 1864 and later became inspired by Green's work at Coranderrk, and was a frequent visitor to Coranderrk in the 1860s. Mathews began to visit the Aborigines camp near Echuca from 1864 and sent five children to Coranderrk between 1864-66. Among these was Jemima Burns who later married Robert Wandin at Coranderrk.

Green reporting on his tour of inspection to the Murray and stations of local guardians in 1872 urged the Board of "the necessity of at once taking steps to have all the children collected, especially the girls over 6 years of age, and brought to Coranderrk."

Green, during his 1869 tour to the Murray, removed 14 Aborigines, who were presumably children, to Coranderrk.

By the 1870s, the Board was engaging in an all out attempt to gather children to its Coranderrk station. Diane Barwick gives a breakdown of the population there between 1865 - 1874. "Of the forty four children there in 1865 only 10 lived with their parents, and the remainder were orphans living in the dormitory with the Greens. By 1874 all of the children and young single women of the Upper and Central Murray and the Goulburn Loddon and Avoca Rivers had been brought to the dormitories at Coranderrk." (Barwick 1969:76).

Although Green and the Board were successful in gathering the children to Coranderrk, there were also unsuccessful attempts made where Aborigines being aware of the Board's intentions would soon disperse and "hide in the bush or cross the rivers when Green came to collect them." (Cato 1976:29).

DANIEL MATHEWS

On Green's 1870 trip to the Echuca, Mount Hope and Gumbower areas, where he was unable to induce the Aborigines to come to Coranderrk with him, he made contact with Daniel Mathews. Mathews informed him that he was taking steps to establish an Aboriginal school on the N.S.W. side of the river near Echuca.
where he was going to give 20 acres of land to build on.

"Mathews asked Green if the Board would give him any assistance. Green did not think so, in the way of money to build with; but told him that it was possible the Board might provide some supplies if he had any of the Aborigines belonging to the Victoria side of the river. Green also told Mathews of his intentions to remove all of the children from their old haunts to Coranderrk and recommended that the Board do this at once."

(B.P.A. Vic. 1871:Appendix.)

Mathews, although he had been only some 6 years in Echuca, was to become a central figure in what was to be an endless connection and interrelationship between Maloga (later Cummeragunga) and Coranderrk from traditional times to present day.
The site Mathews chose to establish his Maloga school was originally occupied by Curr, who as the reader will remember referred to it as his trans-Murray portion of his Tongala run. It was approved by the Commissioner whose authority didn't extend over the Murray, and was occupied by him until later on it formed a portion of Sir John O'Shanassy's Moira Station. (Curr 1883:70).

It was on this same portion that Daniel and his brother William selected their 761 acres of land. Daniel found out later from members of the Yorta Yorta tribe that "the sandy promontory on the block taken out in Williams name (Portion 11) had been a great gathering place and corroboree ground for as long as anyone could remember." (Cato 1976:28).

Mathews had already made contact with Aborigines around Echuca and Moama, and had visited those up and down the Murray, and Goulburn Rivers who were receiving some assistance from the local guardians' stations. He soon became well aware of the general condition that Aborigines were forced into, and began his efforts to set up a refuge for them.

One of his major concerns was the supply of alcohol to Aborigines which he felt was having an exterminating influence on the people. "At that time there was a population of some 1500 people in Echuca and there were 32 licensed public houses." (Cato 1976:31).

At that time Mathews noted that the blacks were becoming numerous around Echuca. He noted in 1865 that there were four distinct tribes camped in Echuca who were from the Goulburn River, Loddon, Terrick Terrick (near Kerang) and the Murray". (Cato 1976:31).
Mathews began a campaign to raise public support for his Maloga school. He wrote to newspapers, in Vic. and NSW, and the Victoria Protection Board in an effort to raise public interest and awareness of the plight of the Aborigines and the need for their care and protection.

**MATHEW THE MISSIONARY**

Mathews main concern was the teaching of Christianity to the remaining Aborigines, which he believed would be the saviour of the people. He was motivated by a missionary zeal which was part of the missionary movement that began in Britain.

The missionary movement itself first stemmed from an upsurge in evangelical religion in Britain, whose advocates saw British colonialism as a vehicle for spreading the gospel to all corners of the globe. Their belief was that once the indigenous people were converted to christianity they would then become civilized and live like Europeans. The Church Missionary Societies of Europe were well established in Australia before Mathews came, and had set up mission stations throughout NSW and Victoria between 1835-1860. Mathews plan to set up a school was the same as those missionaries before him whose main objectives were the christian conversion of their subjects, once they got them to come to these places. Lots of criticisms can be levelled at missionaries for having this approach and imposing their religion onto Aborigines who had their own religious beliefs. Both cultures could have exchanged their religious beliefs and way of life, instead of the missionaries taking the attitude that their religion was the superior one and Aborigines to be saved had to be converted to it.

It also must be said that missionaries played a major role in protecting Aborigines from their further destruction by Europeans, and provided places where Aboriginal people could come together and seek support amongst their own kinfolk.
GATHERING THE PEOPLE

After Mathews set up Maloga in 1874, his next task was to gather Aboriginal people from around the area. The first residents were gathered from the surrounding stations at Moira and Madowla. Mathews became unpopular with the local station owners, Kinnear, and O'Shannassy, because he was enticing Aboriginal people away from their stations. "Thus the squatters believed they had lost a potential labour force and free domestic help." (Cato 1976:65).

O'Shannassy was more hostile towards Mathews than Kinnear of Madowla, because the Maloga property had been selected on Crown Land under lease to O'Shannassy whose station lost a valuable section of river frontage. Selection came in under the N.S.W. Robertson Land Acts, 1861, which limited each selection to 320 acres and saw squatters using Aborigines as dummy selectors. O'Shannassy acquired two sections of freehold for Moira station in the name of two Aborigines and paid the deposit. No account is given of the two Aborigines he had working these selections for him. It could have been a Cooper or Atkinson - Granny Kitty's sons who were working there when Mathews set up Maloga.

Mathews was assisted in gathering the people to Maloga by Bagot Morgan, one of the first residents of Maloga, who he had previously come into contact with in 1869 at the Moama camp. He noted in his diary for that year how he went to the Moama camp to watch a large corroboree in which the boys as well as the men took part. One little fellow named Bagot, while jumping, tripped and fell into the fire and got severely burnt. Mathews and Dr. Newbold later went to the camp and took food to him; he was deeply burnt. (Cato 1976:60).

The original population that settled at Maloga came from both sides of the Murray and in 1874 Mathews had gathered the first people there who were mainly young people with children.
In 1874 Mathews diaries name the first residents: Lizzie (Atkinson) Barber, Sarah Walker each with an infant, Frankie nearly two and Herbert about 15 months. Others to come were Granny Kitty from Moira station and her children, who she had to Europeans Atkinson and Cooper (Cato 1976:69). Later Mathews gathered people from Ulupna station, as Theresa Clements records.

**THERESA CLEMENTS**

"I cam remember what happened when I was three. Oh, I remember as if it was yesterday. Mr. Mathews came. My brother and sister and I ran and hid near the bank of the river. "White man going to take us away," people said. We were terrified. Mr. Mathews had a big dray with four horses. He was collecting all the Aborigines along the river from Swan Hill to Tocumwall. Some objected. I don't know what happened to them. We didn't want to go, but soon we found that our mother and grandmother were coming. We were promised housing food and clothing if we went. Off we went! That dray was the first vehicle I ever rode in. Mr. Mathews took us to the Maloga Mission, about three miles from Cummeragunja". (Clements, 1947:2).

Present day Aboriginal people can trace their origins back to these pioneer settlers that Mathews first brought to Maloga.

The original settlers at Maloga were not all from the NSW side of the river and many were brought from the Goulburn River, Ovens, Campaspe and as far as Korong Vale in the south west. (Cato 1976:73). Many also drifted up from Coranderrk where they already had kinship ties.

**SEEKING SUPPORT**

As the station grew and a lot of the people were coming from Victoria, Mathews continued to raise the question with the Victorian authorities for assistance. He was supported in these requests by the local guardians on the Victorian side, Rutherford at Ulupna and McKenzie of Wyuna, who were still receiving supplies and rations from the Victorian Protection Board in 1874. The Board were not forthcoming with any assistance for Mathews because his station was in N.S.W. and they argued therefore it was the N.S.W. Government's responsibility to provide assistance.
The Victoria border was a thorn in Mathews' side for many years to come and even though Maloga was closer to Melbourne and some 500 miles from the N.S.W. capital, neither Government would take responsibility or offer any assistance for the Maloga station. Towards the end of the 1870s, Mathews frustrated by lack of support from the Victoria administration, turned his attention to Sydney where he made "several important journeys between 1878-81", and with the assistance of Rev. John Gribble of Jerilderee they were "instrumental in getting an interested body of people together to form the first Aborigines Protection Association in N.S.W." (Cato 1976:125).

The Protection Association was administered by an elected committee and was funded by private subscription and Government assistance. The A.P.A. assumed responsibility for the administration of Maloga and a second mission established at Darlington Point (Warangesda) by Rev. J. Gribble in 1880. Another mission came under its control in 1886 at Brewarrina.

REFUGEES FROM FAR AND NEAR.

"Another result of Mathew's visits to Sydney was the population of Maloga was increased by 23 men women and children from the Sydney coast tribes and a few wandering Queenslanders who happened to be in Sydney. These were followed the next year by 15 from Gosford." (Cato 1976:134).

The population of Maloga by the 1880s had risen to some 250, consisting of the original Yorta Yorta/Bangerang people and those who came from Coranderrk to rejoin their kinsfolk before and after the 1886 act was introduced in Victoria, as well as the newcomers from Sydney and Gosford. The 1886 Aborigines Protection Act compelled part-Aborigines under the age of 35 to leave the reserve and fend for themselves in the general community. After the 1886 Act "some 60 exiled part-Aborigines left Coranderrk for Maloga/Cummeroogunga."

(Barwick 1970:297)
The amalgamation of the Aborigines Mathews brought from Sydney caused a lot of conflict between them and those who already had established kinship ties along traditional lines. Mathews lacked understanding of these traditional customs and laws Aborigines upheld, and it took a long time for the newcomers to be accepted. Comments about the disruption this caused are made later by Aboriginal people in the oral history section, particularly by Dan Atkinson Snr.

**THE COMING OF GRANDPA JAMES**

The 1880s saw many changes for Maloga and during this time there are two important events which remain vivid recollections with present day Aboriginal people.

The first was in 1881 when an Indian schoolteacher from Mauritius came there as an assistant teacher to Daniel Mathews "who was acting in that position without salary." (Cato 1976:134). The same year the Maloga school became a recognised public school by the Department of Public Instruction and a salary was provided for the teacher, "which Mathews put towards the assistant's services and mission funds." (Cato 1976:151).

Thomas Shadrach James was known later to everyone as Grandpa James and became a focal point with the Aboriginal community for some 41 years 1881-1922. He took over the position of schoolteacher in 1883 when Mathews resigned as official teacher. In 1885 he married Ada Cooper, daughter of Granny Kitty who Mathews had brought from Moira station in 1874. His marriage into the people and his dark skin made him one of them, and his skills as teacher, doctor, dentist, medical dispenser and community organiser made him an outstanding leader of the community. People today still have the utmost respect for him. He is sometimes referred to as the Ghandi of the Cummera people. Many stories are told by his surviving children Pricilla, Rebecka, Kerry, and other Aboriginal people who were taught by him, in the next section.
LAND RIGHTS PETITION

The second major event was the petition by the Maloga people in 1881 for land. This could be seen as the first land rights petition in N.S.W. by descendents of the original owners. Victorian Aborigines had made a similar attempt in 1859 when members of the Kulin tribes made a deputation to the Victorian Board.

It seems ironical that when the 1881 Maloga petition was organised there were Coranderrk people at Maloga then who were part of the 1859 land rights claim. According to Diane Barwick, one of the tribal leaders of the 1859 Victorian deputation to Guardian Thomas, William Barak was visiting Maloga with his dying son at the time of the Maloga petition, and there were twenty other Coranderrk people either visiting or settled in 1881. (Barwick 1972:47).

The 1881 petition was signed by 42 Maloga residents representing the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang, and presented to Gov.Loftus in Sydney by Mathews on their behalf. "The petitioners requested a 'sufficient area of land to cultivate and raise stock', 'that we may form homes for our families and in a few years, support ourselves by our own industry.' They asked this as compensation, because 'all the land within our tribal boundaries has been taken possession of by the Government and white settlers'". (Barwick 1972:47).

THE N.S.W. GOVERNMENT STEPS IN.

The petition was refused at the time but in 1883 a reserve of 1800 acres adjoining the Mathews' property was gazetted by the N.S.W. Government for the establishment of a reserve for the Maloga people to move to. This was the same year as the N.S.W. Aborigines Protection Board was set up on the recommendations of the protector appointed in 1881, and followed an official enquiry into the administration of Maloga and Warangesda mission stations in 1882.

The Protection Board was modelled on the lines of the Victorian system which had been in operation since 1860.

The newly formed Board did not establish any new stations until 1886 and continued to support the Association Mathews and Gribble were instrumental in forming. However the Association had selected a new site for Maloga about
four miles further up the river on the new 1800 acre adjoining Government reserve, and pushed for the Maloga houses and buildings to be shifted there.

Mathews authority was taken from him by the A.P.A. and George Bellinger became manager of the new reserve and was instructed to pull down the existing houses and move them to the new site. This must have been a severe blow to Mathews to see everything he had worked and fought for being taken from around him. The final blow came when he offered his services to the new station but he "was told he was not wanted in any capacity. . . . . . . Daniel and his wife Janet resigned in 1888". (Cato 1976:239).

ANOTHER PETITION FOR LAND

The year before the Mathews resignation one of their first residents Jacky Cooper (Son of Kitty ) presented another petition to Lord Carrington at the Moama railway station, when he was passing through on a Vice Regal tour. "The petition was for 100 acres of land be granted to those Aboriginal people who were capable of farming in order to support themselves and their families." Nothing became of the petition until 1895 when six small blocks were allotted (17 years after the first petition in 1881) and by 1898 there were a total of 20 farm blocks allotted for the pioneer families of Maloga and Cummeragunga. However the people only farmed them for 10 years and the BPA took them back. The decision by the Board to take them back has remained a sore point with the Cummerapeople to this day!

The story behind Cummeragunga and its connections with Coranderrk up to this point have been mainly based on the observations and interpretations of Europeans. The history of Cummeragunga and Coranderrk has another side - the story told by the people who lived there and experienced it from the other side.

I want to concentrate now on the oral history I've recorded from the Aboriginal people who lived on Cummeragunga and Coranderrk; from what was passed down to them by their ancestors; and from how they saw it themselves.

The earliest recollections of the Cumeragunga people I have interviewed go back to Maloga, so it's appropriate for me now to draw upon that information.
and present a picture of the history from the Aboriginal viewpoint. These people are the direct descendents of the pioneer families I mentioned earlier who came to Maloga and Coranderrk, mainly from the Kulin, Yorta Yorta and Bangerang tribes.
ORAL HISTORY:

A HISTORY OF CUMMERACUNGA AS TOLD

BY ITS PEOPLE.
I have chosen this heading from Theresa Clement's book where she has recorded her early memoirs of Maloga Mission. She is the only Aboriginal person from Maloga whose written records have survived. Other Aboriginal people did write things down and kept daily accounts in diaries, such as Bob Cooper, William Cooper, Shadrach James, and his father Thomas James. Unfortunately the whereabouts of these records are unknown as they have either been lost or are in the possession of people who don't wish to reveal their existence.

Besides Theresa Clement's book there are still oral accounts of the Maloga Mission and even the Madowla Camp which was situated across the river around about the same time. These early accounts are given by my oldest informants who can go back to the Maloga days as told to them by their parents. I want to start the story now from the people of Maloga.

* Theresa Clements ("From Old Maloga" c.1947)

Although the Aborigines were all together at Maloga, they were still very clannish (sticking to their own tribes), and each had its own separate camp. Some of them had been there five years when we came. (Maloga started in 1874. This could be 1879-1880). Mr. Mathews had got them to build little log cabins. We thought it was wonderful to live in houses like that. At first we lived in a log cabin. There were bunks and an earthen floor. Later we were housed in a building set apart for younger girls. There were six rooms, three girls slept in each. There was a large room for dining room and work room.

At Maloga we grew sorghum, tomatoes, and other fruit, pumpkin and vegetables. Every week mother would go up and get rations. At the beginning of winter blankets were given out. There was a blanket for each man, woman and child, not just one to each family! We were well clad, too.

Mr. Thomas James taught the school at Maloga (1881-88). We all liked him very much. I think he was about 18 when I saw him first. He was an Indian,
and had lived in Mauritius. He was very well educated and he taught us a great deal.

*Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1978-80)*

I was born on Maloga and was only two when I left there. My father (Grandpa James) told me when Mathews got him to come there; and he was quite good to him. Grandpa did everything he could for them there at Maloga.

Then my mother (Ada Cooper) came, and was placed there as a housemaid.

Well my father fell in love with her then, and they both fell in love and got married at Maloga. They left Maloga when it was closed (1887) and moved to Cummera which is where the major part of Grandpa's work and his whole life was part of.

*Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1978-80)*

When Mathews first gathered the Aboriginal people onto Maloga he brought them in from all over the place which caused a tension between the people because they were gathered from their different tribal areas, and mixed in together. Mathews was very ignorant about this... You study Aborigines! One of their strictest laws is "trespassing" - you could get killed if you went over another tribe's boundaries. Another thing the old fellas used to tell me was that they would never inter-marry. They exchanged women from other tribes and never married amongst their own tribe. I believe it was awful when Mathews first gathered them and put them together... there were different tribes who some were enemies mixed in together.

Mathews went to Dimboola, Darlington Point, Healesville, Balranald, Sydney, and all over the place. Hell, it was the biggest mixture in the world there! Say for instance if he had of gathered people from this area, well he could have made a go of it, but as it was it took years for them to get on together and settle.
MALOGA and CORANDERRK PEOPLE

*Ivy Sampson (Barmah 1978)

My father was Thomas Dunolly who is buried at Coranderrk where he was married to my mother, (pointing at photo on mantlepiece) Jessie Hamilton. My father came from Dunolly.....they all got names in those days from the places they came from and stations.

The other two girls in the photo are from the Wangaratta camp. I don't know their names but they were being taken from all over the place then, and they were taken to Coranderrk (1860s). I'll show you another photo to give you an idea about Jemima Wandin, who you asked me about! She was my stepmother. When I was little I went into the Wandin's family and grew up with them. Martha's children (Martha Nevin daughter of Robert and Jemima Wandin) came up to Barmah to see me, and some of them won't believe that I'm only a stepdaughter because I was treated as one of the family when I lived with them....they reckon I was a daughter but I wasn't! I was only taken when I was little and reared when my mother died.

Jemima Wandin originally came from around Echuca when Mathews sent some children from Echuca to Coranderrk under Green's care.

CHILDREN MATHews SENT TO CORANDERRK IN 1866.

JEMIMA BURNS (WANDIN)
JIMMY PARKER
MARY PARKER
ALFRED PARKER
LOUISA PARKER
*LIZZIE DAVIS (Cato 1976:16,27,29)

*Lizzie Davis must have gone from Murchison over to Echuca because her and Jemima used to talk about playing together in Echuca....They used to talk about climbing up this big tank when they were kids in Echuca where they must have been camped before they were taken to Coranderrk.

MISSIONARIES

*Bevan Nicholls (Barmah 1978)

If you put yourself in their position say and you had strong christian beliefs
and believed in the equality of all human beings regardless of race, colour, or creed. They saw the Aborigines getting knocked around so they thought they would grab a few from here and a few from somewhere else. Then we might be able to get a bit of ground off the Government and entice these people to come onto it. We'll start off with about 15-20 people on a couple of hundred acres of land. Then we'll read them the bible and when things get really bad they can pick up the bible...never mind about a feed! Just pick it up and the Good Lord would provide... Well there were a lot of times that the Good Lord didn't provide and we needed more than the bible to get through. They tried to teach us their way of life and they are still trying to do it today.

*Merle Jackamos* (Melbourne 1979)

Mathews found Bagot Morgan as a young boy. His father was a white man and his mother was a fullblood, and like so many of the white fathers who disappeared into the sunset, so Bagot stayed with his mother. Mathews tended to Bagot when he was severely burnt during a coroborree when he fell into the fire. The traditional culture and language, as told to me by my mother and grandparents, was stopped at Maloga...They weren't allowed to speak the language...they had to speak the whiteman's language. There were a lot of times when we wanted our grandmother to talk just a few words to us but they used to say that they were not allowed. Also another thing that wasn't allowed was the coroborrees because they thought it was some form of witchcraft.

The rules to stop the continuation of the old ways was made by Mathews who even though a lot of people would not say a word against him, but today! when you look back you wonder how you ever survived or put up with those sorts of conditions and decisions that were imposed on the people by missionaries and managers.

For instance if you didn't go to church you were told to leave the mission. Grandfather Bagot was put off the mission so many times because he was seen to be what they would regard in today's terms as one of the radicals; even though he practically grew up there and in the early part he was the one who helped Mathews to encourage the people to come to Maloga. He also helped to build the
cottages on Maloga and together with Jimmy Turner helped build the Warangesda Mission near Darlington Point. Grandfather Bagot and Mathews used to do some things that didn't fall into line with the wishes of the Aboriginal people. One of these was when Mathews wanted to marry Bagot and Elizabeth Walker who both belonged to different divisions of the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang tribes. Lizzie's brother Freddy Walker objected to this and was going to walk off the mission because Mathews was insisting that they be married according to European tradition and disregarded the Aboriginal system of marriage. The old fella objected but they still got married!

Before Mathews set up Maloga he could see that the Aborigines were being exploited and he wanted to provide some sort of protection and assistance for them.

*Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1980)*

When Mathews was running Maloga, according to the old stories he got too many people there, and he run out of funds to keep it going so he made a request to the Government then for financial support. They said they couldn't help him while the Aboriginal people were living at Maloga because it was on private land. So the Government then decided to set aside a section of land adjoining Mathews property where they made the new site which became Cummera.

**MOVEMENT FROM MALOGA**

My Grandfather Edgar Atkinson helped them move the houses from Maloga. He told me they shifted the houses on wooden sledges made out of timber they cut down, and they were pulled by a team of horses. When they moved from Maloga all the major construction work was done by Aborigines who were all good builders, e.g. Herb Walker, Bagot Morgan, Edgar and Aaron Atkinson. They were smart fellas them old fellas.

**CHOOSING A NEW SITE**

They first stopped at a site in between Maloga and the present site of Cummera where they were going to build the new station. They called this site Ulunja but decided not to go ahead with it, because it was too far from the river for water and was in a low lying area which made it subject to flooding. So they decided to look for...
another site....they kept walking and looking around and the old people told me that you couldn't walk from where the cemetery is now to Cummera for timber. It was thick with Murray Pine timber which they used later for the picket fencing at Cummera. If you have a look at the old photos of Cummera you will see lots of picket fences around houses and up the middle of the streets around the trees that were planted. Those pickets were made from the pine timber when they cleared it all later.

ANOTHER SITE

After they decided not to build on the ULUNJA site they then moved to where the cemetery is now and built one house and were half way through building another and that's as far as they got. They again decided it was also too far from the river to cart water.

OUR HOME

The next site was chosen after the people walked down to the river and chose the present day site, naming it Cummeragunga meaning "Our Home".

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S ABSORPTION POLICY 1886

COMMENT: Before leaving Maloga I would like to briefly touch on the population increase at Maloga after the Victoria Government introduced its 1886 Absorption Policy.

The Absorption Policy came under the Aborigines Protection Act passed by the Victoria Government in 1886, which changed the earlier definition of Aborigines under the 1869 Act to;

"Aborigines are full bloods, half castes over thirty four, female half castes married to Aborigines, infants of Aborigines and any half caste who is licensed by the Victorian Board to reside on a station." (Vic. Parliamentary Acts:1886)

This meant that those Aborigines who were under the age of 35 and who were not licensed by the Board to stay, were compelled to leave the reserve. Those who were forced to leave were followed by their families, and they moved to Maloga in N.S.W. where kinship
ties were already established and the Victorian powers didn't apply.

After the Act was introduced there were some 60 who were exiled from Coranderrk, who moved to Maloga and were taken in by Mathews, who was criticised by the Victorian authorities for providing support to those who had been compelled to leave, thus undermining their absorption policy. However, the Victorian people seeking refuge at Maloga were soon to be faced with a similar act which was introduced by the N.S.W. Government in 1909-10. The N.S.W. Act was in fact a duplication of the Victorian policy aimed at dispersing part-Aborigines from the reserve, forcing them to become separated from their extended family and kinship ties, and pushing them into the general community to fend for themselves.

Some of the older people like Ivy Sampson and Effie Walsh have recollections of the Movements to Maloga and Cummera from Coranderrk as told to them by their parents, the Dunollys and Hamiltons, who were pioneer families of Coranderrk.

* Ivy Sampson (Barmah 1978)

There was some distinction about those who had fairer children and after Green left and Shaw came there, I think he was going to put all of the fair ones off... send them out among the whites, so they feared this and moved away with their children to Cummera. That's how my mother and father came down this way... Peter Dave and Sissy my brothers and sister were pretty fair when they were young. Me, Tom and Dick were the dark ones.

The same thing happened to a lot of other families too! and they came down to Cummera.

*Effie Walsh (Nathalia 1980)

My father's name was William Hamilton and my mother was Annie Johnson. She's from down at Euston and my father over at Kilmore way on the Goulburn there. My mother met my father at Coranderrk and there used to be a mission there and a place for women to have children, that's how my mother came from Euston. In those days there used to be no reserves up there so they used to send them all down there to
Coranderrk, then a lot came down from there to Cummera. That's how Cummera grew from all the people shifting down from Coranderrk.

**MIGRATION BETWEEN CUMMERANGUNGA AND CORANDERRK**

**COMMENT:** The movements between Cummeragunga and Coranderrk are best described by Diane Barwick in her studies of "Changes in the Aboriginal Population of Victoria 1863-1966" which gives the periods and numbers of Aboriginal people who were moved to Coranderrk and later migrated to Cummeragunga between 1860-1925.

**MAIN MOVEMENTS**

1. **1860**: Many part Aborigines from the Murray - Goulburn junction (Echuca area) had been removed to Coranderrk during the 1860s.

2. **1876-1885**: Some 50 rejoined their kinsmen and friends at Maloga during this period.

3. **1886**: Another 60 exiled after the 1886 Absorption policy from Coranderrk.

4. **1886-1925**: There was consistent migration and visiting until Coranderrk closed in 1925.

**DUPLICATION OF VIC. ACT BY N.S.W. 1909-10**

1909-1915: After the N.S.W. Act was introduced 150 part Aborigines were dismissed from Cummeragunga between 1909-1915. (Barwick 1970:297).

**LINKS WITH OTHER N.S.W. RESERVES**

Cummeragunga also had links and inter-marriage associations with the Wembawemba and Berababeraba of Moonahcullah (1898-1962) and the Wiradjuri of Darlington Point (1880-1926).
CHAPTER 6. THE OLD WAYS

* Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna:1978)

Terrible it must've been to have that culture destroyed. It must have still been very much alive when they came to Cummera. Although I believe at that stage they probably stopped doing their traditional dances and things like that, but maybe they still spoke their language. I think the only thing that kept being very strong was their love of the country that was around 'em. Many of the old ones continue to go up into the forest and do a lot of fishing and camping along there as we've known from what they've told us about those old places where they once lived, like the Bough Yard, Algabonyah, the Moira Lakes and places like that. They still did that for quite a long time. In my time I can remember when the flood waters came up, they'd go up the river an' catch fish an' swan eggs an' things like that. They'd live free for a while, when the floodwaters were up.

WHAT ABOUT THE BUNYIP HOLE?

I believe that there was a bunyip, because the kids in my days, anyway - the bunyip that they spoke of, it's a fair bet that there wouldn't be anybody around my age that ever swam in that hole because the old people told us the bunyip hole was there, an' if you went there the bunyip got you and nobody swam there and I've never swam there in my life. And it's a very interesting point that during the summer months when the river was high we used to walk many miles up stream and swim out onto the old barges that used to float the logs down to Echuca, and we knew all the old barge fellows, and we'd swim out and dive off 'em all the way down, but nobody swam while we were passing that "Bunyip Hole". So I think it was a good thing really that everybody respected what the old people said.
**LANGUAGE**

*Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1978)*

Our people - my mother Ada (Cooper) James and her brothers, Theresa Clements - they used to speak in the language. That's how we picked up a lot of it. If anyone was here talking with me, I could answer them. It's gone now, there's no-one here can talk it, I'm the oldest one you know.

**WHAT CAN YOU REMEMBER?**

We used to say, if our mother was going out -

**MUMA WOKA NYINI YANA**

Where you going to

She'd say "what you asking that for - my business" (laughs). If she asked us something and it was yes, we use to say "moorway" - "yes, alright".

We used to talk like this to her. We used to love to you know, but see now nobody to talk to you now in the Yorta Yorta language.

**CORROBOREE SONG.**

The old people taught us the corroboree song, and we used to sit down with our legs crossed and a pillow in our lap, beating the pillows and singing while they'd be corroboreeing.

We used to sing:

Down the Railway, Gooby Gooby (Go Away)

NARABRI DER YUR WYN NGUNGBARI WYN

YOU THIS ONE HERE

WOOLBA WOOLBA, WOOTHAMAYI

THAT ONE THERE LOOK.

DERYA WYN NGUNGBARI WYN

THIS ONE HERE LOOK

**OLD CUSTOMS**

*Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)*

One of the things I remember when I was at Cummera in the early days was when my Uncle died and my Aunt smoked the house out which lasted for about 2 weeks.
They still do this today! I remember my Grandfather coming in crying which was the first time I ever heard him crying, and he really cried loud as he sat there beside the smoke. After a death occurred it was a custom that you were not allowed to speak that person's name and nothing was shown that belonged to them. After someone died you would hear people referring to that person as "poor brother" or "poor sister".

I remember when I was only small and I called my sister who had passed away by her name, and they all yelled at me telling me that I wasn't allowed to say that. It was very important that people didn't speak a dead person's name until after a certain time.

ABORIGINES EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

There was a foreign fellow who came from overseas and he said... Everytime his mother would open her mouth to cry when her father died, they would say "shoosh" to her, or rush her into another room. He said no wonder there's so many people who have gone off their heads because they're not allowed to express their real feelings, whereas Aborigines do express their feelings and if they want to cry... "they cry" and feel a lot better for it after instead of keeping it all bottled up inside and ending up a nervous wreck. Another thing in white society is that most children are not allowed to go to funerals, whereas in Aboriginal society children are allowed to go, which is part of their education.

TOTEM:

I learnt what my totem was from my mother (Theresa Clements) and Aunt's totem, which was the Emu, Wundjuck, and if you speak to someone up north and they ask you what your totem is and you say Emu or Wundjuck they say - that's mine too! "You're my sister". (laughs).

LOSS OF CULTURE

*Bevan Nicholls (Nathalia 1980)

We missed a lot of our culture because of the mission stations which is the time it was more or less cut off from us. We only heard little bits but my father (Dowie Nicholls) would have been more of that period and when it came to me it was more fragmented. You could blame the missionaries for a lot of that because
they said 'now what we are going to teach you is coming out of the bible'...and I'm a believer in Jesus Christ to be honest but let's not cut people off from what they believe in.

They tried to impose all their ways onto us and never tried to learn anything from us. Had we been able to stay in the one particular area and carried on our culture we would still retain it today.

**BUSH TUCKER**

*Margaret Tucker (Melb. 1979)*

Moonacullah:

There was this old tribal fella called ALLOWIDGEE who always had fruit and used to get goannas from the bush and he would cook them. We used to ask him what 'cha doin' that for G'upa (means Grandpa) and he used to say - you'll see! you'll see! So we waited until it was cooked and then he said.....Get me some green boughs! He laid the goanna on the green boughs after it was cooked ....the same way we used to prepare fish. They didn't use plates in those days - we used to use green boughs. So he tore the skin off the goanna and the meat was real white....They were real hungry days for Aboriginal people those days as they didn't get any rations at Moonacullah, and they were hungry as they watched ALLOWIDGEE skinning the goanna so they couldn't resist the temptation when they saw him starting to eat it. We asked him if we could have some and he gave us some ... it tasted just like chicken. When we finished having a feed we went home and I told my mother. She said that's good for you! We used to use the goanna fat too because it was very good for ailments.

**OTHER BUSH TUCKER**

We used to get the wild herbs and buckerbunch was delicious specially after the rain. Other things like dandylions which was another form of vegetable that was eaten. When they used to cut down the trees to make a Mia Mia from the bark, they would skin the bark off and it would leave all this lovely white sap so we would scrape it off with a knife and eat it. It was delicious!
BLACKFELLAS BREAD

When they cut down the tree and lifted off the dead bark, it would be underneath the bark. It was a lump of food substance that looked like bread. White people would probably say "yuk" when they saw some of the traditional foods the Aborigines ate but to them it was their natural food that provided them with plenty of nourishment. All of these things are nearly forgotten now and most of the natural food started to disappear as settlement spread out.

ABORIGINAL CURES

"GUM" Gum from the tree was used for upset stomachs. It was boiled down and used as a liquid medicine to drink. Not a whole lot just a little which was one of the Aboriginal cures.

OLD MAN WEED

It grew along the river beds and on the open flood plains. It was used for sores and also to drink if you were sick or had a cold. They used to use it for a lot of things and it was very strong with little buds on it they used for toothache. There were a lot of natural herbs that were very valuable to the Aborigines in those days.

* Ivy Sampson (Barmah 1980)

A doctor in Melbourne, Dr. Newman still uses Old Man Weed for treatment. Aborigines used to use it for curing illness such as T.B., sores and other ailments. They used to drink it.....I knew a young man who is old now! He was only a young fella about 18 and he got T.B. He was a good shearer and this was in Mr. Burridge's time as schoolteacher at Cummera (1925)... they took him and the doctor gave him six months to live. The old lady would go away and gather it and boil it up. He would be out sitting in the sun, he couldn't walk much and was pale as anything. So she would give him this to drink and after a while it cured him and he's still alive today. It also cured Uncle Manuel Cooper, Gretta and Barney's mother too! and when she stopped taking it she got sick again.

A lot of people used to take it because it was a natural healing plant that must have been used for years.
NATURAL FOOD DESTROYED

*Margaret Tucker (Melb:1979)

As farms started to crop up and squatters started to move in, the natural food started to disappear - like the Aborigines are disappearing today! They were introduced to white people's food which they had to work for or pinch a sheep or two every now and again. A lot of Aboriginal people were starved out during the early days and were suffering from consumption because they didn't have the right food which is what killed off a lot of our people in the early days and they were dying like flies.

When the white man went out to clear the land and their wives didn't go with them they intermixed with the Aboriginal women which is true because its been handed down from the old people. And that's in the first place where a lot of our fair skin people come from, who some of them don't even know they've got Aboriginal blood in them. Then they've married again into white people...It's hard to put into words but deep down its sad of the things that happened to our people.

OLD YARNS

*Mary Clarke (Framlingham:1979)

LINKS WITH TRUGANINI

My Grandmother was Granny Briggs who was the only daughter Truganini had. She married a Briggs from Tasmania who was supposed to be a sealer and they came over to Victoria after they were married. Then later on they went up to Cummera. That's where Granny Briggs lived until she died there.

OLD CLEVER FELLA'S

I remember an old clever fella coming to Cummera there before I left there and come over here to Framlingham. He was after my cousin Minna who was married to Harry Podham. She used to go out with some other boys and girls to where the old football ground was and this day they saw a lot of cows looking at something in the bush with their ears up! ...There he was plantin in the bush this old black fella who they didn't know where he come from. He came from nowhere this old fella and he was after my cousin! They think that Harry Podham knew him and got him to come over to Cummera. So they watched him there and they used to see him stooping
down fiddling about with things there, and he’d be there for some time - and all the
cows would be watching and looking over at him. They would be wondering all the
time what the cows were looking at, and this old fella would be there still
fiddling about there with something. He had Minnas hair and I saw that hair too!
and I can still see it today. He had it in a hollow stick with other things stuck
in it - stones and everything were in it... and he used to be out there singing
with this hair.

One day they waited till he came out again and as soon as he went back into the
bush again, they went over to where he was fiddling about and got this piece of
wood with Minnas hair in it and took it over to Aunty Maggie Currs place, which
is the place there now where Jessie Cooper is living in (one of the old Maloga homes).
Anyhow they took it there and that night they put it in a tin behind the bags near the
wall. When they went to bed they could hear this tin "rattling" which had the piece
of wood in it. Then poor old Uncle Leonard started swearing "take that bloody
thing out of here go on - I don't want it in here." Everybody was frightened
of it cause it was hitting against the tin when this old clever fella must have
been singin it. So next morning my Uncle said to take that tin out of the
house .. go on I don't want it here, so the girls and all the rest of 'em took
the tin and everything down to the river and threw it into the Murray River.
When they threw it into the river, all the water around it went real black.

Then Minna had to go and hide, cause when this old fella found out that
everything was taken, "he was ropabley mad, he was a really wild old fella! and
his eyes were real white and big...he would frighten you just looking at him.
He was ropable because they took his things that he was using to sing Minna.
Thats what they used to do in the early days...get a piece of your hair and sing
it and you would get sick and die.

Anyhow that old clever fella ended up singin her and in the long run she died. He
wanted to get her right or wrong because he was wild with them for taking his
things and he didn't want them to know what he was up to.

After that people used to lock their doors when they'd hear...black doctors coming
black doctor. I remember that well and when they used to hear that they would all
be inside and you could hear the hammer going then at the windows and doors locking it all up from the black doctor. Yes, that name still rings in my ears today when I look back. We used to put ashes outside the doors then and when we'd get up in the morning, we would go and see if there were any tracks there.

"HE WAS THERE ALRIGHT".

* Bevan Nicholls (Nathalia:1980)

"Some of their beliefs what they talked about when you come to work it out it makes you wonder"

For instance the witchdoctor or the fella in the tribe who had the most knowledge and power, he told the people now look....when you go away and do your business well you cover it over, because somebody from the other tribe will come along (now we're talking about 2-300 in the one camp) and take it and sing you because they have a part of you. So that meant covering your business over.

Now if you look into it where there was 2-300 people living in a tribe all close together...you could get hook worm and other diseases. So if the old fella was to go over and cover your dung. up to avoid this then it wouldn't have as much influence as the fear of being boned if they didn't do it themselves. All of this sort of ways and customs were wiped out.

HAIRY BECKER

Take the"Hairy Becker". He was another story that was told to prevent children wandering near the bush at night and getting lost. The thing about these stories is they were told for a purpose and there was some definite logic behind them.

After all what logic was behind "Superman" who we used to go along to the matinees and watch and the next day try to fly off the top of the roof or from a tree and end up feeling sore and sorry for ourselves.

OVEN MOUNDS

In a lot of places along the Murray they (archaeologists) are finding bones in Aboriginal oven mounds. Now straight away most of the white people will say without thinking that's where they ate people. One of the things I picked up from old Aborigines is that they buried their dead in the oven mound because their
belief is that when someone dies their spirit remains with the tribe. The reason for that is because they had to travel sometimes long distances in search of food. For instance around Swan Hill they used to hunt for food out in the Mallee country which is some 60 miles. My Grandfather’s tribe travelled long distances to water holes for ducks, and after other foods that came to those places in mass on the plains. So when they came back to prepare and cook their food which was always in the same place...then whoever died and was buried in the mound...their spirit was there with them and the belief was that they ate with them when they had a feed because the spirit was there all the time.

When you look at it, its a pretty good way of thinking because the present way is we bury our dead and that’s it. How many go up to the cemetery and see if everything is alright. We bury our dead now according to European ways where as traditionally thats the way it was done.

We dug up an oven up in Swan Hill when I was working there and underneath there was a "widows cap". When a man of a tribe dies his widow never marries again but is looked after by his tribe. So they make a cap of clay which fits around the head and when the widow died she was buried there in the mound. These mounds have been there for thousands of years, and archaeologists they seem to be on a different track and its about time they started listening to us now because we’ve had a lot passed down to us. So thats some of the reason for these beliefs and its a pretty good thing too when you come to think of it!

RESERVES/MISSIONS

At that particular time a lot of people thought that it was a good thing because lets face it they were poisoning Aboriginals and shooting them. The squatter came in and wanted the land and Aborigines were a block between them and the land.

At this particular station where I worked there was a great tower where they used to climb up and watch for the blacks. They wasted time and money having someone up there all the time watching out. The first settler who moved in there realizing there was not much of the traditional tucker around because the sheep destroyed a lot of it, decided to give the Aborigines a few sheep which they thought was good tucker.
So after a while they saw a few running around in a mob the same as the kangaroo and thought they must be alright, they're running around in a mob just like the kangaroo, so they speared a few of them. The next minute along came these fellas (squatter shepherds) and "boom" they get shot for it.

That was one incident. Another was on Tyntynder station where they poisoned a lot of Aborigines there by putting arsenic in their flour which wiped a lot of our people out in the early days. Then they died of other diseases such as the cold and other viruses which they never had before white man came. Reserves then were more or less a refuge for Aborigines to come to so they could be protected.
"Oh yes right to this day we think about that! the way they treated them very badly and took their farm blocks back without telling them why. They worked their blocks and the Board came along and took them back just like that. They never gave any warning or reason for it and they were very upset about it when they took them back." (Pricilla McKray : Mooroopna 1980)

COMMENT:
The farm blocks that were allotted between 1895 and 1898 as I mentioned earlier in the Maloga history, were in response to the petitions in 1881 by 42 Maloga residents and the 1887 petition by Jack Cooper. The story behind the farm blocks is still today regarded as a bitter memory to the descendants of those who were granted blocks to farm and then had them taken back by the Board in 1907, only 12 years after they were first granted.

Between 1895 and 1898 there were twenty, forty acre blocks granted to the pioneer residents of Maloga and Cummera and by 1898 these twenty blocks were being cultivated and cleared.

It's difficult today to find out who the 20 block holders were but the main ones as told to me by Aboriginal descendants were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HERB WALKER</th>
<th>HENRY ATKINSON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRED WALKER</td>
<td>EDGAR ATKINSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAGOT MORGAN</td>
<td>EARNIE JOHACHIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOB COOPER</td>
<td>JAMES COGHILL</td>
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<tr>
<td>JACK COOPER</td>
<td>GEORGE ALLEN</td>
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<td>WILLIAM COOPER</td>
<td>ALICK BRIGGS</td>
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<td>AARON ATKINSON</td>
<td>FINEMORE JACKSON</td>
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<td></td>
<td>WILLIE MURRAY</td>
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</tbody>
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The N.S.W. Aborigines Protection Board reported in its annual report for 1896: "The farm blocks were ploughed an aggregate of 70 acres, which they put under wheat. Johnny Atkinson ploughed and sowed 27 acres with wheat—about 4 acres were destroyed by rabbits; 17 acres were cut for hay, giving a total yield of about 4 tons; 6 acres were stripped giving a total yield of 72 bushels. He returned 12 bags of wheat to Station, that quantity having been supplied him for seed. He has cut most of his hay for chaff and has sold over 1 ton. Robert Cooper ploughed and sowed 9 acres with wheat, which he cut for hay, getting a return of about 3½ tons. E. Joachim ploughed and sowed 10 acres with wheat; cut 3 acres for hay, getting about 1 ton return; stripped the other 7 acres for about 38 bushels of wheat. F. and H. Walker ploughed and sowed 8 acres with wheat; cut 7 acres for hay, getting about 2½ tons hay, and stripped 1 acre for 9 bushells, which they returned to Station. Bagot Morgan ploughed and sowed 8 acres with wheat, which he cut for hay, getting about 1 ton, which he sold for 3-10-0. George Allen ploughed and sowed 9 acres; rabbits destroyed about 2 acres; crops cut for hay about 1½ tons." (N.S.W. A.P.B. 1897:11).

There were many obstacles put in front of the block holders during their attempts to develop their 40 acre blocks and adapt to an agricultural way of life. The 1890s experienced a major depression followed by the great drought lasting into the 1900s, which had a big effect on the whole rural sector e.g. sheep numbers were reduced by 50%, cattle by 40% and average wheat yields dropped by 75%. On top of this there were major floods and plagues of rabbits and grubs, which was devastating for the whole region.

The machinery that had to be shared between the 20 block holders would have been another problem but apart from all these things, the Government and the Board's policy towards Aboriginal reserves was not to encourage individual initiatives or enterprise. Their main concern was to manage the reserve and the people under their own set of rules and regulations, and in the long term Aboriginal people were to be eventually absorbed into the general community. The Board decided to abolish the farm block system in 1907 after a visit of inspection was made by members of the Board. This decision, as stated in
the 1908 annual report, was made on the evidence of the local board (whose job was to oversight the developments of the reserve) and the manager, who reported that "the residents of the station had after sufficient opportunity, failed to properly work the blocks of land placed at their disposal." The Board decided for the future to abolish the farm block system and work the land for the general benefit of the station.

This must have been a bitter blow to those who were trying to make a go of their blocks under the most extreme adverse conditions. Some of them protested and spoke out about the Board's decision but to no avail. The Board had the power under regulations to remove Aboriginal people from the reserve and it seems coincidental that the following year to the blocks being taken back, they used those powers to remove what they regarded as certain undesirable residents. (N.S.W. A.P.B. 1908:7)

Further powers were given to the Board and managers in 1910 when the Aborigines Protection Act, introduced in 1909, came into force. This Act was similar to the Victorian policy of 1886 referred to as the absorption policy. It gave the N.S.W. Board powers to remove those who didn't abide by or conform to their rules and regulations.

Rations were not allowed to be issued to any of the able bodied who had to find work outside the reserve to support their families. Those who were allowed to stay on the reserve were the aged and those part Aborigines who had no other means of support. All other people who the Board termed as half or lighter caste were to be removed and discouraged from visiting their kinfolk.

The population of Cummera reached its peak of 394 in 1908, when expulsions actually began; by 1915 only 252 persons remained, meaning there were about 142 that were either moved away under the powers of the Act, or left with their children when they were compelled to leave the reserve. (Barwick 1972:56)

ABORIGINAL VIEWS ABOUT BLOCKS:

* Ronald Morgan (1952 : 10)

The portion of the station known as Ulunja (the first site chosen after leaving Maloga) was measured into blocks and given to the more able men of the place to
clear and work for themselves. The men worked hard clearing and fencing in their allotted blocks receiving the station rations while doing so. In between times they would go shearing and do other seasonal work outside the station. Working untiringly as they did many got their land cleared and had the pleasure of having a crop off it. There were still others who reached the stage of clearing their land but never had the opportunity of getting a crop. Something unforeseen was discovered. Having no horses or implements of their own, what the station had were insufficient to supply the needs of all. What was to be done? This problem like the first, was also solved. The Board then known as the Aborigines Protection Board, decided to work the land on a community system, the revenue going to the upkeep of the station. This was eventually done, much to the resentment of the Aborigines, and has been one of the life long grievances of Cummeragunga.

This portion of the station (on which the people had their blocks) was first leased out in the early 1920s, and is still in private hands in one a Mr. Wally Smart.

**COMMENT**

The land leased by Smart was 2000 acres, and according to evidence given to the 1937-8 Select Committee by Danvers who was the manager there 1934-37, the price Smart paid for the leasehold was 4 shillings and two pence an acre. During this period Smart also set up a timber mill there where between 29.1.37 and 17.5.37 (4 months) he produced 52, 435 super feet of timber from the leasehold.

The revenue was split on a 50/50 basis with the Board.

(N.S.W. Select Committee 1937-8:86)

This land, in the heart of Cummera, is still under leasehold to a whiteman, and Aboriginal people are still trying to get it back in 1980.

*Fred Walker* (Barmah 1978)

My father Herbert and Uncle Fred were two of the block holders. I don't know why the Board took them back - my father and Uncle worked very hard trying to make
a go of their block and work it like Europeans who had a lot more experience in working the land for farming and growing crops. I don't know why they took them back, but I remember the Board building houses on the reserve where all the people could live together instead of having separate places. They wanted to keep them all together in the one place. Some didn’t work their blocks because they were already working outside. In those days the fishing industry was big and it was nothing to go and catch a basket of fish which would bring a good return. So a lot of them preferred to work fishing rather than put time into their blocks and farm them the way Europeans do. As far as they were concerned the blocks were their homes and to be worked in their own pace.

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1979)

Dan Atkinson took me to the place where the farm blocks were and pointed out to me the places where the people of Maloga worked the farm blocks.

That's where they were ....(pointing to a large area which is now taken up by surrounding farmers). That was where Herb Walker's block was, and see that dam over there (pointing to a section of land on the west side of the sand hills and the road that leads to the old Maloga site)...that dam is still referred to today as Herb Walker's dam. Alongside Herb's block was Bagot Morgan's block...They used to work their blocks and in those days they never had much machinery between them so they used to work their blocks with one single furrow plough and a horse....They used to help each other work their blocks, and then after a while they came and took them off the people for what reason I don't know!

* Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1978)

They looked after their blocks and cultivated them. They used to get real good crops and that's one thing I've never forgot how they took them like that. They lost trust with the Board then but they couldn't do anything about it... They just had to abide by what the Board said or if they spoke out they were told to leave the reserve. Grandpa James was very put out about the Board's
decision and he used to write on behalf of the block holders to the Board, but they never responded to his letters...it was just like writing a dead letter.

I remember when they were working their blocks I was only a young girl then and I used to take food down to Uncle Johnny (Atkinson) and them (Granny Kitty's sons) while they were working.

*Effie Walsh (Nathalia 1980)*

After those blocks were taken back that fella Smart he come there, and he was a smart fella too! He done a lot of dirty work against our people for the Board and the manager; they were together. In the sandhills there they had a lovely lot of big pine trees that grew there where the graves and that were. Well they got a sawman then and cut all them trees down and they sawed them all up then and used to send it into the mill in Echuca, and some of it was kept for building houses on the mission. The Board leased the land to Smart and he put a mill up there and sold all the timber. He had some people working for him but I don't know whether it was white fellas or black fellas but they (the Board) wouldn't let our people work it for themselves. They didn't want them to learn see!
CHAPTER 8. SCHOOLING and WORK

UNDER GRANDPA JAMES

"He was the cog in the wheel and when he left it left a big gap to fill because he set such a high standard to follow." (Fred Walker)

* Rebecka Murray (Shepparton 1978)

Grandfather came out on the boat from Mauritius...he was only young and he wanted to travel and see a bit of the world. So the first place he landed was Tasmania where he stopped, and he studied there to be a schoolteacher. He taught in a school somewhere in Tasmania and then he decided to come across to Melbourne where he wanted to see a bit of Australia. When he arrived in Melbourne he was taken in by Crosbys who were well to do people in Melbourne. They saw him and took a liking to him, and they invited him home to their place and offered him a room there and work looking after their horses. He agreed to go and after that he never looked back. While he was staying there he used to study and he used to receive 4/6 a week for looking after the horses and doing odd jobs for Mrs. Crosby. Out of that money he used to buy himself some books and a candle. Then of a nighttime he would sit up in his little room and study. It wasn't long after that Mr. Mathews came along and he met Grandpa when Grandpa attended a meeting he was holding at Brighton beach. Mathews used to come down to Brighton and set up a tent on the beach there where he used to preach and try and gain support from people for Maloga. Grandpa became interested in Mathews and what he was trying to do so he volunteered then to come to Maloaga and that's where he stayed for most of his life. He was only a young man when he came there.
Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1979)

Grandpa was appointed headmaster at Cummera. He went away to Hay to do his exams after we moved to Cummera because he was only a schoolteacher at Maloga. He went to Hay to sit for his exams and passed them with a credit. Before he became a qualified teacher he was studying to be a doctor...Well then he got ill when he had to sit for his doctors exam, and he caught typhoid fever which prevented him from going on with his medical studies, so he had to give up then because it left him with an unsteady hand. So then he said to himself. I'll turn my sights to teaching, and he became the headmaster then at Cummera.

When Grandpa became headmaster I became his senior assistant then and Miriam was the other assistant. Miriam was the eldest girl but I became his eldest assistant sort of thing. Then there was Shadrach who became a junior assistant. That went on for a while and then Ferguson came there as manager and one of his daughters Brucinda came into the school as an assistant.

The school was open to both Aborigines and whites. The Maloney boys used to go to school there and they were taught by Grandpa. Willie Maloney the eldest boy later became a teacher at Moama.

He was a doctor and a preacher as well and if anyone was sick he would go and tend to them all hours of the night, even over to Barmah... He saved Lenny Maloney who had pneumonia and my father pulled him through it for which he was never forgotten.

They had a dispensary at Cummera too and he used to mix all the medicines when the Doctor from Echuca would come out and prescribe some medicine for those who were sick.

GRANDPA'S PEOPLE IN MAURITIUS

He used to write to his people back in Mauritius and they used to write to him. He was a very loved person by his family in Mauritius and they used to always keep in touch with him. Then the time came when he got his 6 months leave from the N.S.W. Education Dept. so he went back to his home and visited his family, and he then came back to Cummera and stayed there until he retired in 1922.
YOU COULDN'T WAG IT IN GRANDPAS TIME!

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1978)

In Grandpa's time he made sure you went to school. If children didn't attend school and made excuses that they were sick and that sort of thing, Grandpa would soon come along and visit them with the stethoscope to find out whether it was real or not.

* Mary James (Shepparton 1978)

My first twelve months at school was taught by Grandpa. I was 5 then and he left there when I was 6. I remember the day I went to school and he was standing at the gate and when I walked in he picked me up and kissed me and took me into school.

* Margaret Tucker (Melbourne 1979)

HE DIDN'T SPARE THE ROD!

Grandpa James was loved by everyone and yet he didn't spare the rod. He was the only one who gave punishment in the school. I remember the time I was sent to him to get the cane...I was only new there then because I used to come to Cummera from Moonahculah to attend school and stop on my Grandfather's farm, just out of Cummera.

This day when I was sent to get the cane, I went to Grandpa's room and I was too frightened to open the door... He saw the top of my head as I was standing there and opened the door and held the door... He said "and what are you standing there for?" I remember it as clear as if it only happened yesterday and then he said "never mind you be a good girl now!" and then he bent down and kissed me on the cheek and sent me back to my class.

SCHOOLING AFTER GRANDPA

* Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

Education in the very early days was a lot better than it was later. As history tells us the very early times when they came to Cummeragunga from Maloga - those people were better educated than they are even today. Mr. James who was the teacher then played a big part in their education and was a big influence on the people in those days. I think the people were a lot better off in those days as far as education goes. The next teacher that came there
after him wasn't as good as him and then of course after that the education standard just dropped dramatically from then on. Say people around about my age now or from around about that time.

After he retired I would say would be the time things started to decline. The older ones can give a better picture on this but from what I can remember there was a lot of unrest there after Mr. James left.

Managers were getting tougher and tougher and if anyone played up on the mission or went away they had a pretty hard time getting back and I can remember those days pretty well.

*Colin Charles (Cummeragunga 1978)*

When I first started school Grandpa was teaching and then old Burridge took over after him. Grandpa taught my mother, and my wife's mother... He was a clever man that fella... My wife's sister, Hyllus went in for double entry book keeping under Grandpa James. They were all good writers too. Then when Grandpa left we used to have white teachers ... they used to take us out walking you know in the bush and we knew the bush all the time (laughs). They used to take us on nature study walks through the bush... It should have been the other way around and us taking the teachers on nature study lessons...

We lost one poor fella (teacher) down there in the bush one day, and we all had to looking for him.

*Rupert Cooper (Barmah 1979)*

I went to school just after Grandpa James left and a white man came here by the name of Charley Burridge... He didn't know how to teach a black fella.... a black fella could teach him. He was half silly and used to take us down the river swimming. We'd been swimming since we were little fallas. Then he would take us on bush walks and all he wanted to do was look at the bush... like we'd been doing all the time! Anyhow he left there later and went to Moonahcullah...

I always try to tell white people all the time... "there's nothing you can teach a blackfella" a blackfella can teach you whether he is educated or not.

I said you can't show him what to do! he'll show you what to do.
Lottie Atkinson (Shepparton 1978)

There was not much schooling after Austin (teacher after Burridge and James). There was not much when he was there either! The only schooling was when Grandpa James was there. Burridge came after that and there was hardly any education under him....there was a big mob of girls who could hardly read when they left school....they couldn't count money or sign their own name - some of them! If they didn't turn up at school in those days, he (teacher) didn't worry....And when you'd go to school he used to do more talking and no writing, no studying or anything like that, or sums. You know, a lot of the things the younger ones today learn in their education.....we never even knew about or seen anything like that. Teachers in those days like Mr. Burridge never used to write on the board any sums or teach us a proper education.

LEVEL OF EDUCATION.

Clive Atkinson (Robinvale 1978)

Burridge was there for a long time. I remember him telling us he was only allowed to teach us to 3rd grade. He said "you boys would be clever alright", he said to us "but I'm not allowed to teach you any more than 3rd grade". He said "that's why I've got to send my children across to Barmah School, over to Victoria."

He had children Winnie, Elsie and Allan. So that's what I found out that we weren't allowed to be educated any higher than the 3rd grade because it was the rules that teachers had to go by. The people that went to school under Grandpa were better educated than us. They didn't want to educate us fellas for some reason.....I don't know they might have thought we'd cause trouble or something if we became too aware of the real facts.

Bevan Nicholls (Barmah 1978)

A lot of our people from Cummera will say "Oh yes, we got a good education because we had Grandpa James". But alright in that time he was one of us, and as he said, it was his responsibility to educate the people and prepare them for...
later on. Then of course he moved and we got white teachers. A Mr. Austin came there... a good old chap and all that but he was from overseas again like the other white managers. His idea was "Well look! They've got good voices, these people and if I teach them to sing they'll be good singers" which is what he did. A lot of people from Cummera around about my time and before all had pretty good voices and could sing naturally. If we don't use our voices for singing we use them for singing out about what's been done to us!

This is how a lot of them (teachers) used to think. For instance they would say to themselves... Aborigines are good artists... so alright we'll teach them to draw and paint. This is the attitude the teachers had and I'm talking about my age group that were living on Cummera at the time that went through the white schoolteacher period. I think schooling then was only to 3rd grade level. There were a lot of brilliant students in my age group... yet there they were... some of them came out of it alright who were able to paint and sing and didn't make no money out of it! These are the sorts of things we're looking at now. At my age o.k. I should be a retired person. And yet here we are still battling along, you know? And there's a lot of other people like me.

TRIBAL DAYS

If we go back to our people in the tribal days, my grandfathers they used to hold their concerts and their dances and other things in their own country, without coming onto the reserve, and someone saying to them "Well look, now! We're going to teach you how to sing all day!" - or half the day, or salute the flag which went on nearly all Monday. From what I can remember, Monday was a day of singing and saluting the flag, and sport, which didn't prepare us for what we have to face today.

TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1980)

There was a fair few working on the reserve in the early times, but not enough to keep everyone in work. So the others had to go outside for work, which is how they came to take those girls that time (1918). The men were all way down over the sand hill digging burrows and in those days they only had a
horse and buggy to get around.

DEPRESSION

The first big depression just before the first world war - it was a bad depression that one which is the time we had to work two days a week for our rations and tucker. There was no work off the reserve in that time, like fruit picking or anything like that. Things got better after a while and it changed from battling to get a job to having plenty of work. It was one heck of a battle in those early days. I was only thinking about those days this morning. And I can remember the times when a shearing contractor used to come there, and he would always go away with a load of shearers. There used to be a lot of work in the hay carting season and they were good hay carters, stack builders too.

LOG DRAYS

The main work I did there in the early days was on the log drays carting wood for the people. There were two drays we used to work and you had to have a really sharp axe, because some of the logs we got thrown were pretty tough. It was all axe work in those days.

OLD STORE

*Ivy Sampson (Barmah 1978)*

Some of the men used to work on Cummera digging rabbit burrows and others used to go away shearing. There was a big general store on Cummera and every morning at 9 o'clock they opened that store and you could buy anything from sweets to dungarees, and the kids used to buy lollies and biscuits there. They had everything you wanted in that store. You'd see the old men all sitting around under a big tree there.

STATION WORK

After I married Berty Sampson we moved to Moonahcullah for a while then we came back to Cummera and I worked on Moira Station then. Clarkes were there then and I used to do house work and when they would go away I would cook the meals for the rest of the family. May who married Hartley Briggs was there before me and Henry Atkinson was there too! He'd been working there for years. Ronny Morgan
and Jonathan Jackson were working there...they were all rabbiting then. I worked there for 5 years doing house work, washing, cooking, cleaning.

Clarkes were good to work for and the wages in those days I was getting about 2/10/- a week.

* Ruby Neir (Mooroopna 1980)

I still have a vivid picture of the bags of wheat that were harvested at Cummera in the early days being lined up along the river waiting for the steamers to come and load it onto the barges and take it up to Echuca.

I started work at a very young age and had some tough experiences working on stations, in the canneries and other jobs off the reserve. Aboriginal people were exploited in those days and in most cases they were treated badly by white employers. They were also paid low money for the amount of work they had to do. Some white employers were good and tried to do the right thing by Aborigines but there were a lot of bad white employers who exploited Aborigines and treated them like slaves. Those days were very tough!

* Mary James (Shepparton:1978)

To my knowledge shearing was the only type of work and they had half a dozen working on the mission. They were paid to deliver wood to the people and the milking and the butcher. They used to have over 80-90 cows and lots of sheep and they had their own slaughter yards and milking yard. There was no work for the women on the reserve but later on a lot of the women worked on the fruit and in the canneries in Shepparton and Mooroopna.

FRUIT AND VEGI GARDENS

At that time it was a good place for people to live. It was every bit as good as a little town because everybody took an interest in their own houses. A couple of the older ones on Cummera had their own orchards and vegetable gardens on a small block at the back of their homes. Seymour Jackson and George Nelson had small orchards of their own cause I remember when we were kids
going up there and buying a peach for a halfpenny. And old George Nelson had a block of ground where he used to grow veggies and sell them. An' Uncle Herbie Walker grew veggies too. So people used to go out there and buy their veggies and fruit off those three people.

The biggest majority of the men were shearers. Old Clarrie Atkinson was the milkman....Henry Charles and another old fella Yogan they used to call him.... they were the butchers. The drays and the horses were there for them to borrow if they wanted to cart a load of wood or sand.

FISHING

Iris Atkinson (Echuca 1978)

They used to ring a bell on Cummera on certain days which meant we had to go up and get our supplies and rations. We all used to take our containers up for our flour, sugar and tea. Then every Tuesday and Friday I think it was we used to go up with our big plate and get so many pounds of meat. Well that meat had to last us till Friday and then when we run out - well we run out! there was nothing until the next week. So we just had to depend on what father got (George Nelson).

He was a fisherman and that was his living. He used to fish with nets. My mother used to be a champion net maker. She used to make all his drum nets. I remember I used to sit for hours and watch her do those nets and father used to tan them. He and Uncle Dick Joyce were great mates and they both worked in together and split their earnings on a 50/50 basis. They used to send their fish down to the Melbourne market. When they caught a basket of fish they would take it up to Picola where it would be packed and sent to Melbourne by train. Then they used to get paid every month for their catch.

I remember when my father used to receive his monthly cheque and he would take my mother into Echuca where they would shop and buy us clothes and shoes. Sometimes we would get other things which we regarded as luxuries that we never got while we were on the reserve because we only got the bare necessities there such as the rations. My father was able to provide us sometimes with luxuries like cheese, butter and those sorts of things. Although on Cummera they grew a
lot of their own vegies and fruit and no-one went without...we always shared
with each other. If any of the folk went fishing and caught plenty of fish,
then they would come back and share with their neighbours and others across
the street or whoever was in need. If the boys went out hunting rabbits, they used
to hang their skins out, then take them up to the store and that would be their
pocket money to buy themselves their tobacco and other small things. If we were
short of anything at the time like sugar, or tea, Mum would say "Look take
a pair of rabbits over to so and so's and ask them for some sugar in exchange for
some rabbits." We were happy and united then!

SHEARING

Fred Walker (Barmah:1980)

I believe that Aborigines had a natural gift for shearing and in those days I
would back an Aboriginal shearing team against any other shearing team anyday.
In one team I worked in I worked alongside Aboriginal shearers like Charley Muir
and Harry McKray who were well respected shearers and were both over 200 a day
shearers....they did it everyday too! We sheared in lots of different places
in those days and our main run was down in the Western District where a lot
of Aboriginal shearers used to follow work. The team that used to go down there
were real guns in those days and we all used to get on well and worked in
together. When we knocked off we used to sit around of a night time and have
a good old yarn over a few beers. But then - the next day, as soon as you were
on that board and the bell rang everyone would be into it and the pen gates
would be swinging all the time! It wouldn't take long for the sweat to start
running out of you either. When I was shearing I never used to smoke but old
Charley Muir did. He used to roll himself 10 cigarettes which would last him
over every run, and when he was going all you could see was Charley down amongst
the wool and the smoke coming up.

MOIRA STAND:

In my time it was a fifteen man stand but that was after the blade finished
and machines took over. So it must have been bigger than that. One of the best
shearers that shore there was Henry Atkinson who was backed by the owners
there at the time, Faulkiner, who put up $500 on Henry against anyone anywhere for quantity and quality.

*Mally Cooper (Bairnsdale 1980)*

Different ones would go out in groups shearing. There would be 3-4 go to one shed and another 3-4 to another shed. They'd go right up northern NSW and sometimes they'd be away for 6 weeks and sometimes more. The women would stay at home and there was always a man around if there was any trouble who you could go to for help. When the shearing was finished a lot would go fishing in the off season. They used to go camping up the other side of the Moira Lakes. There was plenty of work around at that time and Cummera was a self-supporting place.

Mrs. Danvers (managers wife 1934-37) taught a lot to do handcraft work. I used to make a lot of the clothes for Cummera people...even mens trousers from the material they used to get.

They were all good shearers, the Atkinsons, Coopers, Walkers, Morgans and they were pretty shearers. A lot of them used to go to Brunts every year. The Nicholls used to go there and old Jimmy Charles. They all made good money too!

Yes they would buy a new horse or get a couple of new wheels for their buggy so they could travel around the sheds. Some of the men would also find work harvesting when the crops were ready.

*Eddy Walker (Shepparton 1980)*

I grew up on Cummera and went to school there and then I left and went to work with Maloney's operating the Barmah punt.

**ACROSS THE PUNT FOR A SHILLING A WHEEL**

There was different charges for going across the punt then. It used to be a shilling a wheel or if you had a horse and cart it used to cost 2 shillings and a car was two shillings and sixpence. In those days I used to operate it by hand and used to wind it back and forth all day. I was playing football then and it used to keep me in trim. Sometimes when there was no-one waiting for it I used to wind it over and back a couple of times just to keep me fit for football, and that was my training. (Laughs)
I left there then and went to Mathoura from Cummera because there was not enough work there then. I used to do a bit of fencing when Ferguson was the manager there but there wasn't enough work to keep everyone going. I had my family on Cummera and then moved away to Mathoura cutting sleepers and falling timber for the mill there. In between all of that I used to go away shearing then around the district. I shore at Moira station and around Mathoura at Hill Plains, Deniliquin...that was my run. Then I used to meet up with some of the other Aboriginal shearers at Moira. Frank and Henry Atkinson they were good shearers. Uncle Henry was pretty good. He was a great shearer that fella.

YOU WERE PRETTY GOOD YOURSELF FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD YOU COULD KNOCK OVER YOUR TALLY IN A DAY?

Oh, yes!
I shore my 200 a day and I've seen fellas shear their 200 one day and then none the next. I shore my 200 a day all the time. All of my boys ended up shearers. I was taught by my father Herb Walker. I used to go around to all the different sheds with him and do a bit of pickin-up and I used to watch the head man and whenever I saw him do a fast blow then I would learn it which is how I picked it up. And whenever I was slow on a stroke I used to watch someone else's blow that was faster and pick it up to make myself faster. I taught my sons then and whenever they were slow I taught them the fast blow.

* Clive Atkinson (Robinvale 1978)

DEPRESSION 1930s.

Danvers was the manager who replaced Austin (1934). He gave the people more and he gave all the young fellas a bit of work and extra rations. During the depression in Austin's time (1930s) Terry Atkinson and I went up and asked him for a bit of work so we could get some tucker, and Austin said "Get on the track and find a job". At that time there were thousands of people on the roads during the depression looking for work all over Australia. Then if you went into the towns to Echuca or Moama to try and find a bit of work or get the dole, they'd say "Oh you come from the mission - Go back there then!" So what could you do?
There was a few fellas used to do a bit of carpentering. Old Jimmy Charles an' Uncle Eddie Atkinson, Henry Cooper. They used to get about 25 bob a week. I used to work at Maloney's at the pub there.

*Claire Moulton (Mooroopna 1980)

LEECHING

Uncle Eddy and Henry, Clive and Jeff Atkinson used to catch leeches and send them to Melbourne to the hospitals. They were mainly caught in the creeks and muddy places. There was a big demand for them in those days because they used to use them for putting on infections and sores to suck all the bad blood out of the infection. They'd catch them with this flat piece of board they used to grease on both sides and by stirring up the mud the leeches would come up and stick to the bottom. Then while they were taking them off one side there would be more sticking onto the other side and that's how they used to do it. They would put them all into a stocking and when they caught enough there used to be a man who would come around and collect them and take them to Melbourne. They used to get paid so much a dozen or a hundred for them.

*Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

I remember as a boy I had to work on the mission and my job was to help the old fella there to do the milking. My job would be to get the cows in of a night and lock the calves up, take the mail up to Barmah and pick up the mail that came in; for which I used to be paid the large sum of 14 bob a fortnight. Most people were getting rations then and I can remember a lot of the old fellas there who used to keep a good supply of meat up because there was always plenty of rabbits and wild life they could get.

CHARCOAL

And then of course the years that I remember as being better for the people was during the war (1939-45) because there was a lot of charcoal produced or burnt up in the Barmah Forest. So a lot of men made a living out of that which was a great help.

No trades or skills of any value were taught on Cummera in my time. But in the
early days of Cummera it is known they planted crops, ran cattle and grazed sheep and during that time people learnt skills such as farming, and shearing. Cummera is well known for the shearsers it produced and have still carried it on till today which has been handed down from generation to generation. Me and my eight brothers were taught by our father who used to always say to us that when we grew up and had to find work shearing was a trade that would always hold us in work anywhere we went as there were no other trades or skills taught on Cummera!

Kevin Atkinson (Shepparton 1980)

Some of the early things I can recall are some of the folks that used to work on Cummera and would only be working for rations. The types of work they were doing then were digging drains and making drainage for gutters, and painting houses. One of the blokes used to have regular employment in emptying the sanitary cause they didn't have sewerage in those days. They had their own herd of cattle there and one of my jobs was to herd the cattle and one of my jobs was to help milk as I was getting on to the end of school then and Andy Cooper and I used to look after the cattle and milking. He was older than me! When I was about 12 I was given the job of mailman, which used to be my brother's job. So in the mornings I would miss a session at school to take the mail over to Barmah and then after school I would go and pick the mail up again which was for six days of the week. Looking back it was a pretty big assignment for me being so young and particularly on Saturday because the mail wouldn't get in till 7-8 o'clock Saturday night. Then you would be crossing the river by boat in the night because the ferry keeper would be knocked off then. I done that for 10 shillings a week and rations so that was my first job. There wasn't enough work for everyone at the time and a lot had to go outside looking for work. They did all types of work i.e.

SHEARING

WOODCUTTING, SLEEPERCUTTING

CHARCOAL BURNING WAS IN THEN

BIT OF FARM WORK e.g. HAY CARTING (IN SEASON), FENCING

RABBITING, FISHING

FRUIT PICKING.
SHEARING

I always have the feeling about shearing in that its one of the things that an Aboriginal becomes equal with his counterpart. For instance if an Aboriginal and a white person went up to the contractor of a shearing shed and he wanted one or two shearers, the Aboriginal bloke would have equal opportunity because he is such a good tradesman in that field. So I think that's one of the reasons an Aboriginal took to shearing because they were so good at it generally speaking. All over the place they were pretty good at it and they were always accepted wherever they went. There was never any discrimination because it was an area they could compete on equal terms if not better than whites in the general community. They were discriminated against in other areas of work where if they went along with a white person looking for other types of work there would usually be every opportunity they wouldn't get the job because they were Aboriginal.

* Colin Walker (Barmah 1980)

My father Fred Walker taught me shearing same as old Dan Atkinson he taught all his boys, Old Mick Morgan, taught his and Uncle Eddy Walker taught his boys. Then there was old Charley Muir who taught his son Tommy Muir. They were all "cracker jack" shearers them fellas - they were regarded as the best shearers in Australia.

There was no employment on Cummera then and we had to go outside and work for about 3-4 months. This is when we were about 15-16. Barney my brother he was about 14 when he went out and worked with Davis Bros. orchards where he stayed for 10-15 years. That was when he took up fighting and became contender for the Australian Featherweight title during his fighting career in the 1950s. He would let us know when the fruit was ready for picking and a big mob of us used to go over there and work on the fruit. When the season finished we would come home and go shearing then. I used to start my run at Berrigan NSW with dad and Uncle Mick Morgan and we would end up at Wallan in Victoria. We'd start in June and go right through to Christmas, and that was our run.
Some of the boys would go to South Australia. The Morgan brothers used to go over there.

In those days we wouldn't see our families for weeks because we had no way of travelling. I shore at Picola which is only 9 miles away, and used to stay there in the shearer's huts. They were hard times then! and you had to work long hours for your money in those days.

LOOKING BACK AT TRAINING ON CUMMERA

COMMENT:

1938-40 N.S.W. PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD INQUIRY INTO ABORIGINES PROTECTION

"At present the system of education of children leaves much to be desired. Until the beginning of this year the syllabus provided may be described shortly as reaching a standard ordinarily attained by the normal child in the ordinary school of 8 years of age."

(N.S.W. Public Service Board Report:1940:17)

The 1938-40 Public Service Board inquiry shows the failure of the reserve system to provide people with European education and work skills to eventually find work and establish themselves in the general community. Before that Cummeragunga was fortunate to have T.S. James who took it as his responsibility to educate the people and "prepare them for what they had to face later". He was also one of the people, and in his time 1881-1922 he was able to give the people a higher education than those who went to school after, under white teachers. It was in this period after T.S. James retired that the education level dropped dramatically as pointed out by the Public Service Board Inquiry. The Manager of Cummera James Danvers, who came to Cummera in 1934, gave evidence to the 1938 Select Committee into the
administration of the Aborigines Protection Board which was followed by the
Public Service Board Inquiry 1938-40. He stated:

"I went there in January or February of 1934. I found there quite a
different proposition from the back stations of N.S.W., like Brewarrina and Bourke.
At Cummeroogunga there are more people, and they were far more sophisticated.
The people there have been educated by an old black man from Mauritius. He
was there for 39 years as school master, and I don't think anybody could want
a finer school master than he was. He married one of their people,
(Ada Cooper). His name was Thomas Shadrach James, and he had a most
marvellous control over those children. If they didn't turn up to school he
would go out and get them, and if necessary he would give them a spanking,
but nobody took exception to that. I doubt if a white man could do that, but
he had a very fine record, which I believe is still on record in the
Education Department. Many of his people are in the district, I believe
are on the stations at the present time. Some of the older among them can
write like copperplate.

"If a few more men like him could be obtained and put on the stations there
would never be any complaints about the education the Aborigines receive."
(Select Committee Inquiry 1938:74).

* Pricilia McKray (Mooroopna 1978)

No trades were taught. The boys never had no opportunities to go for a trade.
It was frustrating. Yes, my father spoke many a time about it, you know, and
even when his boys would be leaving school he tried to put in for the Board
to get jobs for the boys, see? But no, no! But they were just cried down,
they were just getting the rations and that's all the Board wanted. They were
satisfied to give them their tea, sugar and flour and this bit of meat twice a
week.

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1980)

There wasn't any opening or encouragement for people to learn trades or anything
like that. They only learnt farm work which is why I believe a lot of people didn't
want to move away from the reserve in the first place because they had nothing
behind them to help them find good jobs. The reserve didn't teach us any proper trades or training to find work in the towns later on.

* Bevan Nicholls (Natalie 1980)

We had two main adjustments to make to work outside. Firstly in the mission we were part of a group that was told all the time what to do by the manager. Then we go away from the reserve in search of seasonal work to a place like Shepparton and then all of a sudden there he is...he doesn't know for a start how to ask for a job. Then you would have the boss of the place who probably never seen an Aboriginal person before. In those days the average white boss never came into contact with an Aboriginal very much, the response would be "Well I don't know whether I can trust him or not...should I watch him all the time". And this is the sort of thing that Aborigines coming from the reserve were up against.

I found it very difficult...now for a start when I was old enough for work I was living in Melbourne which was during and after the (2nd World) war. I worked in an iron foundary...the chap that owned the foundary wanted me to be a fitter and turner but I couldn't be because of the inadequate education. It just wasn't enough for me to learn a skilled trade. Then I was in the shoe trade which was alright too but I couldn't learn that because I lacked that education. So because of that all I was good for as far as they were concerned was shovel work, unskilled labour; and yet I had the knowhow to go ahead but I couldn't because this held me up!

It all goes back to the inadequacies of the reserve which didn't equip people with the skills to move into the general community and find suitable interesting employment when they left the reserve, which resulted in people working in unskilled type work...factories, fruit industry, woodcutting, pick and shovel work.
"Cummera was a lovely place! It was just like a little city - they had their own houses, park, streets, church, hall, hospital and football ground."
(Mary James, Shepparton 1978).

DEAR OLD CUMGERA

* Mary Clarke  (Framlingham 1979)
Before I left there in 1911 Mr. George Harris was the Manager there then and the people had nice homes with lovely gardens and they were all together. We used to make strangers welcome there and take them into our homes. I still say today that dear old Cummera was a happy place where I grew up. "They wouldn't snub you in those days", and every body had a good word for you.

HOUSING

* Priscilla McKray (Moorooroopa 1978)
The original houses on Cummera were built by their own people like Uncle Aaron Atkinson and Uncle William Cooper and the older ones who were all good builders and they built all those houses on Cummera. They didn't learn the trade they just picked it up themselves and the houses they built were all very solid and good to live in.

* Fred Walker (Barmah 1978)
I remember the time when Cummera was a big place. They had a shop there and a store. Granny Mag Nelson had the little shop there, and when they had the store, you could buy anything from a crowbar to a camp oven, clothes and everything like that. There was a butcher shop there where they killed their own meat and they had a big team of draft horses whose stables were built by my father Herb Walker and old Harry Sullivan. All of the houses and buildings were laid out in three streets Chanter, George and Cooper streets.

In those days, Cummera was a self supporting place and it used to support Warangesda at Darlington Point and...I think! Moonahcullah. They used to have their own blacksmith's shop...They were all clever people there. Old Bagot Morgan was a surveyor and a champion stack builder...but the Board wanted to keep them down all the time.

* Sophie Briggs (Barmah 1978).
"The good old days are gone" now - see that picture on the wall there? That's all the old people of Cummera which was taken in front of my husband's mother's place. Alick and Minnie Briggs.

Houses were everywhere in those days and we had good times then. Grandpa James
was teaching in the school. We used to have sports, processions, concerts. Then the reserve started to go down when the people went away to work, and their houses were pulled down! They had nowhere to live then! I never left my house, and my family stayed with me until they were married and went away. Evelyn Briggs and I were in hospital together having our children at the time those houses were pulled down. Then they pulled the church down also. That was terrible! They shouldn't have pulled them down! The people were very shocked when they found out.

My house was one of the original Maloga homes, that was shifted up on wooden sledges to Cummera, pulled by horses. Jessi&Cooper's is the other one around the corner. They are the only two old Maloga homes now. The manager who was here then made them pull the houses down.

* Ivy Sampson (Barmah 1979)

They had gravel streets there in the early days just like in the towns. There was shops on the mission and everybody had lovely gardens, fruit trees growing and flowers in the front and vegetables in the back. They all had nice houses, no lino on the floor in those days but they were scrubbed and spotlessly clean.

Aunty Mag Nelson used to have ice cream in her shop. I don't know how she used to make it in those days but she used to have it on the counter in a barrel. And she had ginger beer in another barrel.

GRANNY MAG’S SHOP

*Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1980)

Grandfather Henry and Granny Mag Nelson came to Cummera from Coranderrk where they lived when they first got married and then they came to Cummera where they had their family then. Granny Mag had this little shop on Cummera which was built by her son George Nelson (my father). She had this little shop for many years from when I was only a little girl and she used to make all her own drinks, ginger beer, hop beer which she made in a big barrel. Then she used to go in to Echuca twice a week and get all her stores. The place where she used to get all her cakes and bread from was Sutton's Bakery which is still there today. After a while she used to get her goods delivered. I can remember it well and when Granny used to come from Echuca with her stores you would see children and parents coming from everywhere waiting for the shop to open. The children would come with their penny to buy something and they used to always knock on this one spot on the door. I can still picture this spot on the door that was worn from them knocking with their little hands when they came to buy something with their penny - a drink, ice cream or whatever.

UNLOADING THE RATIONS

*Mick Davis (Echuca 1980)

I can remember being at Cummera walking the rivers and that, way back in the early 1920s, with my trousers tucked up, loading the flour bags up from the steamers
and helping them carry the supplies up to the drays for the mission. I used to watch the old fellas load up the drays with the rations, flour, sugar, tea, up on the bend there where Colin Charles lives now. The steamers used to pull in there because there was a good deep ridge there, and they used to bring the drays down there and unload the rations and then they would take them up to the store which was in the main part of the mission.

My father Alf Davis came from Coranderrk up to Cummera where he married Leah Morgan and I had about four or five trips back and forth between Coranderrk and Cummera. I reckon Coranderrk and Cummera are connected today when I come to look at it. I reckon all those people living there now on Cummera and who were there before are related to Coranderrk people. They would be that close it wouldn't matter. Cummera was like Coranderrk it was self sufficient. It was a more developed station than the others and yet it was the lowest on the map. (NSW).

CHURCH
* Rupert Cooper (Barmah 1980)
There was a church on the mission, Grandpa James was the preacher there and then Uncle Eddy Atkinson took over after he left. He used to preach just like Grandpa James and my poor father Alick Cooper used to go up and preach sometimes.

My mother was Sissy Dunolly, Aunty Ivy Sampson's sister. They came from Coranderrk.

* Rebecca Murray (Shepparton 1978)
Grandpa James also used to go in there and take services in Echuca at the Baptist church and at the Methodist church. They'd ask him all round. He was on what was called "The Plan". Shady used to get the horses and drive him to Katupna. One day he couldn't find the horses anywhere so Grandpa just took his little portmanto and away he went. He walked all the way to Katupna. It's a long way - I don't know how many miles it would be (Ed. about 12 miles). And he got there in time to preach! And then they drove him to Narioka. He was on the plan to Picola and Picola West and Nathalia.

* Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1980)
Church was of major importance! We revered Sunday; there was no activities such as sport and everybody kept themselves clean and tidy. We just used to go for walks along the river and sit down and have a yarn amongst ourselves and that sort of thing. We knew that was the day Uncle Eddy expected us to remember and that's how we were brought up. We used to have Sunday School first and then the 7 o'clock service in the evening.... The church used to always be full!

CHOICE
People had a choice! They were not compelled to go to church and it wasn't forced on them. In the services Uncle Eddy Atkinson was our main preacher and then we had our choir which was so lovely...That was when my mother (Pricilla Nelson later McKray) was the organist for the choir and the church.
Colin Walker (Barmah 1980)

In my time when I was young, Uncle Eddy and Aunty Ellen Atkinson and a whole lot of people would walk along and stop at every house and sing a hymn. One thing about the old people! they were very religious. That's why we had a lot of respect for them...you wasn't allowed to do anything you wanted to in that house. Just say if you came home late after having a few drinks and there was a big pot of stew on the stove...Well you had to have your tea there and then and, after that you had to remain quiet.

Geraldine Briggs (Melb. 1979)

Church in my time was very strong and they had their regular services and Sunday school. The choir used to have all different harmony sections and people enjoyed going to church in those days. The spirit was amongst the community and if anybody got into trouble there was always someone there to help.

I remember a funny incident that happened in my time when a fellow on Cummera had been fined 2 for something, and you know how long it takes for court cases to come up? So he'd forgotten about it and he was a good honest man too! Anyhow he was getting married in the church this day and just before he was going into the church to be married he was stopped by the police, which was a terrible thing to do. So Mr. Long who was there at the time came in and asked if they could hold proceedings up for a little while until they take up a small collection. He (Mr. Long) didn't really know how to put it to the gathering...Uncle Shady James asked Mr. Long what was the collection for because they'd like to know? Two of the elderly people sitting down there Aunty Loise and Nanny said "Shady!...don't ask Mr. Long questions like that! if he wants to tell you he'll tell you", because they'd just got a whisper from outside that it was the police who were stopping the bridegroom from coming in. So everybody put in something towards raising the 2 and the bridegroom came in and the wedding proceeded. That was something that people saw as being an awful thing to do because it was only 2 and although that was a lot in those days, it was terrible to stop a wedding in a church over it.

ENTERTAINMENT

Priscilla McKay (Mooroopa 1980)

Aunty Becky (my sister) and I were taught music. We both learnt from a music teacher that used to come to Barmah and then after that he came over to our place at Cummera and taught us there. My father had a piano there for us and we both learnt music theory and then we were able to teach our own people. We organised the concerts and plays that were part of our entertainment on Cummera. And then later on we used to travel around to the surrounding towns and put on our concerts for the white people.

Rebecca Murray (Echappart 1978)

I was taught music from a Mr. Haslem in Echuca. That's my certificate there in the frame on the wall (Diploma in Music). But I also got other certificates too!
After Mr. Haslem I was taught at Nathalia and then I became a qualified music teacher and trained them all at Cummera for the concerts and the plays we presented: "Snow White; and the "Picnic Party". In the early days we used to hold all our concerts in a big grain shed, and poor old Uncle Aaron Atkinson he was one of our carpenters on Cummera. Well he used to fix up the props, and the stage, which he used to borrow from Echuca.

Oh! We had wonderful concerts you know! A funny thing happened which always makes me laugh when I look back. One of the girls in this particular concert we had come from way up Warangesda way, and she always wore a little cap, like a jockeys cap. Anyhow this young Harris boy and Shady James who were both great mates were there. And she's singing "It was on a dreadful stormy night", and she stopped in the middle of it. And there was a window on the side of the hall and she stopped and said "I see you there Shady James and Jacky Harris". They used to call her conductor you see, because she had this cap on which looked like a conductor. So she went "one, two, three" stepped down and chased them up the street she did, and then she came back and finished the song!

(Cummera Choir)

We taught them all to sing in their different harmony sections, and when we used to sing they could hear us at Barmah. Our voices used to carry down the river. The Malones who owned the hotel at Barmah would come out and sit along their verandah....and they used to say to us how lovely it sounded and how our voices used to float over the water from Cummera.

Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)

There were a lot of happy times on Cummera. When the sport, football and dances were held there it was a great occasion for everyone. The women would get dressed up in their long gowns for the dances and people used to come across from Barmah. The Rices and all those mob would come to the dances. They used to have concerts and Uncle Eddy Atkinson would have a trailer he used to cart everyone around in. I used to be one of the Hula girls and we used to all sit in this little truck with a canopy over the top...and away we used to go to all these little places and put on our concerts. All you would see in these small places would be the hall standing there and all the local people would come in to watch us. We had the "Cummeragunga Choir" which for sentimental reasons this title is still used today at different social functions. The Cummera Choir still comes together today at our various functions and entertains people.

Concerts : "Snow White"

* Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

We used to practise in preparation for the concerts we had and I can remember when we put on the play Snow White in which I played the part of a fairy. We presented it to a packed house at the Paramount Theatre in Echuca. We all had
to work hard learning the different parts and memorizing our lines until we knew them off by heart. There was Aunty Mag James who played the part of the Queen; Aunty Louise Muir was Snow White, Uncle Shady James was the Prince, Uncle Percy Barber was Carl the Huntsman and The Dwarfs were played by the Group: George Nelson, Henry James, Theo Morgan, Doug Nicholls and the Briggs boys all played the part of the dwarfs. All of the costumes and embroidery was done by the women to perfection. The whole show was a great event for us and we entertained a packed house in Echuca.

**MERRY SINGERS**

They were started off by Aunty Becky who was the musical director of the Merry Singers. We used to travel for miles all through NSW/VIC. putting on shows in the summer months, and we all used to think it was wonderful to be able to travel around to the different places putting on our show. Those who were in the group were:

- Rebecka Murray (MUSICAL DIRECTOR)
- Grandpa James (ADMINISTRATOR)
- Shadrach James (DOOR KEEPER)
- Maggie Campbell (James) (SOPRANO)
- Ruby Muir (Neir) (SINGER)
- Eddy Atkinson (DANCER/SINGER)
- Iris Nelson (Atkinson) (DANCER)
- Claire Murray (Moulton) (DANCER)
- Nona James (DANCER)
- Lorraine Nelson (Grant) (DANCER/ACROBAT)
- Louise James (Muir) (SINGER)
- Geraldine Clements (Briggs) (SOPRANO)
- Alick Cooper (COMEDIAN SINGER)
- Vivian Cooper (VIOLINIST)
- Jack Cooper (VIOLINIST/SINGER)
- Wally Nicholls (SINGER)
- Mary Cooper (COSTUMES)
- Kerry James (TRANSPORT)
- Charley Hienz (TRANSPORT)

Aunty Louise Muir made all the costumes for us, and when it was time to go on tour with our show, away we'd go then to places like Echuca, Torrumbarry, Bunaloo, Womboota, Tocumwal, Barham, Berrigan, Finley, Jerilderie, Numurkah, Rochester, and many other little places we used to put on our show. Before we went to these places, they used to have a lot of posters printed by the Riverine Herald in Echuca which were sent out about two weeks before, advertising the "Merry Singers."
Then the main part of the show we all used to look forward to was the dance we used to have at the end of each show which was everyone's delight. They all loved it, and in those days it was all old time dancing. We'd start off with the circular waltz; then the polka and the progressive barn dance, which everyone would join in, and enjoy themselves.

**PROCESSION**

Another great event on Cummera was our yearly sports day where we would have our procession. We used to decorate all the cars and trucks, and different ones used to even decorate their horses and ride them in the procession. That was a big day at Cummera and we all used to get dressed up, and the procession used to go around all the streets and then out onto the football ground for the grand parade around the ground. Then there were prizes given for the best decorated entries, followed by sporting events - like races, footrunning.

We had happy days there at Cummera because we made our own entertainment, and still today when the older ones come together we still go back to Cummera and relive those wonderful times we had here on "dear old Cummera".

Claire Moulton (Moorooroo 1980)

We travelled to this little town one night to put on our concert and we were all dressed in our costumes waiting for the show to start and there was not many there. I said to Iris Nelson (Atkinson) there doesn't seem to be anybody coming! Anyhow we waited for a little while and all of a sudden there were lights coming from everywhere and the hall ended up packed. So we were delighted then that we had a good audience to perform to. It was a good life in those days. We used to travel around everywhere with the Merry Singers.

*NO BLACKS ALLOWED IN*!

* Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)

When I came down to Melbourne for the first time and stayed with Grandpa James and Granny Ada, Beckey was teaching us for a concert. Oh, lovely you know, the girls were dancing - Iris, Claire, Mona, and Lula was doing acrobats. We went back up to Barham which was one of the towns we went to for the concert and it was very hot so we decided we would go for a swim.

They wouldn't let us in the gate at this new swimming pool! They said "No blacks allowed in" - and we were so wild you know, it was the biggest shock we ever got! And they wouldn't let us in so we all went home really mad about it.

And the next night at the concert, Grandpa James brought it up in his speech about the girls being discriminated against, and everybody could see that the concert they put on was first class you know? And all dressed beautifully. Every time the girl came on to the stage to do a new dance they had different costumes on. It was really lovely. And it made them really ashamed you know to think that they'd treated them like that. And Mum went up there and gave them a bit of her mind, my mother was there then, and she was very well respected but it didn't make any difference - didn't want any black people in their pool.
I can go right back to when Cummera put on the play Snow White. I was in it and Clancy, Dicky they had the curly paper on. Old Percy Barber was the policeman; Iris, Claire, Nora were singing on the stage, and they had the lights on all green and red. Grandpa James was on the door collecting the tickets and it was a full house at the Paramount Theatre in Echuca. I played the part of the little laughing fella and had the black shoes, and stockings, white shirt with the red band across. An old friend of mine here in Echuca Andy MacMillan remembers going to the play and he always says to me "I remember you when you were in Snow White" and he's 11 years older than me. I'm going on 66.

**GUM LEAVES AND GUITARS**

*Eddie Walker (Shepparton : 1980)*

They learnt to play amongst themselves on Cummera - they used to hear others play and picked it up that way. They were never taught. They would sit around amongst themselves and play and sing. Its almost you could say born in them or bred in them.

All the family were musical - they all used to play instruments. I used to play the accordion and my father did too! I could play the piano a bit too, but the boys went further and played more. They learnt themselves and just improved as they went along.

Archie played everything. He learnt the older ones like Franky and Kevin who both played violin. Its all been passed on to the younger ones. Archie made a living out of it. He was best on the steel guitar and taught a lot of young people in Echuca. He used to play the steel guitar with a hair oil bottle or a knife.

*Violet Charles*

They'd sit along the bank or they'd climb up on the tankstands - there was all this room for them to sit up there, the young men. And they'd play these leaves. And they'd sing these songs. Well some of them would sing and they'd play in parts, low notes, medium and high, on the gum leaves. And it used to be beautiful in those days.

**CUMMERA PEOPLE LOVED THEIR SPORT**

COMMENT : In sporting achievements the Cummeragunga people have much to be proud of. They have produced some of the finest footballers, and in footrunning they have a record that cannot be equalled by any town in Australia.

Cummeragunga people were also successful in cricket and as early as 1888 - 9 won the Echuca District Trophy for two years running and in 1899 were the District Football Premiers, a success they repeated on many later occasions. As well as its footballers, runners and cricket team there were many fine boxers who came from Cummera.
CUMMERAS SPORTING IDENTITIES

Lynch Cooper

WORLD PROFESSIONAL SPRINT CHAMPION 1929
WINNER 1928 STAWELL GIFT

Alf Morgan

WINNER BOTANY BAY HANDICAP, SIMILAR TO STAWELL GIFT.

Peter Dunolly

HIGH JUMP, RUNNING

Billie Charles

RUNNER UP, STAWELL

Stan Charles

RUNNER UP, STAWELL

Selwyn Briggs

ECHUCA GIFT

Eddy Briggs

RUNNER UP STAWELL

Morry Charles

RUNNER

Bill Onus

RUNNER

Eric Onus

WARRACKNABEAL, NYAH GIFTS,

Sir Doug Nicholls

WARRACKNABEAL, NYAH GIFTS,

Dowie Nicholls

RUNNERS UP AT STAWELL.

Wally Nicholls

INTRODUCED FAMOUS CROUCH START

Bobby McDonald

AUSTRALIAN WELTERWEIGHT BOXING CONTENDER 1950's.

Barney Walker

FOOTBALL

"What position do you play?" "Anywhere you're losing!!"

* Bill Muir Snr. (Barmah 1978)

They had some good players in those days. They were all good and didn't need much coaching because they had a natural ability. I started playing with Cummera and then went into Echuca and played. Then Richmond invited me down there to play in their practise matches. I was only young then, and the manager of Richmond came up here and stayed in the Barmah pub. He wanted me to go back to Richmond with him. He stayed for 3-4 days, and I used to take him fishing up the Moira Lakes, and then I went back with him. I played in the practise matches and held my own as far as football goes, but it was hard to fit in down there because a lot of the players didn't accept me because of my colour, so I came back and played with Echuca in the Goulburn Valley then, and after a while they moved into the Bendigo League where I played.

Cummera had a champion team and cleaned them all up around here. Nathalia had a good team too but we went up there and hammered them.

After a while they started a Wednesday League here and I played in that too!

The position I usually played was "everywhere" but my main position was roving and on the forward line and back line....When I played in Echuca we were playing Bendigo this day and they had this big fella who was over six feet and they couldn't stop him from kicking goals so they put me on him to stop him....I was only a little fella and he was over six foot....I was looking up at him!
Everytime he went for a mark I would stand on his toes or I would back into him and throw myself forward just before the ball came and get a free kick. The umpire used to watch me too! but I beat him.

All the young fellas on Cummera were good footballers! They all had great judgement of the ball...that was their main thing, and they were very quick on their feet. That's why we had such a good team at Cummera.

* Colin Charles (Cummeragunga 1978)

Football was a big thing in those days. We had three teams here then and Cummera won 13 premierships. Their 14th was coming up and if we had old Billy Muir, Eddy Atkinson and Stanley Charles playing in that team we would have won it.

It's hard to pick out who the best players were because they were all good.

Billy Muir, Doug Nicholls, Maurie and Stan Charles were good. Other good players in those times were Bob, Keith, George Nelson, Selwyn and Eddy Briggs, Eddy Atkinson, Charley Muir and the Walker boys. They made up a song about poor Maurie Charles when he was playing that went: "Give it to Maurie he'll make it sorry". Maurie was deadly poison; he could kick both feet and if he was close to the goals when he got the ball you could always count on him to put it through.

Northcote invited me to go down and have a run with them when I was playing with Cummera.

*Spectators*  
*Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)*

Saturdays was a great day for us to look forward to, because it was our day of pleasure and that was the football. Then after the football we would come home and get dressed up for the dance that night. The dance would have to finish by 12 o'clock which was one of the rules set down by the manager. We weren't allowed to dance on Sunday mornings.

If Cummera won the premiership at the end of the season we used to decorate the hall up in red and white streamers... (that was their colours) and it used to be a big occasion for everyone when Cummera won the flag.

*Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)*

They had very good teams in those days and one of the teams won the flag three years in a row without losing a game. In those days most of the white teams were very hostile towards our teams which used to create a lot of ill feeling because a lot of the barrackers used to call them all the names about the place. And of course none of us would stand for that sort of thing 'specially the women.

There was a lot of sporting activities on Cummera; they had tennis courts and they also held a procession on the river with decorated boats. One of the boats that won the prize for the best decoration was Edgar and Melley Coopers who decorated their boat up like a swan made out of paper. Christmas time was also a big occasion and they had sports for the children. Mr. & Mrs. Payne from the Church of
Christ in Echuca would bring out all sorts of prizes for everyone and everybody had a real good day's outing.

WOMENS CRICKET TEAM

*Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1978)

We had a women's cricket team which used to travel to different towns and compete against white teams, places like Deniliquin, Echuca. We also used to play against Moonhacullah mission. We had good players, and good runners in our team and the thing we enjoyed the most was our people coming along to watch us play, and white people from around the district used to come along too.

Those that I can remember who played in the team were:

- DAISY ATKINSON
- RACHEL BARBER
- RUTH ATKINSON
- LOUISE CHARLES
- ELLEN CAMPBELL
- PRICILLA JAMES
- SOOKY BARBER
- GRACE ATKINSON
- MARY COOPER

Daisy Atkinson was the captain, and we used to play against Barmah too! who were our real enemies. Sport was a big thing for Aboriginal people in those days and it was something the whole family took part in and enjoyed....

CARING FOR THE SICK

"When there was any sickness on the mission there was always someone there who would come to your side." (Ivy Sampson)

GRANDPA JAMES AS DOCTOR

* Pricilia McKay (Mooroopna 1968)

My father was their main doctor there on Cummera, and when the doctor used to be busy, in Echuca you know, he'd say "you've got a doctor there - go to him. Go to Mr. James. He'll do as good as I can for you." Yes.

And my father used to extract teeth. He used to lance their sores or anything like that. He had the instruments and all, 'cause he trained for a doctor. They were lucky that he was there - he saved many a one on Cummera.

They had a dispensary put up there at the Manager's place. My father was the dispenser. Doctors used to come out and visit once a month, take my father round different ones, leave their prescriptions there. Father used to make them up.

He was the main doctor. They got him out of bed all hours, and even over at Barmah they used to come for my father and get him out. He saved Maloney's boy who was very ill with pneumonia. My father sat with him all night - Lennie. Next morning he saw the change coming he said ; "He's met the crisis. Now you keep on with my treatment with him". Lennie got better.

MIDWIFERY

* Nora Charles (Shepparton 1978)

Trevor was born in a bag humpy, that's where I delivered him, in a bag humpy.
Trevor. I delivered 40 babies at Cummera! (laughs) Georgie and Brenda (Nelson) were my babies. I did the midwifery for 7 years.

I used to always take the girls in to Doctor Graham to see if I could handle it. And if I couldn't he'd order them into the hospital then, he didn't care what matron said, because I wasn't qualified you see. And he was thinking of me, and if the patient was alright, he said "Oh, you can manage it, but if you want me" he said "ring me and I'll come out." I managed all right! But this is what used to go on those days. I used to go up to the punt, to those bag humpies up there - Sandy Atkinson was born in a bag humpy at the pump. I looked after him Sandy was my first baby. But I used to be across the river. Stormy nights in the little boats and up the river, down the bend, those days. I didn't mind, I liked the job.

They were too shy to go to the hospital. The last manager stopped me from doing the job and he said "They'll have to go in there now" he said.

I used to help with the other sicknesses when they built the hospital then. They used to send for me, the mothers, to help with pneumonia and to ask my opinion. I said "Look you best manage to take them to the doctor". They always used to send for me when the kids were sick. I used to go up to the hospital to help the sisters too, if they wanted me.

Kids had pneumonia and bronchitis.

* Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)

In the early days all the Cummera people had their families there. They had two midwives -

Aunty Florrie Walker (Atkinson)
Aunty Nora Charles.

There were 7 of us born there in the old house which was one of the old Maloga homes.

THE PNEUMONIC PLAGUE

COMMENT: In 1914-15 Echuca hospital reported 40 cases of typhoid and 90 cases of diptheria which claimed 4 lives. Two years later only 26 diptheria cases were admitted and more of them died mainly due to the results of anti-toxin. After the war a new epidemic disease appeared, pneumonic influenza, which was believed to be introduced by returned soldiers. The worst year was 1919-20 when 71 cases were admitted to hospital and 9 died. (Priestley 1965:172,3)

* Ivy Sampson (Barmah ; 1978)

I was there when that happened and tended Fricilla Nelson...I seen her laying there and she told me she was sinking and I ran up to Mr. James and they said he was sick so I told them I saw Fricilla and she was sinking fast, so they told him. And he got up and came in his pyjamas and got his doctor's bag and he off, and they got her and shifted her back to his house.

Eva's mother (she was a Cooper) was sick with it. Eva came up she was only small
then and she said that her mother wanted me. Her mother was very sick and was just getting over it and was staying with Billy and Lydia Charles looking after their two children. So I went down and that’s the time I saw Pricilla like that and I went down to my sister and got Mr. James to come down... A lot of people died.

THE SOUP ANGEL

The old fella Henry as we called him used to make up a bucket of soup. They used to kill their own sheep and he used to get the heads and boil them up in this kerosine bucket for soup, then go around to all the sick... he saved a lot of people’s lives because they couldn’t cook their own tucker.

After that they used to call him "THE SOUP ANGEL" because of the people’s lives he saved and he was like an angel tending and caring for the sick.

Dr. Stoney from Echuca used to come out. It lasted for a good while ’cause they were dying like anything. It was a general plague that hit the outside community. It was brought from overseas I think, and the people didn’t have any resistance to it.

* Louise Atkinson

Do I remember it! There was only us kids that never got it you know. They were carting them up to the cemetery every week in a dray they used to use to cart the coffins up there. We used to have to do for mother and father and the rest of us, cause the kid’s mothers - all of them were down. Oh, there were a lot died. When there was anyone so terribly ill, they’d come round and sing hymns. And they’d try and help you to do things. Now here if you’re sick you run around to the doctor, you’re down there all the time. Well, there was none of that out there. People had their own belief, and they used to do things... they’d reckon that they could make you better.

* Rebecka Murray (Shepparton, 1980)

NO ANAESTHETIC FOR TONSILS!

Grandpa took me into Echuca to see Dr. Stoney and Dr. Stoney said to me "you’ll have to get those tonsils out" he said. "otherwise you’ll choke" which frightened me! I sat in the chair and they strapped my legs... I can remember until this day clearly. They strapped my legs, arms to the chair... and they took one of my tonsils out without any anaesthetic - no anaesthetic! So after they took one out they undid my legs then and I ran for the door and Dr. Stoney said "Oh no, there’s one more to come out yet, otherwise you’ll choke". See when they were bad Mum used to keep me awake with a wet towel when I used to get this awful throat. So I had to go back to the chair where they strapped me down again... and oh! I’ll never forget that. They then took the other one out. Oh gee, you’ve got no idea how it hurt. It was dreadful... they were big tonsils. Grandpa was there holding my head. I don't know whether there was any anaesthetic in those days. I know they never gave me any. You would have thought they would have given me some!

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COMMUNITY SPIRIT

* Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)

The main thing that kept people together on Cummera was the closeness of the community. All being together and when anyone was short of something everyone helped each other and shared what they had. We didn't call it borrowing because you never expected to get back what you shared, and this is what is still carried on today in the Aboriginal community. Another important thing too was if one of the children was missing from home the parents wouldn't have to go outside the gate to look for them. All you would do was sing out at the gate and there would soon be a response from other people in the street who would in turn call out for whoever was missing. My Aunty would always call out for me when I was missing and then you would hear them all singing out at the top of their voices. After a while someone would hear them down the other end of the street and would reply..."she's down here " and they would send us home. That was a system of communication which applied for all the children in the community as most people had big families, and their parents knew where they were all the time.

People would go into each other's homes and could always get a meal. It was an open community to those who lived in it. At night time the younger ones would light a big fire in a place they called the park and everyone would sit around there telling stories and having a yarn. That was a big thing in those days because there was no T.V. or radio then, and it was the expected thing that you sit around and listen to the stories the older people had handed down to them. It was something that was carried on from the old days.

* Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)

In those days we didn't have much but we kept our spirits up by working in together. The women used to do all the cooking for the various functions they held to help raise funds and used to play a major part in organising social and sporting activities. What we had in those days we shared which was the spirit we were all brought up in.

If anyone got very ill and they needed help everybody would be there by their side to comfort them. A lot of our people when they got sick wouldn't go into the hospital, 'specially the older ones because they didn't want to leave their homes and their people. So different ones would take it in turns sitting with them and helping with their housework, cooking. If anyone was in need of something, food or whatever, we always gave as it was part of the spirit and togetherness.
CHAPTER 10. "THE BOARD."

COMMENT:

The "Board" variously referred to as the Protection Board, the A.P.B., and by a lot of Aboriginal people as the Persecution Board, was responsible for the administration of Government reserves and the funds allocated to it by the Government. Members of the Board were all non-Aboriginal and consisted of M.P.'s and Government officials - public servants. The actual running of the reserve or what I call the "on the spot people" was carried out by a manager appointed by the Board to run the reserve according to the rules, regulations and laws set out in the Protection Acts introduced by Government legislation. Managers had sole control of the reserve and if need be were assisted by the local police if any of the laws on the reserve were broken, or his authority was disobeyed. As well as the police there was a local committee, which consisted of local farmers and selected people from the general community who were responsible for overseeing the developments of the reserve, and reporting their findings to the Board.
STRUCTURE OF RESERVES

PARLIAMENT
Introduce LEGISLATION, ACTS
  e.g. ABORIGINES PROTECTION ACTS.
  ALLOCATE FUNDS TO BOARD.

BOARD
Members: PARLIMENTARIANS, J.P.'s, POLICE
  & OTHER GOVT. OFFICIALS
Duties: Administer funds and Reserves
  Advise government on policies

MANAGERS: Run reserve according to Laws
  of Protection Act.
  Report to Board.
OVERSEER: Farm Developments
POLICE: Intervene if misconduct,
  breaking rules on reserve.
  Arrest Offenders.
LOCAL COMMITTEE: Oversee developments,
  report to Board.

ABORIGINES
Inhabitants of Reserve, Receivers of
  Govt. Board & Managers Decisions &
  Policies.

PARLIAMENT
ADMINISTRATION
RESERVES.
"ON THE SPOT" PEOPLE
NO ARROWS GOING UP.
The whole system of Government reserves is similar to the apartheid policies which applied in South Africa. That is, Aboriginal people were separated from the general community and isolated in controlled areas of land where a separate set of restrictive laws were introduced for their management and control. Another popular term for reserves today is "institutions of change". When we look at Aboriginal reserves under this term, we can see they were for the purpose of changing one group to be like the other. The Government's policies of Protection and Assimilation highlight this in that Aborigines were isolated in institutional type settings where they were under the control of a management whose task was to enforce change. The N.S.W. Government felt that this was achieved by the 1940s when the Protection Board was changed to the Welfare Board and the policy changed from Protection to Assimilation i.e. Aboriginal people were ready to take their place in the general community.

The most significant thing that stands out today is that Aboriginal people have survived through all of the restrictions, oppression and deliberate attempts by the Government through these policies and decisions to try and wipe out Aboriginal culture.

**RUNNING OF RESERVES**

"All the managers that came there and their wives who we had to call matron, lived in the old homestead. Cummera had the most beautiful homestead there for the managers and their wives who used to have a yardsman there working for them".

(Iris Atkinson)

* Bevan Nicholls (Nathalia 1980)

The only person we had dealings with was the manager who was nearly always an Englishman, who usually wasn't long out here from the old country. And the reserve would be worked something like these other British colonies. This was their way of thinking...they imposed their own ways of living onto us as they did in the other colonies.

* Elizabeth Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)

A lot of things were left to the manager's discretion on the reserve and if he didn't like a person he could give them a hard time. There were different rules and regulations that people had to abide by and the managers had wide powers over the movements of Aboriginal people on the reserve. For example, if someone wanted to come onto the reserve they had to report to the manager to get his authority, and they also had to report to him if they wanted to leave. When I left there as a young girl and started work outside, I used to go back and visit my family and everytime I went back I had to report to the manager and get his approval before I could see my family.
LAWS
There were strict laws that applied on the reserve and one of those was the prohibition of alcohol. If anyone brought alcohol onto the reserve they could be arrested for it.

EXEMPTION CERTIFICATES (DOG TAGS)
IN N.S.W. Exemption Certificates applied which exempted Aboriginal people from the laws that restricted Aboriginal people from the rights of normal citizens. Prohibition did not apply in Victoria and people used to go over the border from NSW and get a drink at Barmah. The certificates were approved by the Board and issued by the police. They were referred to by Aboriginal people as dog tags, and when someone was going off the reserve they would be reminded if they had their "dog tag" which they had to carry with them and produce when they wanted to be served in a hotel.
Aboriginal people never had any say in the running of the reserve and it was all under the control of the Board and the managers.

ARREST
I remember the time when our poor father was arrested one night for bringing a bottle of beer onto the reserve. He'd been shearing, and after he finished work, like most of his European shearing mates, he picked up a bottle of beer on the way home from work. He walked into his own home, mind you, and sat down to have his tea, opened the bottle of beer and the next minute he was arrested on the spot. Someone must have reported him to the manager for bringing alcohol onto the reserve. I never forget that! The laws and restrictions on the reserve were very tough for our people in those days.

EXPULSION
*Dan Atkinson  (Barmah 1979)
It started in the very early days. Old Bob Cooper, Billy Cooper and a lot of other people who used to speak up for their rights were expelled. That was the only reason because they never drank or made any trouble. After they were expelled they lived on the Barmah side and reared their families there. It made it very difficult for the women when men were expelled and she would have to move too! in the long run.
There were other penalties too besides expulsion such as rations being cut off, and there was a paddock between Cummera and the bridge which was cleared by Aboriginal men as a form of punishment given by the manager for breaking the rules on the reserve.
In my time, there were lots of bad managers and not too many good ones. Talking about managers, I remember the time I just missed out on getting hold of a book which was called the "punishment book" in which the manager used to record the types of punishment he issued. It was being burnt with a lot of other administrative records of the Board on the reserve, and I just missed out on...
getting it out of the fire before it was burnt.
Living on the reserve in those days, you were always under threat - if you did something wrong in the manager's eyes well then you were confronted with either being expelled or the police uniform. Aboriginal people came to dislike the police uniform and what it stood for because they had bitter memories of other incidents that involved the police, 'specially that when the girls were taken by force in 1918. If anyone was taken from the reserve by the police, and locked up in Moama...well there was no legal service in those days, and if you wanted a lawyer from Victoria to represent you it was not allowed - Aboriginal people had no access to legal services or representation in those days and they just had to take what penalty was handed down to them.

THREE LAWS
* Sevan Nicholls (Nathalia 1978)
Looking back at our history you could say we had to adjust to three different laws The first one was our traditional law which was a very strict and severe one, and if you committed any wrong in tribal law the penalties were very harsh. Then the reserve law was the next one we had to learn to abide by which was a different set of rules and regulations to the outside community. And then when we moved from the reserve we had to adjust to the third law which is the one we're trying to live within today. So when you look back at all of those changes we've been through it's no wonder we're confused sometimes as to the different laws we've had to live by.
Let's take for example the restrictions that applied off the reserve and not on the reserve.
One of the biggest upsets was when you left Cummera and moved into the European set up and that's when you run into all sorts of difficulties. These are simple things, like if you wanted to go along with an axe and cut a tree down for a bit of fire wood or for some material to build yourself a bit of a house... The next thing some authority will come along and say "Ooh! You can't cut that down" and if you did, well then you're faced with some sort of penalty. Another thing was if you wanted to put up a tent or a camp to live in while you were on the reserve and at Barmah it was okay, but when we moved into the town and wanted to do this, they all got upset and would say "Ooh! you can't stay there under those difficulties and conditions", and you would eventually be moved by some authority or other. This is what we've been up against in our history! We've always been trying to adjust to different laws, rules and authorities.

MATRON
* Millie Doherty (Echuca 1978)
We used to have the "matron" who was the manager's wife and her job was to come around and inspect the houses to see if they were being kept clean. She'd have her visiting days and she'd come and look through your house. It used to
annoy us because our homes used to be always spotlessly clean and we didn't need a matron to inspect our homes and give us the feeling we were dirty. I don't know where they got that attitude from but it used to make us annoyed when she used to come around checking our houses. We used to scrub our floors which didn't have any lino on our hands and knees, and our tables were just made out of board. She never found any dirty homes on Cummera and our people took pride in their homes.

* Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)

YOU HAD TO CALL HER MATRON!

When the manager McQuiggan came there (1937) he insisted that his wife be called Matron. When he first spoke to us he said: "And my wife is Matron. She wouldn't know who you were talking about if you said Mrs. McQuiggan"! And yet on the other hand she called all the Aboriginal women by their first names which used to really annoy me and I made a vow to myself never to call her matron because I didn't see any sense in showing her respect when she didn't in turn respect older women than herself. I learnt a lot when I was outside the Mission in other places in N.S.W. and Melbourne which made me more aware of things, and I grew to dislike the superior ways of managers and matrons towards Aborigines. I wasn't prepared to give in to anyone who held that sort of attitude.

After McQuiggan another man came named Peterson, and he wanted everyone to go there and report when they arrived. I remember the time when Dad (her late husband Selwyn) came onto the reserve without reporting to him...He (the manager) came down and he was standing at the gate and sang out, and Dad went out and he said "You didn't report that you came onto the Mission." Dad said "No, I know I didn't." And he said "Well you've got to come and report" and Dad said "This is my home and I'll never report to you. I'm coming to my home... You don't have to report to anyone when you go to Sydney to your mother's home, so why should I have to report to you?" Peterson didn't change his attitude or understand the Aboriginal side of the story, with the result that of course Selwyn got in the bad books for speaking up for himself and opposing Peterson's authority.

When Danvers and Milne came there (1934-37) the reserve was run well but after he left the other managers that came were responsible for the reserve going down, especially McQuiggan and Peterson who followed Danvers.

* Nora Charles (Shepparton 1978)

They had some good managers in the early days, Ferguson and Homes, and after them there was younger ones who came one after the other. The worst one we had there in my time was old Trottman who was a real old brute. He used to chase them off the mission! In those days they used to be expelled, you know. So they used to sneak back onto the mission, but he had pimps there watching for them and he'd soon know when they were there. When he found out he used to go after...
them with a gun and chase them to the river bank. There was a boatload of them getting away this time across the river and he stood on the bank and fired shots at them and made a hole in the boat. He was the worst manager we ever had...

Big fella he was! And oh! he was a brute – we were glad when we'd seen the last of him! (laugh).

BLUE METAL GANG

*Ivy Sampson* (Barmah 1978-9)

There used to be a gang of young fellas who they called the "Blue Metal Gang". They got their name from...if anyone did anything they didn't like well they used to pelt them with blue metal stones. They used to give the manager a bit if he did anything they saw as a wrong to anyone. There was Johnny Shercon, Bobby Peters, Billy Anderson, Bob and Arthur Nelson and there was a mob of them who used to meet on the corner there where Jessie Cooper still lives (in the last of the old Maloga houses). They would meet there and be singing and playing the mouth organ and then you would hear the stones flying...the blue metal gang would be at it again and they used to nearly give the manager a bit.

Trottman (the manager) took a shot at them in the boat because they were not supposed to be on the mission as they had been expelled, and they used to come over of a night time. Expulsion was severe in those days, they wouldn't be allowed back on the mission but then when the next manager came sometimes they would let them come back.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

COMMENT:

Although managers were seen from outside to be the sole authority on reserves and their main task was to run the reserve in accordance with the Government’s policies, the reserve had its own authorities who were looked upon by the people as their leaders and who played a major role in the general organisation of reserve life and activities.

They are still today regarded as the pioneer people of the Aboriginal movement and the first fighters for Aboriginal rights. People like William Cooper, Thomas Shadrach James, Shadrach James, Sir Doug Nicholls, Bill and Eric Onus, Eddy Atkinson and Selwyn Briggs from Cummera, as well as others like Marg Tucker, William Ferguson and Pearl Gibbs were all responsible for taking the Aboriginal cause to the general community in the early 1900's and were the foundation layers for their following generations to build on. The Aborigines Progressive Association established in Sydney in 1933 and the Australia Aborigines League in Melbourne 1934 which later became the Aborigine Advancement League, were set up through the efforts of these people.

*Bevan Nicholls* (Nathalia 1978).

Living in an Aboriginal community you already have your leaders - you don't ask them to become leaders they're automatically there. You have people that can organise things and people who can put up houses using their own skills.
We had 3 - 4 Aboriginal people who could build a house out of bush timber which you've got to be a very skilled person to be able to do something like that. Now we're talking about bush material such as young trees (suckers) that have been cut down and made into a house; placed together with no nails and able to withstand all of the stresses and strains.

There were quite a few leaders in my day who could easily organise a meeting, concert, sport and other activities on the reserve. Some of these were the Briggs, Atkinsons, Coopers, Nelsons, Walkers - they could all organise things. Even weddings they were a big thing and they had to be organised. If we had to put in a crop of wheat well that had to be organised. It was usually done by the overseer who was the manager's right hand man but there were Aboriginal people there who could do these things if they were given the encouragement and opportunity. In those days they didn't need a manager but then a time went on people had to go up to the manager and ask for permission to put on their functions, and you had to ask for permission to come onto the reserve and to leave. We've always had our own leaders right from back in the old tribal days.

* Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

William Cooper was looked up to as one of our leaders and it was Uncle Cooper as he used to be referred to who went with Shadrach James to Canberra to put their case to the Government. It was Uncle Cooper that started things off in the first place...fighting for Aboriginal rights. He fought for his people and wanted to see them be given fair treatment. His own son Lynch was a world professional sprint champion and his daughter Sally was a champion highland fling dancer and Uncle Cooper was very proud of his family too. But his main concern was to see his people get their equal citizens rights which is what he fought for,and then it was handed on to Sir Doug and Bill and Eric Onus.

Then Uncle Eddy Atkinson was another one we looked to for leadership. He took over the religious duties after Grandpa James retired and even though it was a big gap to fill he was still just as respected by the people. Uncle Eddy was a very gifted man who was good at many things. He was a champion footballer, and performed in the concerts we presented as a tenor singer, and he was a beautiful tap dancer...in fact there weren't many things that Uncle Eddy couldn't do. Then later on when he passed on, the religious duties were taken over by his son Jeff Atkinson who like his father was highly respected and loved by his people.

* Liz Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)

The first people to move into the general community who looking back are regarded as the trail blazers or the pioneers were:

William Cooper and his brothers Caleb Morgan, Bill and Eric Onus, Sir Doug and there were others too who were the first ones that came to Melbourne. Then after that others followed either to the city or country towns. During the war years it was these pioneer people who layed the foundations of the Aborigines Advancement League in Melbourne which was first called the Australian
Aborigines League. These people all originally came from Cummera, and they were fortunate to be pupils of Grandpa James who gave his pupils a better education than those after him mainly because he was one of them.

* Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)

A lot of the families that used to speak up for themselves when they believed they were being treated wrong, or against the conditions they had to live by, left themselves open to pressure from the Board. But it didn't deter them though - they still spoke out when the need arose, which is one of the main reasons they broke Cummera up. A lot of our spokespeople were very capable people who could get up anywhere and talk in public, and a lot of that has been handed down to their descendants.

* Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

There was always someone the people could look up to for leadership - and there was not only one! but many they could look up to. They were the ones who seemed to be able to advise on decisions and I feel this was something that was carried on from the tribal days when the elders used to make all of the decisions. I believe we had many people who always stood out like, T.S. James, William Cooper and in the years that followed we had men like the late Eddie Atkinson who played a big part in the leadership. He was a great leader and stood for everything that was right for his people. And then as the people moved away from Cummera to Shepparton and Mooroopna we had great men like the late Shadrach James who was an outstanding spokesperson and leader for his people. We always had someone there who was able to stand up for the rights of their people. Those sort of special people are still there fighting today.
COMMENT:

Following Cummera's history through there are many incidents that caused friction and hostility between the management and the managed. The most significant of these which still remains a bitter memory today was the 1919 incident where the girls were taken by force and placed in a home at Cootamundra to be trained for domestic duties in European homes. The story behind this incident goes back to the legislation introduced in 1909-10, the Aborigines Protection Act, which was amended in 1915 and 1918 to provide the Board with more powers over the lives and movements of Aboriginal people, and the apprenticeship of children.

POWERS OF 1909-10 ABORIGINAL PROTECTION ACT

CHILDREN

SECTION II.

"The Board may, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of the Apprentices Act, 1901, by indenture bind or cause to be bound, the child of any aborigine, or the neglected child of any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood in their veins, to be apprenticed to any master, and may collect and institute proceedings for the recovery of any wages payable under such indenture, and may expend the same as the board may think fit in the interest of the child.

Every child so apprenticed shall be under the supervision of the board, or of such person as may be authorised in that behalf by the regulations.

Any such child so apprenticed shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished for absconding, or for other misconduct, in the same way as any child apprenticed by his father with such child's consent.

A person shall be deemed a child who is above 14 and under 21."

SECTION 13.

"Any person who entices a child apprenticed as aforesaid to leave his lawful service or who entices the child of any aborigine, or of any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood in his veins, to leave any school, home, or institution, without the consent of the Board, shall be guilty of an offence against this act."

Aborigines Protection Act 1909-10

N.S.W. Parliamentary Acts.

AMENDMENTS TO 1909-10 ACT

1915 and 1918

Both amendments were designed to give more powers to the Board for apprenticing children and to assist the Board with this, the age was changed from a child
who was above 14 and under 21 to all those who were under 21. The Board could also now assume full control over the child and if it felt it was desirable, could remove a child from its parents or an employer and place them in an institution.

For the purpose of selecting children to be sent to the training home at Cootamundra, the Board appointed two inspectors in 1915 who were Mr. Swindlehurst and a Robert Donaldson. Their job was to visit Aboriginal stations and reserves throughout N.S.W. looking for girls to be sent to the home for training. Jack Horner gives a good account of this policy of the Government and the Board in his book "Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom."

"Donaldson and Swindlehurst, each taking half of N.S.W. as his territory, began a routine (as they inspected the reserve lands and visited the station managers) to look for girls - preferably those who could not be placed with an Aboriginal family....the children that were of employable age and fitness were Donaldson's particular interest."

DOMESTIC SERVICE

"After a domestic science course at Cootamundra, girls of 14 went into domestic service with private families. The apprenticeship pay was 15/6d. a week, less the 15/3d. that the Board banked in a Trust Fund which the child was expected to draw (with interest) when she came of age. (This 'pay' rose to 5/- a week in the furth year, with the Board putting 4/- of this into the Trust Fund.)"

BOYS;

"From 1917, boys went to a similar home at Singleton to be prepared for service on farms. In 1924, the boys were transferred to a new home at Kinchela, near Kempsey."

WHO BENEFITED?

"Squatters, country solicitors, and "well heeled" suburban ladies, among others benefited from this cheap service.

WHAT ABOUT THE PARENTS?

"Parents not only feared the eviction of their children; they deeply resented the fact that an inspector, or a policeman, could examine their homes for cleanliness, or order repairs to the Government property, without so much as asking for permission to enter." (Horner 1974 : 11)

ENTRY INTO HOMES

SECTION 19

1909-10 ACT

"Any station or reserve on which Aborigines are located and any buildings, and the stores, stock and any other matter or thing thereon or therein, may be inspected by any member of the board or, on the authority of the Board, by any member of a local committee, guardian, or by any member of the police force."
if such member is also authorized by the Inspector General of Police. The Person making such inspection shall report thereon to the Board."

(1909-10 Aborigines Protection Act N.S.W. Parliamentary Acts)

**GIRLS TAKEN FROM CUMMERAJ**

"One day in 1918, the manager of Cummercoonga arranged with a Moama police sergeant that the Aboriginal men should be away from the station for a whole day, shooting and trapping rabbits. There was some gratitude expressed at the time, as jobs were short. Since 1909 it had been the Board's policy that men should work outside for most of the year. On the morning the men left for the forest, the sergeant's real interest in the matter was explained, when two police cars arrived at the station, and two policemen took away a number of girls who were sent to Cootamundra for domestic training at the girls home.

"Younger children fled and hid where they could find hiding places - even across the Murray River into Victoria. Pastor Doug Nicholls - thirteen then - crawled in great fear under the floor of the weatherboard school building. When the frightened women told their men that night they were very angry. Their children bore an abiding fear of the police for most of their lives. Many girls were taken, including one of Doug Nicholls' sisters. This news dismayed the Aboriginal communities at Moonahcullah (Deniliquin) and Darlington Point. People could not believe it. As Pastor Nicholls was to say years later, 'they disliked the sneaky way that the police had gone about it.'"

*(Horner 1974: 13)*

**HOW THE PEOPLE SAW IT!**

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1978)

There was supposed to have been a police constable who was a member of the Board. He was supposed to have played a major part in the decision to take the girls from the reserve and place them in Cootamundra. He later became manager at Moonahcullah.

When they took those girls there was a big movement across the river, people lost trust in the Board after that. Not long after they moved "The heads" came down from Sydney and said to the people "We'll make a promise that there will be no child taken from here again unless they go through a court", so with that most of the people moved back.

They took them from other reserves too! and what I was told years ago was - if they took the girls away from the reserve then they would be forced to inter-marry with European men. Then this would mean the Aboriginal men would have no Aboriginal women to marry and also would have to inter-marry with European women, which would eventually see the Aboriginal race become interwoven with Europeans and in the long run became extinct.
When you look at it, it seems that was the authorities' real motives, because why did they want to send the girls away from the reserve to be taught how to become domestics when they could have learnt all of those things on the reserve without going to a place like Cootamundra.

*Ivy Sampson* (Barmah 1978)

There was a Miss Lowe who was in someway connected with the girls being taken. She came from Cootamundra where she had girls in the home. There was also a fella by the name of Donaldson that used to come around looking for girls. He was nasty and a big "red faced fella". I didn't like him! When they would come around you would see the boys and girls scattering everywhere.

Miss Lowe took poor Margaret Nelson and Nellie Jackson. Their parents were more agreeable for them to go because they thought it would be good for them and they would learn more than staying on the reserve. Margaret was a lovely girl and when she was taken I mised her a lot because we were very close - I used to stay at Granny Mag's (Margaret's mother) at that time after my mother died. Margaret used to write letters and the old people told me often that she used to write in these letters how she was very tired, and she was trying to tell them "in between the lines" that she was sick and being over worked. Then later on they got a telegram saying she was in hospital sick, and not long after another telegram followed saying that she died. Nellie came back after that and all her hair was knotted and they had to cut it out. She said she never had time to comb her hair while she was there because they had too much work to do.

People were very angry about the girls being taken. They didn't like Miss Lowe or Donaldson but they couldn't do nothing about it, they had no choice.

Margaret and Nellie were the second lot of girls that went to Cootamundra. The first lot were taken by the police who came there when the men were working way over the other side of the sandhill there - about 2 miles from Cummera.

*Pricilla McKray* (Mooroopna 1979)

There was a good spirit at Cummera and everyone felt part of the community, and then the Board came and broke a lot of that when they took those girls. That more or less broke the mission...

I remember it as clear as if it was only yesterday. I was married then and they (Board) came there and made a rule that all young girls had to leave the mission. We couldn't understand why they should have to leave? They were there with their parents being well looked after...They were happy and then all of a sudden one day out came the police car from Moama and next thing we could hear all this screaming on the mission...They were grabbing at these young girls the police, and then all the people gathered around. The men were away working.
Poor Aunty Florrie Nicholls was there, and it was one of her girls that they grabbed, Hilda. Then there were two other girls who ran and jumped into the river and got away. Winnie Atkinson (Walker) was one of them, and Alf Morgan helped them get across the other side to Victoria by boat, because they couldn't touch them over there. But oh! it was terrible to hear all this screaming and the women fighting with the police for their girls...they were playing tug-o-war for their daughters. The police took 3 - 4 of the girls by force, Hilda Nicholls, Bella McGee, Miriam Charles, ......

Took them into Moama and sent them to Cootamundra to the home.

Well then everyone was up in arms over it see! so they packed up then, "it was a pack up" and they moved across the other side - Cummera was a curse to them the Board coming like that and sending the police to take their children. They wanted to get them away off the mission!

My mother-in-law she had a beautiful girl Margaret. I don't know how but they got around her somehow, and she agreed to let Margaret go. And there was nothing Margaret didn't know she was a good living girl. She never came back and she later died in Sydney.

After the girls were taken, the mission broke and there was a lot of unrest there between the Board and the people. A lot never came back after that and then later on they moved on over to Shepparton and Mooroopna.

*Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)*

Even in my time when I went to school there they used to come there to take the girls to Cootamundra. In fact, my sister and I were nearly sent there, and brothers, for the fact that we had no mother you know? And they were going to send us, we were marked to go, but only for my grand father who was real respected, and he really spoke up and we were more or less put in his care even though our aunty looked after us. My dad was away all the time shearing.

So my grand father saved us from that fate. But I can remember them coming down and taking another two girls. They came down to school and we all had to line up and they came and took the two girls. One of the girls went back since but the other one never returned. They took them to Cootamundra. But whenever we'd see a car coming in the old people would yell out "Look, here they come" and oh! they'd all go down and swim across to the other side, you know. (laughs). But before that in the earlier years, yes they came down and took a lot of the girls to Cootamundra.

*Nora Charles (Shepparton 1978).*

I'll never forget that day too!

My poor old mother Florrie she got in the car, and one of the other old women got the crowbar and was gonna puncture the tyre on the police car. My mother wouldn't get out of the car and they took her all the way into Moama with my sister Hilda. When they got into Moama she got into the train then and she hung onto the train - and the police had to drag her away. My father was very angry because the men were sent away to work. He put up a fight against
the Board and wrote letters to them, in protest of what they did. The Board then wrote back to him and promised that it would never happen again and they would always summon the two parents and ever since that incident they do that now.

We all left Cummera after that and camped on the other side. So Uncle Eddy then became spokesperson for the Board, and the manager trying to get us to come back and they were giving us their word that it would never happen again. That was the start of the movement then and they moved on to Shepp and Mooroopna looking for work.

Some went back but after that incident with the girls being taken, everyone couldn't trust the Board and as time went on conditions on the reserve got worse.

*Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)*

I can remember only about the old people that never forgot it, they kept talking about it. They never forgot all the bad things like that that came along and they still speak of it today. And our people today still react to people like the Social Welfare Department who try to work in close liaison with our people. And I think it runs right away back to those days when all that type of thing happened. We've got a very poor relationship even today with the Social Welfare Department.

I believe it will be a long, long time before our people forget those incidents because the old ones just kept telling the younger ones about it and may be that's one of the hurdles we've yet to jump over, because it keeps getting handed down from father to son or mother to daughter and we're never going to forget it for a long time yet.
THE STRIKE, 1939

COMMENT:
After the girls were taken in 1918 as pointed out in the oral history, there was a lot of unrest on Cummera mainly due to the fear of the same thing happening again and the mistrust which was created between the people and the Board. Between 1918 and the 1940's, the relationship between the Board and the Aboriginal residents didn't improve. The NSW Government during this period was working towards its assimilation policy, which was aimed at discouraging resettlement on reserves and encouraging the movement of Aboriginal people into the general community. Diane Barwick provides details about the conditions during this period which led to the strike in 1939, when the majority of residents packed up and moved across the river to Victoria in protest against the management and conditions.

"In 1937 little remained at Cumeroogunga and only the Aborigines remembered why it ceased to be a model farm. The staff had changed frequently and few Board members had ever visited. The incumbent officials were intensively questioned but they either did not know or did not wish to embarrass the government by admitting that the abandonment of farming and the exodus of half of the residents to Victoria was a direct consequence of policy. During the 1937 Select Committee Inquiry into the administration of the Protection Board Aborigines and officials gave evidence to the inquiry about the present state of the former model farm: the water supply had failed a decade earlier so it was impossible to grow vegetables or green fodder for milk cows; only a few head of stock remained after 1928; no resident had been paid a cash wage for work on the reserve since 1929; most of the reserve had been leased to European farmers since 1921, and all of the farm implements and machinery had been removed to other reserves during the 1920s. Twenty one cottages had been burned or pulled down as their occupants left for seasonal work in order to discourage their intended return. In 1937 the remaining 25 cottages housed 172 persons and another 113 residents camped in "humpies" made of old tins and wheat bags. Other former residents, forbidden access to the reserve, camped in humpies directly across the Murray.

"Some Cumeroogunga exiles participated in a January 1938 deputation to the Prime Minister, with little result.

"Embarrassed by the revelations of the 1937 inquiry, the Government ordered a Public Service Board report, presented in August 1938, which sharply criticised the leasing of Cumeroogunga and recommended re-organisation of the Board and development of the stations so residents could be trained for "assimilation". But conditions did not improve and the dissatisfied Cumeroogunga residents supported by exiles in Melbourne and Sydney
resolved to "strike". " (Barwick 1972:62-3).

As well as the decline in farming developments, housing and management, there were also other factors behind the strike.

People were very unhappy with the particular manager McQuiggan and they had already petitioned to the Board for his removal in 1938, but without success. He was very standoverish and threatened to cut off people's rations if they didn't conform to his ways of running the reserve. Rations were also inadequate for families to survive. People were in protest against the decision of the Board to lease 2,000 acres of reserve land to a European farmer, when they could have farmed this land themselves.

The education level being taught on the reserve was only of a third grade level, equal to that of a white 8 year old child.

No employment opportunities on the reserve or training for future employment outside were being provided.

Child endowment payments were being administered by the Board and were not paid in full to the mothers.

Finally, people's feelings about all these matters were brought to a head by the visit on 1st February 1939 of Jack Patten. He was on an extensive tour of Aboriginal reserves as President of the Aborigines Progressive Association of Sydney, to raise support for the newly formed Association's call for legislative reform of the Protection Act, and the fight for citizens rights.

Patten as well as being a very skillful public speaker was also editor of the Aboriginal monthly newspaper "The Abo Call" published in 1938. From people's accounts of the strike it is clear that Patten had a big impact on the decision of the people to move across the river. Exactly what he said to the people is not recorded. However going by the philosophy which he expressed in the Abo Call, he was trying to get people to unite against the oppressive laws and restrictions that people were forced to live under.

In an editorial from the May 1938 edition of the Abo Call he says:

"Look at our Reserves! What is it that greets us on investigation? Starvation, poor housing and education, and general oppression. It seems that "Protection" Board on some reserves appoints men to torture us mentally with bullying tactics.

"This, with the wrecking of our physical condition through inadequate food supply has only one object - Extermination! What have we to lose if this so called "protection" Board is abolished!

"So all Aborigines in Australia who want the privileges and benefits of civilization for the welfare of their wives and children should get behind this movement. Say goodbye to the damper and ashes, and to "compounds". We want to be absorbed into the Nation of Australia, and thus survive in the land of our forefathers, on equal terms." (Patten 1938).
Patten's speech to the Cummera people resulted in him being arrested by the Moama police and charged with having induced people to leave the reserve - which ironically was an offence under the very act he was campaigning against. It also resulted in the mass exodus of Cummera people to the other side of the Murray.

THE WALKOUT

* Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)

When Jack Patten came there just before the strike and while he was there things were really moving. He continued to talk and tell everyone what their rights were.

At that time there was a petition going around which we were trying to get people to sign for better conditions. Many signed it but those who were employed by the Board to work on the reserve wouldn't sign, because they would then jeopardise their jobs. That's the way the Board used to keep people divided because they knew if all the people united they could stand up against the Board and for their rights.

Jack was eventually caught up with by the police and charged under a very old law which was "inciting Aborigines". The people got together and raised bail for him, and Jack also had a lawyer in Sydney who was his legal advisor. After that incident they were really out after him so Jack enlisted for the army when he returned to Sydney. He joined the army and went overseas.

Later on in his life he met with a fatal accident in Melbourne and died as a result of it.

Most of the people moved over the river and then later on a lot moved over to Shepparton and Mooroopna. There were only about 3-4 families left on Cummera who were employed by the Board to work on the reserve. When people moved away from the reserve the manager McQuiggan moved things out of people's houses. He went about it in a very cunning way too! and what he did was he formed a committee after a few people had gone back there. The committee consisted of a bailiff, sheriff, etc. who were then delegated with the authority to go into the houses and get the contents out. The reason he did this was because he wasn't game to do it himself so he had to get someone else to do it. When people found out about this they were very annoyed but they couldn't do much about it because McQuiggan had the power to call the police in if anyone caused a disturbance on the reserve. The movement created a lot of divisions and unrest amongst the people and McQuiggan used this to try and divide the people and blame them for the movement away instead of his own bad management and the inadequate conditions of the reserve.

* Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1978-9)

Jack Patten came there and spoke to us and he was trying to make people aware of the laws, conditions and other things we had to live by on the reserve.

Looking back now in comparison with present day society a person like
Jack Patten would today be seen as a radical.

**COMPOUND**

Before the walkout there was some talk going around in the early days by one of the managers that they were going to make Cummera into a compound. But the only thing that stopped them was the Murray River because the people could swim over to the Victorian side when the police came. Or when they wanted someone for something against the law in N.S.W. well they could just jump in the river on a boat and go across to the Victorian side. Then, when they got across "they could cheek them from the other side!" That's one thing the police didn't do in those days and that was to cross the river into N.S.W. because their authority didn't extend into N.S.W. The laws then were more open in Victoria, you could go over there and get a drink, which you couldn't in N.S.W. because Aborigines weren't allowed to be served in N.S.W. pubs then.

When we moved over in 1939 we didn't receive any assistance from the Victorian or the N.S.W. Government. People found it very hard then and things were pretty tough as far as housing and food was concerned. Some assistance was provided when Jacky Patten got help from church groups and other people. Uncle Eddy Atkinson was there too! and he was trying to get some support through the Red Cross.

Finally some head bloke came down and said....

"Look you can't fight for what yous want in N.S.W. while you're over here in Victoria", and he said "we can't help you from N.S.W. while you're in Victoria."

So he said "Move back to the reserve and fight the N.S.W. Govt. and the Board from there." We had a meeting then and some agreed to go back and others decided to stay. We decided to pack up and go back.

When we got back there the manager McQuiggan hadn't changed at all and he continued to give us a rough time for a while. Then after a while as luck would happen they sorted McQuiggan out and he got the sack. The whole trouble was the manager that came after him was no better and he ended up getting the bullet too! Conditions slowly got better as time went on and after they got rid of McQuiggan they stopped the leasing of the land which was one of the reasons for the strike.

Most of the people who stayed on the other side never came back and moved on over to Mooroopna where they set up camp on the bend of the Goulburn River which later became known as "The Flat".

Patten was arrested and was put on a good behaviour bond for three months.

The manager that came after McQuiggen was not much better. He started pulling people's houses down and selling the materials. He used to re-run the iron and sell it and he also got into trouble for selling other property which didn't belong to him. The houses he was pulling down belonged to those who moved away, and he started pulling them down as soon as they left. I reckon those who assisted him to pull those houses down should have refused...
to, because there was a chance that those people who moved might not have
done any good, and would want to move back to Cummera to their homes.
Anyhow they eventually got Peterson and the police came out one night and
arrested him. He was the same fella that had the revolver and "he would use
it too if he got the chance". I think they (managers) were allowed to have
a revolver because I went up to the manager's house one day and knocked at the
door. He opened the door, reached around and I saw he had a revolver. I
also seen the same fella shoot a horse with one so they must have been
allowed to carry them on the reserve.

* Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)
I remember that incident very well...most of the residents who lived on
Cummera moved over the river to Victoria. They moved off Cummera in protest
of the ways they were being treated and against certain conditions on the
reserve, such as land being leased out to European farmers. There was
2,000 acres leased out to a European (W. Smart) which the people believed
could have been put to use in training their own younger people in
farming and working the land.
I still have very vivid memories of that incident when they all moved and
lived down opposite the old bend across from the reserve. I would have been
about 9 then and things were really bad then. There was no work; the men
were all out of work. Aunty Hillus Briggs set up a school and she was
teaching the children there on the Barmah side. I feel she was a more
qualified teacher than the previous teacher!

SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE
At that time Aunty Mary Tucker, Sir Doug Nicholls and others who were in
Melbourne used to run concerts and other functions to raise money to buy
food for the people. They would bring whatever they could up to the people
who were camped on the river during the strike.
While the people were camped on the other side a lot of the houses were
pulled down. So a lot of the people who wanted to come back had no choice
but to stay on the other side or move over to Shepparton, Mooroopna, Echuca
and other places.

FEAR OF COMPOUND
* Colin & Violet Charles (Cummeragunga 1978)

Colin:
There was one fella I remember who was involved in that, Jacky Patten. He
came to Cummera and stood up on a big stump there and talked to the
people. He told them that they were going to be compounded and they were
going to put a big fence around us so they could keep us inside. So with
that a big mob shifted over the river.

Violet:
There was a rumour that they were going to compound them and keep them like
they weren't allowed to go anywhere without permission! And the people said
"we're not going to be compounded! We'll stand up against that sort of
thing", and they moved over the river. Later a lot of them resented this and
they came back after, when it started to ease. A lot didn't come back though!
and that was when Cummera started to break up.

CHILD ENDOWMENT

COMMENT:
"On the introduction of child endowment, in 1925, the Protection Board was
asked to administer the funds for Aboriginal mothers. These mothers on
stations and reserves received their endowment in the form of shopping orders

Aboriginal mothers had to come to the manager or the police for these shopping
orders. One of the civil rights matters that the Aborigines' Progressive
Association struggled for was the right to get child endowment paid directly
to the mother, which was already happening in Victoria.

*Mally Cooper (Bairnsdale 1980)

Jack Patten came along who was a well spoken man with a good education. He
said to all the women "You want to get across the river and you'll get
endowment!" So we all protested and went across the river to Barmah side and
put in for it there and got it by money, cheques.

They wouldn't pay you your endowment in NSW they would only give it to you in
coupons, and you had to go to the store and get a certain amount of groceries
and clothing and you had to put down what you wanted for your children.

There were a lot of other things that you needed but you couldn't get them
because you were only allowed what the coupon would give you.

We used to go to the Barmah store for the groceries, then we would have to go
into Echuca, for the clothing.

On the Victorian side we had an endowment book where we signed a paper and
they would tear it out.

We had to go by the manager's rules and do what he said. I reckon Aboriginal
people should have had a say in what was going on but the trouble was a lot
of them were frightened to speak up against the white man...he was a big man
then who had a lot of power.

But McQuiggan had no power - when they walked off he couldn't hold them. He
tried to get them to go back, he got the police out and tried to get them to
go back but no they wouldn't. If anyone spoke out like Bob Cooper they would
get put off the mission like we were. All of us women clubbed together and
went up to the manager and asked if we could have our money for the endowment
which Jack told us to do, and he said "Oh no"...he said "You'll have to go to
the Board in Sydney about that". So we said "Oh well never mind then, we'll go
across the river and get it"...which we did!

*Dan Atkinson (Barmah 1980)

People had to collect their endowment in the form of a cheque which didn't work...
out very successfully so they decided to give them money orders instead of
cheques which had to be collected at the police station.
Another thing too about baby bonus was that if the baby was predominantly
Aboriginal they were not entitled to the bonus, whereas if it was European then
you were eligible. This was changed later on and we got it after a while, but
it was left to the manager’s discretion for the payment of the baby bonus.

*Liz Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)*
The 1939 strike wasn’t anything that was new to the situation. It was just
that there were fighters coming along who were prepared to fight the issue and
a lot of Aboriginal people were not prepared to accept the conditions, which
is what the whole issue arose from.
Looking back on it now the people who moved over the river didn’t want to let
the people down who were organising the strike. They were left with practic-
ally no food and the conditions on the other side became unpleasant. It was
cold and dismal; they had a lot of rain during the first few weeks; houses
were made out of any materials people could find. A lot of people moved on
and it was very hard for the ones that were just left there and didn’t have
anywhere to go. Eventually they were encouraged to come back onto the reserve
and stay.
A lot came back and didn’t stay too long because of the work situation.
Conditions did get better which in a lot of ways was due to the
2nd World War which started about that time. It was also during that period
the manager who was behind a lot of the trouble left. Also during that time
a lot of young men joined the army and a lot of other people moved away because
they were able to find work in the cities in ammunition factories and other
Government set ups that required labour during the war.
Looking back I feel that a lot of the people who went on strike were wrongly
advised by moving across the river to Victoria and fighting the issue there.
But people thought they were doing the right thing at the time and it was going
to be for the betterment of their people.

*Kevin Atkinson (Shepparton 1980)*
I think the reason for pulling the houses down was because they didn’t want
the people to come back after they moved across the river. They used to tell
us that Cummera was the furtherest point away from Sydney and it was starting
to become too big a cost for the Government to run. I think that was one
of the main reasons they were trying to phase it out and move people away
from Cummera into the towns. The assimilation policy would also be one of the
factors behind the move too! They wanted to phase it out and move us into
places like Moama, Echuca, Shepparton and Moorcopna.

*HOUSES ON VICTORIA SIDE*

*Mally Cooper* (Ballsdale 1980)
When we moved over we stayed in my father-in-law’s place. Bob Cooper who had
lived away from the reserve for a long time. The men erected a big tank on the other side for their water, and the first few weeks, heavy rain made conditions very hard. They built their houses out of anything they could get hold of, and a lot used to go up to the Barmah store and buy potato bags and flour bags, which they made their huts out of. They used to get white paste and mix it up with paint, then painted the bags with it. The houses used to look like little cottages when they were finished. For the chimneys they used iron and they used to use clay mud to block up the cracks to keep the cold out. People were happy there: they were together and the conditions weren't anything new to them. They were always used to roughing it!
CHAPTER 12. MOVEMENT AWAY

COMMENT: "Their mass migration across the Murray in February 1939 brought unprecedented press attention and debate in the N.S.W., Victorian and Commonwealth Parliaments. Public concern hastened the reconstitution of the Protection Board as an Aborigines Welfare Board under an amended Act in 1940". (Barwick 1972:63)

The new Welfare Board changed its emphasis from "protection" to assisting people to assimilate into the general community. The Board's new policy was to assist people in housing, education and employment.

This form of assistance only applied to those in NSW, so the Cummera people who moved across the border were left to their own devices in moving into the general community. In Victoria, the Government's attitude was "that Victoria had no Aboriginal problem, that its Aborigines were citizens, and that the (Victorian) Board had no authority to deal with any persons except the residents of Lake Tyers Aboriginal station."

"Victoria commenced its phasing out of reserves in 1919 and their aim was to gather all the Victorian Aboriginal population onto Lake Tyers where they could be managed in the one place and all other reserves were to be closed."

"This attitude brought to Victoria the ridicule of Paul Hasluck in 1952. 'I suppose that today Victoria is the most backward state in Australia (and also the most self-righteous) in regard to native affairs. It is so backward that it can still think of the problem only in the outworn terms of protection and, because it does not have any longer any bush-dwelling primitives to protect, and because consequently it has ended its protective policies, Victorians believe they have nothing to worry about except the shortcomings of other States and territories.' " (Felton 1960:51)

It was not until 1957, under a new Government, that the Aborigines Welfare Board of Victoria was appointed. As we will see from the oral history many Cummera people lived in shacks until the new Welfare Board brought in its housing programme at Mooroopna.

THE MOOROOPNA FLAT :
* Margaret Saunders (Mooroopna 1978)

When we first moved to Mooroopna we camped over the railway bridge there along the river behind the cannery. Then people moved from there to the flat.

We were first there at the flat; then others followed. It was hard on the flat.
specially when we'd get flooded out, then we'd have to move across to Dashes Paddock they called it then, and every time the flat got flooded that's where people used to move to, and they would come back to the flat when the river went down and have to clean all of our homes out. Our little places were only made out of bush material then but they used to withstand the floods.

Looking at all the hardships we faced in those days, we were happy and together.

No electricity! We used to pull our water up from the river on a pulley with a rope, and there was a lot of people camped down there then: Nelsons, Charles, Morgans, Atkinsons, Barbers, Harrisons, Joachamines, Briggs, Muirs, Bulls, Murrays. These were mainly the people who moved over after they left Cummera, looking for work.

ACCEPTANCE

When we first came to Mooroopna and started work in the cannery there was a lot of prejudice towards us. That's when Uncle Shady James started fighting for our rights to work in the cannery. He spoke up for our rights to be employed on equal citizens and it was through Uncle Shady that the cannery changed their attitude and we were employed there then.

* Geraldine Briggs (Melbourne 1979)

Things were really tough when people had to leave the reserve. We moved into a place out at Ardmona. Uncle Eddy Atkinson moved over to Mooroopna from Cummera and set up a little church. A lot of hardships were faced moving from the reserve to the towns and there were hundreds camped along the river. They were all camped together along the river from the Mooroopna railway station to the Goulburn River and down around the bend.

DOLE RESTRICTIONS:

During that period black people were not given the dole, whereas white people did receive it! So you can imagine the hardships that people were confronted with then which goes back to the days of McQuiggan when people left the reserve in protest against his management.

* Violet Harrisons (Shepparton 1978)

They were hard days but they were good days! No body interferred with us. I was only young then and they were the happiest days of my life living on the river bank. Granny Smith (one of the first residents)had a beautiful house on the flat and she used to cook soup and give it around to the big families. Real good old woman she was! Thats the way we used to work in those days all helping one another, and they were all big families then. We were camped right along the bend of the river on the Goulburn there. When we were living down there I felt free, not like on the reserve where you had managers telling you what to do, and you were regulated by bells and rules.

* Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

We lived on the flat when we first moved to Mooroopna and that's when the
women were working in the cannery. The only work we could find then was seasonal work on the fruit. In the off season women used to find domestic work in the town, and the men used to find work in the orchards pruning; some were woodcutting and of course a lot were shearsers.

We were able to support our families with the work we found, and in those days when we were on the flat we never had the conveniences like today. We used to have to come home from work and bucket water up from the river to do our washing. They were real hard times, but we were happy and used to help each other.

COUNCIL STEPS IN:
The flat lasted for about 7-8 years until the council stepped in because there was some concern about the amount of people living there and the lack of proper water and sewerage services. Both the Mooroopna and Shepparton councils had a meeting, and it was decided that they were going to provide proper homes for people on the flat. They were going to get the Welfare Board to build commission homes and they wanted the people to move from the flat. That's when Rumbalara came into being then and the people moved there. Some of the families were able to move into commission homes in the town.

TOWNS ATTITUDE TO FLAT:
The flat - that's where they were against us, they were prejudiced against that. The children going to school had problems and they used to come home upset and say that the white kids would be calling them names and throwing their colour up to them. They were always coming home with a problem saying that they had a fight with someone over their colour. Mr. Gallager was the schoolteacher there then and he was a fine man who tried to prevent a lot of the sorts of attitudes that kids had when our children first started going to school. We grew up with his own children and they mixed in with us. My two brothers George and Keith Nelson played football with them.

Uncle Eddy Atkinson was there then and he was our minister. They built the church for his congregation which is still there today - the Church of Christ, Mooroopna, which was taken over by his son Jeff who has since passed on.

* Trevor Morgan (Shepparton 1978)

It was during the 2nd World War that most of the people moved over to Shepparton and Mooroopna, and there was a lot of work then on the fruit. See the troops who were away fighting needed food and they had to get everybody who was left here to work in the food processing industries.

So people moved across and built their camps on the flat and then most of the people started to come away from the reserve. They felt it was a better place to live around where they could find work. A few were woodcutting and some got permanent work in the orchards. Then a lot of the men used to work on the channels - digging channels during the winter. And the rest were working on
the fruit and odd jobs around the town. Nobody was out of work then. See there was nothing to keep everyone going on the reserve really. They were just drifting away to all the various towns.

ACCEP TANCE:
There wasn't much problem with discrimination. Oh, you got the odd whitefella who didn't like the black fella, but most of us just mixed in. A lot of the Cummera boys played football with the local teams and they got to know everyone that way, and became accepted.

* Sandy Atkinson (Rumbalara 1978)
I believe they had one heck of a battle when they came across here, because there weren't too many who were successful in getting houses in the town. At that time also there weren't too many who wanted Aboriginal people living next door to them in the towns. And the result of that was huts and tents along the river. Many of us here still today in Mooroopna remember quite clearly the little shanty town along the river there, that they then called "The Flat". And it became a constant concern for the local shires and the police, or you could say more of an embarrassment to the local authorities to have this little community camped on the edge of the township.

Another thing too was that we all know how the Goulburn River when it floods can come down over night and of course the people were often in trouble. The police and the Shire and everybody used to have to come to their assistance and help them to move. The only one high place outside of the town where people could be moved to was next to the local tip which was called "Dashes Paddock."

Then later on there were some good people trying to help. They could see the situation couldn't go on the way it was, so there was a committee formed, and on that committee was some police, Shire Councillors, local church ministers, and local concerned people. They got together and were instrumental in pressuring the Government into forming what became the Aborigines Welfare Board. In those days, which I look back on as being the "good old days", after a lot of fighting they made a lot of progress and we reaped a lot of benefit from the work that these people put in. There was a man from this local committee, who became a member of the Welfare Board. And he took the problems right to the Board in Melbourne and that was how they were successful in getting the place where people moved to from the flat - "Rumbalara".

EARLY HOSTILITIES TOWARDS US:
* Ruby Neir and Pricilla McKray (Mooroopna 1978)
When we left Cummera we went to Mooroopna. We were the first ones that moved, which was not long after Grandpa James retired and took a house over in Shepparton in the town.
We couldn't get a house and we went down and camped on the river. But they were so hostile here in Mooroopna towards us. They didn't want the blacks to be working in the cannery. They even got into the manager at the cannery and he was hostile towards us. We weren't allowed into the cannery to work at first.

Then it came! Uncle Shady was such a clever boy, you know! He got in touch with them down in Melbourne, and they called them up and they had a big meeting down there, and they said to Shady: "You go right back to Mooroopna and you tell them there at the cannery (he gave them the names of the people who they put off) to reinstate them at once", and they would be in touch with the manager.

Next day Shady brought the news and we all went in a body to the cannery. Oh and they came out all being real nice to us, saying "Oh yes, come on what work would you like to do?" and we went back there and never had any more trouble. It was Shady who got that fixed up in Melbourne for us. They wrote to the cannery and said "You reinstate those women immediately, they're just as good as any white woman you've got working in that cannery," And then after we went there and worked and my goodness, we were the best workers in the cannery! (laughs) We always got first preference after that.

Mooroopna and Shepparton have always been pretty good as far as accepting our way of life is concerned. You've only got to look at the families that settled here, and the ones that have left and moved back here again because this is where most of the people came to when they left Cummera, and over the years they've learnt to get on with one another.

**COMMENT:** Rumbalara was established as a transitional housing project by the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board in 1958. It was constructed by the Housing Commission on 5 acres of Crown Land excised from a forestry area. The Board's intention with Rumbalara was that it would provide proper accommodation for the people who were living on the flat, and would be a half-way preparation period for people before they moved into Housing Commission Homes in the town.

* Margaret Saunders (Mooroopna 1978)

When they built Rumbalara we were one of the first families to move there. They built ten houses there and the people who I can remember who moved into them were: Lionel Atkinson and his family, Allan and Betty Charles, Leo and Edna Atkinson, Violet Harrison, Piggle McGee and Johnny Healing, Aunty Bernie and Bill. The houses were very small with concrete floors and a small lounge/dining room with two really small bedrooms. All the people had big families then and it's hard to imagine why they built such small pokey little places.

* Sandy Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

In a lot of ways the movement to Rumbalara was a sad change because the people
while they were living along the river bank, they were together! the community was always together. In those days of the flat there was no help from the Government and they were very close. It was similar to the lifestyle they lived on the reserve.

But the change from there to Rumbalara was probably the most difficult one of all because, with Rumbalara, sure! there came a house with electricity and good walls around them. But there came a man from the Government who told people what to do and how to do it. And that was a sad day in their life when they were told how many people they could have living with them and when they could come and when they could go. They were possibly worse off at Rumbalara than they were back at the mission.

The way I look at Rumbalara - I think the people would have been happier if they had of been able to live their own lifestyle without any interference from outside. But then, if you look back on it, the people that lived here went away a much wiser people. Because they were able to adjust to the ways of living in a white community and the responsibilities involved.

If you look back on it I think whether anyone likes it or not it was a step that had to be taken. And from here a lot of people moved out and adjusted without any problems at all. They made many friends after they moved and it's interesting to note that they didn't have too many while they were at Rumbalara because the neighbours around them gave them a hard time.

The Save the Children Fund done a lot of good work towards helping our people adjust. They had a Kindergarten and they did a lot of work. The S.T.C.F. have a very good sister who used to come and look after the kids and advise the mothers, which was a really big help to the people.

* Violet Harrison (Shepparton 1978)

When we came to Rumbalara after they took us off the river bank, they put a supervisor over us, and he used to come around and tell us what to do.

I said to him "Look we're not living in a compound". He said "Oh, you don't know what a compound is". "Dont be funny", I said "I was under compound at Lake Tyers mission before I came here". There was a group of us who stood up to him and I said to him "You can do what you like" I said, "I'm not going to be here tied down by you. You brought us up here to live like white people. Then give us our rights! We fought for freedom when we left the missions".

And he said "Oh, I'm your supervisor". I said "You seem more like a manager to me". I said "We came from freedom down on the riverbank and we're not going to sit back and be told what to do - we're sick of that!" So he bought the police and people from the Welfare Board up. And I stood up to them. I said "You can keep your house, I'll go back to the riverbank where there is more freedom."
STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL TREATMENT:

We were dancing and enjoying ourselves there on "Rumba" one night. And I had the radiogram going and next minute Alfie Healing came to the door and said "Aunty Violet, the police are coming! You're not allowed to have anyone here dancing!" I said "They can go to hell." We were all having a party then dancing and singing. And the knock came on the door, "The police!" So I opened the door and there stood the Sergeant and I said "What do you want?" He said he wanted to come in and see what was going on. I said "You stand back off that step and don't you dare come into this house." I said "if you do I'll assault you. I'll push you and then you'll have me up for assault. This is my house. It might be a government house," I said "but I pay my rent so you're not coming in." I said "we're not under 'compound'. We were brought up here to live like white people. I don't drink and I don't run around the street picking up Tom, Dick and Harry. Come and have a look" I said to him "and see what's in my house - we're all women."

They were trying to stand over us and I stood up to them! The supervisor they put over us didn't want me to have Elsie (daughter) there! I said "You can please yourself. I'm not going to put my own daughter out on the road for you or anyone else." He said "Oh I'll ring the police." I said "Go on and ring them and see what you can do." I said "I'll stand up to you and anyone else who tries to make any of my children leave their home."

Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1979)

I didn't live on Rumbalara but my sister and her family did. They built these little concrete homes, and they were very cold! A lot of people developed sickness from these places and after a long while they decided to close Rumbalara and move people into the Commission Homes, which is where most of the original people who came from Cummera are today. A lot of children used to get sick too, with colds, and in the winter these little places were so cold they were no comfort at all. Children from there were constantly in and out of the Mooroopna Hospital. So that is how today all the families that lived on the Flat and Rumbalara are now living in the Commission Homes.

HOUSES

*Mally Cooper (Bairnsdale 1980)

I shifted to Rumbalara from Melbourne, and I was only there for a few months and I complained about the places only having one door which was at the entrance and there was no doors going into the bedrooms, and they didn't have a bath either. So the Truth paper came up there and reported on the conditions of the houses we were living in. Then they got better conditions for us! They got the toilets put inside and put doors on all the bedrooms and an extra kitchen put on. They took the stove out of the front room which was a kitchen front room.

I told the press when they came there that they only wanted bars on the windows
and it would be the same as a jail. Before that even on the flat we had more room, but with these little places we had to cram all the girls into one room and the boys into another. Then the parents had the other room.

COMMENT:
Rumbalara was officially closed in 1971 as a transitional housing estate, and is now occupied by the Shepparton Mooroopna Aborigines Co-op. It's used as an administrative centre for the Co-op, an Arts and Craft Workshop, and a meeting place for Aboriginal people in the Goulburn Valley and their kinfolk from other areas.

MOVEMENT TO OTHER TOWNS

MOAMA N.S.W.

* Nora Charles (Shepparton 1978)

When they told us that Cummera was about to break up, in the 1950s this would have been, we had a relieving manager who came there, and he asked me. Well I said "I'll go because I'm not well," and I said my husband's seldom home because he was shearing all around the district. I said "I'll make one to leave." They wanted to shift more houses from Cummera, but the others wouldn't move, wouldn't budge. They stuck there like leeches.

They moved three houses then from Cummera into Moama. Ours was one of them and the others were Mickey and Alma Morgan and their family, Uncle Billy and Louise Charles. We were the first ones to move into Moama, and the others wouldn't move so they left them there. But they said to them it would mean that all communications would be cut off - "You'll be left to paddle your own canoe", as the saying goes, "so how are you going to manage?" Well then when they pointed everything out to me I said I'll go and they shifted my house into Moama.

Later on after we left Moama they pulled down those houses then and burnt them for fire wood!

ECHUCA

* Louise Atkinson (Echuca 1978)

We were one of the first families to move into Echuca, then the other main ones I can remember were Henry and Louise Atkinson, Bill and Bella Atkinson, Amby and Daphne, Eddy and Winnie Walker, Clive and Iris Atkinson, Bob and Nancy Egan from Moonahcullah. Most of the people lived over in Echuca West, and there were quite a few who lived in other parts of the town. We first lived in a house near the railway station which is where my family grew up there.

TOWN ATTITUDES

They didn't accept us at all when we first shifted in. Echuca was a terrible prejudiced town when we first shifted. Even before that, when we used to just come in for the day shopping or to the sports, they were very prejudiced towards us.

Things have changed for the better over the years, and it's changed a lot.
now, because the children have grown up in the town along side them, and gone to school together with the white kids. When we first moved my brothers would be always fighting with them. After a while when they would call our kids names and they got a hiding for it, well they got to learn then not to fight with them and a lot of them woke up.

* Elizabeth Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)

When the first people moved from Cummera it created a type of chain migration. Once the first ones moved then their relations and extended family followed the pattern. Most of the people moved to the Goulburn Valley area where there was work on the fruit; others moved to surrounding towns Echuca, Moama, Kyabram, and some to Swan Hill, Robinvale where they worked on the grapes.

Then there was the city movement where a lot of people migrated to in search of work in factories and other places during and after the 2nd World War. Once people moved to the city and other places they settled there then and that's how most of the Aboriginal organisations first started up in Melbourne. It was through the efforts of these pioneer people who first moved away from the reserve.

**GENERAL COMMUNITY**

The sad part about the general community was the non-acceptance of the Aboriginal people, because they had been isolated and a lot were not allowed into towns in the early days. "The manager had ways and means of preventing that too!" In the later days Aboriginal people were sought by local farmers for their labour particularly the men who were good reliable workers.

Most of the people that left the reserve ended up living on the fringe or if you were more prepared to live like the white man and do what they did, you were more acceptable. But Aboriginal values are very different to white man's values, which was always misunderstood through the white man's eyes, and because we lived a different lifestyle to them they saw us as having inferior standards.
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CHAPTER 13. CUMMERA AFTER THE STRIKE

* Merle Jackamos. (Melbourne 1979)

The remaining people camped on the other side, who hadn't drifted over to the towns, came back to Cummera. By 1953 the Cummera population was so small the Board decided resident supervision wasn't needed, and they released a lot of the land to white farmers who came there and grew tobacco and other things. Only 200 acres was kept for the use of the people.

Some of the residents were moved into Echuca. My brother's house was moved into Echuca and a couple of the old people Mr. Louise Charles and Mrs. Nora Charles...they didn't want to go but they had no choice because they told them they were going to close the Mission so they had to leave.

There was a few families still left at Cummera, Coopers, Atkinsons and a few others. In 1960 there were 70 people there. The men worked as shearers and in the Barmah Forests as woodcutters and burning charcoal, others worked for the white farmers who had leased their land.

Then the Kew Branch of the Advancement League took an interest in Cummera and they took an agricultural expert up there to look at the land, and they informed them that the land was good for growing things but they couldn't do much with just the 200 acres they had left. So a couple of them Kevin (Atkinson) and Colin (Walker) and a few others went to Sydney to meet with the Chief Secretary, with the result that some of the leases to the white farmers were cancelled and they more or less told them that they could stay there, but they wouldn't give them a lease to it so that they could work it.

In the years that followed the few remaining families at Cummeragunga formed their own proprietary company. Mrs. Sophie Briggs, the oldest resident on the station played an important part in the fight for Cummera.

Money was borrowed to buy farming implements, cattle and seeds for crops and for the following two years successful crops of tomatoes and wheat were produced, but then the drought of 1967 came, which was a bad year for everyone.

In 1969 the Cummeragunga Company obtained a loan of $68,000 from the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprises.

Note: Aboriginal Enterprises have now been taken over by the newly formed Aboriginal Development Commission.

WHEN THE MANAGER LEFT

* Kevin Atkinson (Shepparton 1980)

At that particular point when there was no managers there, we could see that
there was going to be a movement in on us and people were going to put us right up against the river, because there was neighbouring farmers fencing us off and cutting us off. We even had our track to the cemetery cut off and we had to go through gates to get there.

We had very close friends called Thompsons and they somehow got in touch with the Kew Branch of the Aborigines Advancement League in Melbourne. Mrs. Thompson said to a friend in the Kew Branch "Why don't you come up to Cummera and see if you can help the Aboriginals up there? I think they can do with some sort of assistance." So the Kew friend Ray Adams ended up a very close friend of mine and he came up in 1959 and I suppose one of the things I'll never forget too! on that particular day when he did come up and have a look around, one of the Aboriginals attacked him very strongly and gave him a tongue lashing about the whites coming in and taking over and doing this and doing that, and you could see that our friend was a bit threatened by it and was going all colours. After a while when this particular person stopped attacking him he said "hey, wait a minute! I'm not here to take your land off you I'm here to try and help yous get it back! So lay off me a little while so I can explain myself." So after a while him and this other chap ended up pretty good pals and ended up joking about the whole thing after a while.

It was through that Kew Branch somehow or another they picked up some information somewhere and found out that Cummera was just about to be sold. They were calling tenders for Cumeroogunga. So they got back to us and said that this land is just about to be sold right under your noses and apparently yous don't know anything about it. So they said what if we try and stop the sale of it would you people be prepared to farm it and look after it yourselves? We all agreed why not! A lot of us had some sort of experience in farming, from working outside tractor driving, shearing, general farm work, fencing, irrigating. We reckoned between us we could manage it alright.

**FIRST COMMITTEE**

There wasn't many young fellas in the first committee -

**MEMBERS OF FIRST COMMITTE**:

- KEVIN ATKINSON
- EDDY BRIGGS
- AARON BRIGGS
- HARTLEY BRIGGS
- COLIN WALKER
- DAN ATKINSON
- ANDY COOPER

We said to the Kew Branch to do what they could about it and we would support whatever they did. In these times the only negotiations was through letters which used to take not weeks but months to get replies. Many a time we had to write a couple of letters to get a reply so one time we arranged for an appointment with a man I think Kelly was his name. The police dept. used to have the portfolio for Aboriginal Affairs in those days so what happened used to be the Chief Police Commissioner would be like the Minister today.
He would be the chairman of Aboriginal Affairs for the whole of N.S.W. Gus, I think his name was - Gus Kelly. We had an appointment to meet him in Sydney and we went up and saw him...we thought we had a good chance because the Labour Government was in at that time. I don't know what views this particular bloke had at this time but we felt pretty confident going to a Labour Govt. with our requests we would have more of a sympathetic response. But that wasn't to be, he didn't give us a very good hearing and we came away from there pretty disappointed.

The attitude they had, they said "Look you fellas have got no experience, it's too big a job for you and there's not enough land there for you to make a living. It wouldn't be worth all the mucking around to go to all that trouble when it's not worth it!" That's the sort of response we used to get from them all the time and then towards the end they used to send some of their representatives down here and that was the same thing we used to get over and over ... they would say "Look we've gone into it, we've researched it and it just wouldn't be worthwhile for you to have it back because you wouldn't get nothing out of it." They didn't look at the factor that the place was pioneered by a lot of the old folk - it was our birthplace. There was plenty of skills there to run it ourselves.

SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS CLOSURE:
So in the final round of talks they sent what they called a Select Committee around N.S.W. to look into Aboriginal reserves in general. (This would have been in the 1960's)

NOTE: Committee met at Cummera on 19th July 1966.

The Committee of Inquiry was to see what could be done with reserves in the future. One of the recommendations for Cummera was that it be closed down as a reserve and the residents be assimilated. They came down and told us what their recommendations were and what should be done about Cummera. We said well we're not moving so take it how you like... they said we won't even build houses here for you and those houses are not fit for you to live in. We said well if that's the situation we'll live in them and we're not moving and we're not taking any notice of your recommendation.

So finally then after a while... there was a bloke named Ian Mitchell from Sydney came down...he was I think a secretary from the police dept. or Aboriginal Affairs. He came down and he wasn't too bad he used to give you a reasonable hearing and he finally saw our way to it and agreed to start doing something for Cummera. So we finally got the response to get the housing commission to put up those houses they built in 1968-9.

THEY CLOSE THE SCHOOL.
And then they (the N.S.W. Education Department) felt that the school numbers got down a little bit. We were in a funny situation - we had too many kids
for one teacher and not enough for two. They sort of pulled a swifty over us a little bit because they promised the world on the education side of it and it was too good to refuse, sort of thing. They said "Well look we realised the problems you are going to have here by going into Moama but we think in the long term it will be of benefit to everyone,". We said "Well look, we think the system won't suit the Aboriginal people because going in there they will be lost" so they said "no we won't let that happen; we'll make you a part of the school ... if any kid is a bit behind in their class we'll attend to them on a one to one basis and bring them right up again,"

But it didn't work out that way and once they closed the school down there was no turning back then. I was disappointed with them on that score.

STRUGGLE TO RETAIN CUMMERA
They were a very strong definite group that lived there at the time and I felt if we could have got some continuity of that particular way of life, and of the struggle and support, I feel that place had potential to go on and on and there was no end for Cummera. But some of the older folks died and some of the families of those older people moved away like the Briggs went: when Hartley moved away his family moved. When Andy Cooper died his family didn't become involved, and Aaron Briggs when he was in there "it was like everyone supported it because they had someone involved in it. They were very definite, they supported you no matter what they had to do, and they always supported you in every way: attended meetings, supported the meetings and whatever stand you took, and you didn't mind doing or saying anything on their behalf because you knew you had their support.

CUMMERA CO-OPERATIVE
In 1966 they finally gave us an agreement to farm the place.

NOTE: The people formed the Cumeroogunga Co-operative to manage the land, and all residents were shareholders.

All the leases were cancelled before that, I'd say that would have been in 1965, and it was taken off the whites. So when everything all got straightened out...they drew up an agreement that they always remained the owners and controllers of it, because we were only what they call tenants of the land and we could have been given a month's notice to vacate the land and whatever we had there would be lost.

ONE-SIDED AGREEMENT
If we had a wheat crop in and all of a sudden they told us to pack up and get out the crop became theirs. It was a pretty one-sided agreement but we accepted it - we knew all the restrictions that were on it but we agreed just to have some sort of agreement or permission to work it ourselves. We looked at it as being better than nothing and at least it was a start...we had our
own solicitors looking into it too! they told us straight that it was a real one-sided agreement and made us aware of what we were entering into.

That was in '66. We grew a wheat crop: then we were given a donation of 6 cows and they increased naturally; then we finally hit out a bit and got the stock agents to buy us a few head of cattle of our own and then we finally looked into other avenues after different ones told us that there was money available for different enterprises and ventures. So we drew up a program to develop the place which was approved after we forwarded our submission to Canberra, to the Aboriginal Loans Commission.

START OF DEVELOPMENT

That sort of kicked us off. We went pretty well too. We developed a lot of land, we cleared paddocks, ploughed paddocks and graded them and laid them all out ourselves and sowed them down to pasture, dug channels, put up fences, cattle yards - the lot. Then slowly we had the younger people growing up and I think alcohol was one of the big problems which unsettled people.

FRUSTRATIONS:

That's exactly what it was, frustrating, when you were doing everything that you thought was for the benefit of the whole community and for some reason they could not see this and formed the attitude that it was my own venture, property. There was no way they could see it was every bit as much theirs as it was mine and they got out of it as much as what I did.

The only thing that I get out of it was the wages that I earnt for working the place but apart from any other advantages you could say I came out the loser, 'cause there were lots of times where you would be putting in hours and hours that you would never get paid for.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL TO SELF CONTROL

COMMENT: The N.S.W. Government administered and controlled Cummera from its development out of Maloga in 1889 to 1988 - A period of 77 years. Then in 1966 it was given to the people as Kevin says on an agreement basis that could be terminated within a month (with the makers of the agreement inheriting whatever crops or development taken place at that time).

I put the question to Kevin:

Did he think that after 77 years of Government control and then being handed over to the people, it would take a long re-adjustment stage? And was this any contributing factor to frustrations and lack of support to make a go of it?

No, I think what happened there, was that a lot of people that were there at the time wouldn't have experienced any of that sort of stuff where they were told by managers to do this and do that and go here and go there.
See the younger people would have missed that, they wouldn't even know what a manager was or the restrictions that were placed on people in those times. I think they grew up in a different system altogether where it was entirely different to what the older people experienced. I think that some of the things that people would experience in those times was discipline, 'cause there was no way you could buck the system...the only way you could would be to get outside of the boundaries of it. There was lots of times too if you did go out you were sort of expelled and you weren't allowed to come back, if you were playing up too much or causing trouble in some way... people were not allowed to bring alcohol onto the place. Well so the younger people of today didn't experience any of that stuff.

LOOKING BACK

I have feelings of disappointment, sorrow, I feel very sad for the people that are still left there and Cummera itself. The reason I have these feelings is because I was born right there on Cummera and grew up there spending over 40 years there without moving off the place, and I think that's part of a cultural thing which makes me aware of the feeling that land means to Aboriginal people and how you are part of it.

I think that place will always remain that way for me regardless of how it does finally end up. I'll always still feel that it always will be my birthright ... that I did spend 40 years of my life there and experienced all of the things of growing up.

CUMMERA IN THE 60's.

* Colin Walker (Barmah 1980)

I can go back to 20 years ago. I was married then and bringing the children up on Cummera. They started off going to the Aboriginal school which was good we thought...they were home for dinner everyday and the women could take care of them. This school was run by the N.S.W. Education Department and they had white teachers there. And then we formed a committee and got a bus to take the kids to school outside Cummera. It went to Moama, Nathalia, Primary and Tech. school, and only for us getting that bus!...like there were a lot of white kids who couldn't catch a bus, so things were pretty good.

Then we started growing tomatoes, and the first crop we grew we topped the market in Melbourne which was grown in all maiden ground and everyone worked - it was very successful. We also grew spuds which were very good, we used to take a load out to the Cobb Highway every Sunday and they were picked up there and carted to Primrose for us.

The time we were growing our own crops and running the reserve was the time when we got it back. When we did make employment, a lot didn't want to work. We grew our own crops, tomatoes, spuds, and the people went to Shep. and Mooroonpa for work! and here we had it at our front door. We used to go to Undera and pick tomatoes and then come back and pick here. Kevin Atkinson and I made employment for the people but they preferred to go outside.
COMMUNITY CONTROL

When we were growing up it was good, all the young people respected the elders and the elders had all the say. It was run by a white manager then (Miller then Peterson).

I saw old Finny Jackson bring a bottle of wine on to the reserve and one of the manager's pulled a revolver out and blew it up on a stump! We thought in our time that sort of thing was pretty hard but when you look back I think it was a good idea for those who can't hold liquor.

The old people were very strict - we've got no one there now strict enough to carry it out. If you had a dozen or so old people there now I don't think they would be able to control them...they're just larakins and they drink.

The whole system is smashed because there is no discipline there or effective leadership, management.

HELP FROM THE LANDS TRUST

COMMENT: The Aborigines Welfare Board was abolished by the Aborigines Act, 1969, which vested Aboriginal lands in the Minister, then in 1973 this Act was amended to provide for the Aboriginal Lands Trust to be established, and for Aboriginal lands to be held by the Trust under freehold title. The first members were appointed in 1974. Cummeragunga lands were officially transferred in 1977.

The Lands Trust took over all Aboriginal reserves in N.S.W. so that's how Cummera came under the Lands Trust.

When they took over (1974) we told them about our committee that we were going to form to run the place, and when we had trouble we wanted to have powers from the trust to deal with any problems.

So we consulted with the Trust and sought their advice on what we should do if someone played up or was threatening someone else's rights. They said if something like that happens, then ring up to us and we'll give the police authority to go and take whoever is playing up. We thought that would be good and when any of the boys came and said to us the next day "You got the cops onto us last night", we would say "No we didn't, the Lands Trust did."

It was working all right under those arrangements and we tried our best to get it going.

SETTING UP ON OUR OWN

COMMENT: In 1975 Kevin Atkinson and Colin Walker moved off Cummera and set up their own company on the Barmah side of the river with a loan from the Aboriginal Enterprises Fund.

They are a Co-op. and we are a company. We're independent. This land was originally owned by Rices who occupied it for some 65 years. He was an old fisherman and had Aborigines contracting for him - Briggs, Atkinsons, Coopers. He was the agent and made his money in the fishing period, then he bought
the land here for his sons.

It's been about 6 years since I left there and moved across here. We still crop in there, plant our crops and have an arrangement with water.

FUTURE OF CUMMERA

* Elizabeth Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)

The Advancement League has been involved for a long, long time in trying to get this farming thing going at Cummera. They've spent a lot of time and money in working to preserve the land, fighting governments, Federal and State (N.S.W.) to recognise that it is Aboriginal Land. It has now been handed over to the Aboriginal Lands Trust which has been set up in N.S.W. and funded by the DAA.

The Cumerongunga Land is owned by Aboriginal people. The land title has been handed over. What they want is for the people to become self-supporting, self-producing, and that's something they are working towards because hopefully in the near future Cummera is a place that can become self-supporting.

PRESENT LAND HASSLES

There is still controversy today over what is called the Trosky Farm which in the 1930's was leased to Wally Smart. The land is right in the heart of the reserve land on Cummera and it's still leased out today, by Trosky.

Aboriginal people have asked for that land to be returned and are still hassling over it. Because of the Loans Commission that's been set up by the DAA requests have been made by Aboriginal people that it be returned, which it probably will when the 99 years lease runs out, but nobody knows how long that lease has to run...they've been trying to find out for some time but nobody seems to know when the first lease was signed.

After the 1939 incident the Board stated in its annual report for that year that they were contemplating connecting irrigation to the reserve and dividing up some of the land into blocks so that people could farm them.

The fact was that they never did this and it was only a contemplation!

The point is that Aboriginal people were working it, they had their own crops and were self-producing. When I was born it was the period they were self-producing. I can remember when I was a little tot, running around that we used to lose ourselves amongst the crops which were very high. They had their own crops, sheep, cattle and gardens.

Cummera is a place that can become self-supporting again.
Cummera started to go down after those girls were taken in 1919, and although it was still a big place after that incident you could notice the change. It also had a big effect on the people's feelings towards the administration - Government, Board, police. There was also another big change there after Grandpa James left in the 1920's. After he left they didn't have that organiser there to organise things. Everyone went to him when they had any problems, or wanted any advice. You would never get another man like him in a lifetime. He was a doctor, school teacher, dentist and spoke six different languages. I think Cummera would be a good place for the older people to go back there and live their last days there. If they built some homes for the older ones to retire there I reckon it would be good for them. Cummera was a self supporting reserve in its heyday and I was told then by one particular manager that all of the stock and farming developments on Cummera wasn't just for the running of Cummera but it was for the running of other reserves as well. Cummera used to support a lot of the other reserves in N.S.W., and the money that was made out of Cummera went back into consolidated revenue for that purpose. If it was just to run Cummera you can imagine the difference it would have made.

CORANDERRK

Coranderrk was much the same in its early days! It was a thriving reserve up until they destroyed it. I never went there but I know that from the many people that came from there to Cummera and went from here down there. I see the reserve now as a thing of the past. A lot of the things that are still happening today such as people moving away into the towns, should have been happening 50-60 years ago and people should have been properly assisted in moving into the towns. In the early days it was tough going and people had no choice because they were under Government control. Those were the days families really had to "struggle to survive" and the going was tough. That's why I feel Cummera should be given back to the people because they pioneered it right back to the days of Maloga.

Bevan Nicholls (Barmah 1978)

How many acres of land would there be on Cummera? Originally about 2,965! Well you look at it this way. That amount of land in the general farming community would be worked by one family. Now when you look at Cummera we had a population of some 400-500 in its heyday and the Government have said to themselves. "Oh, well we'll put these people on so many acres of land and that will support them." They forgot about anything else, as far as the acreage being not enough to support the whole community, so they have to rely on other means of support such as social service benefits. People think because we're Aborigines you're not a township. Take Barmah Community the way it is with its population. The town is where the people live and because there is not enough work to support everyone in that town they have to go outside to work, but they return to the town where they live. When people live in a large community they have to have proper houses, services and administration. The Government's attitude was because we're Aborigines then we must be herded together in one place and called a mission or reserve. Let's get
right away from those words!! - we're a community.

IDENTITY

There's been a lot of changes for us as far as a race of people go. But we'll never change our identity. We've changed in a lot of other ways but the people who have left Cummera, they still call it their "home" even though they might live in Melbourne or Sydney.

It's something that always crops up when someone who lived on Cummera has to give their place of birth, or their children want to know where their parents were born. Then these younger ones are always curious to find out about Cummera. I've seen it happen a lot. I've met people that didn't know their background and then all of a sudden "Goodness gracious", they find out they're Aboriginal and the next thing they want to do is check out their origin which will bring them back to Cummera. It's a good thing too, because I wouldn't like to see our people lose their identity and origins. After all it goes back for 10,000's of years and that's something we must be proud of.

There could be a movement back providing we had the skills and equipment to run it the way we wanted with no outside interference. But when you start talking about a separate development like that people start to close up. We've got the answers to our problems as long as we can put them into action ourselves. We have to be left to do this by ourselves and not by some Government officials coming along and saying "yes that's a good idea - but you better do it this way or we won't give you any money." So this is what we're up against.

*Nora Charles (Shepparton 1978)*

Those were the good old days, they were good times we had together on Cummera. They were hard times too but we were all happy and cared for one another. But then when they all shifted and people's houses were pulled down everybody lost interest.

Different ones have asked me if I would go back but I dunno, things have changed a lot now and I think I would prefer to stay where I am now. I don't think I could like to go back but I'll always remember Cummera as "my home."

POTENTIAL IS THERE:

* Elizabeth Hoffman (Melbourne 1979)*

Cummera seemed to have been part of a pattern like other reserves. They were set up to serve the purpose at the time for Aboriginal people. Cummera today could be seen as a place that can be used in the future as a place where Aboriginal people could re-develop a self-supporting community, because if it could have been done in the early days then there's no reason to say it can't be done now. There's land there and all that's needed is the skills and
leadership to get it under way.
The main thing in my opinion that is preventing this happening today is that Aboriginal people are still searching for their identity and trying to survive in the wider community which is the present phase that Aboriginal people are going through now. The potential is definitely there to re-develop Cummera as a self supporting community.
The Advancement League is presently fighting for the future of Cummera and the very existence of Cummera as our birthright. At present there is nothing there for the families living on Cummera as far as education and meaningful work programs, so there is really nothing at present for those families living there. What has to be done as we see it, is to build up from the present situation and get some proper developments taking place there.

BORDER
Cummera being on the border of NSW/VIC has always been a controversy between the two state Governments. Traditionally the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang tribes occupied both sides and the political boundary that divided the states didn't mean anything to the people. As years passed Cummera people related more to Victoria than NSW because it was closer to its capital than N.S.W. This was one of the things that had a big effect on Cummera because it was very isolated from Sydney where the administration was, and was not assisted by Victoria because it was over the border in N.S.W. The original tribes that lived there had the type of set up which, looking back now, was paradise. They more or less just had to sit there and everything was provided. Their needs were pretty small in those days and as long as they had a feed, shelter and warmth from the cold they were happy. The seasons were good all year around and the Murray River people were very healthy people before the coming of Europeans.

*Margaret Tucker (Melbourne 1979)*
The first Cummera people believed that Cummera was theirs and they were going to stay there forever, but this wasn't to be and they became very disheartened when the Board made them leave. Cummera saw many changes and one of the biggest was when Grandpa James left. He set such a high standard to follow and the teachers that came after him found it very hard to follow on from where he left off. He was very much like an Aboriginal person himself, and when he was replaced by a white teacher there was a decline in attendance and a certain amount of discipline lacked after he left. Then the Government started to move from the reserves.
I feel what the Government did to our people in the past was a very wrong thing especially in N.S.W. and Vic. where there is only a very small number of our full blood people. It's very sad to me to look back at a lot of the things that happened to our people.
* Iris Atkinson (Mooroopna 1978)

If Cummera was set up back to its form of glory it was when we all lived there, it would be my choice to move back there, and spend the rest of my life there. I still say with all the modern conveniences and comforts of today, that I could quite easily move back there and live. I've got wonderful memories of Cummera, and everytime the people of my age come together and the older ones, we always go back to Cummera and re-live those days over and over because they meant so much to us. We still have a strong attachment that we share with each other, and go right back to "dear old Cummera" where we all grew up together.

* Merle Jackamos (Melbourne 1979)

At the time it was a happy childhood growing up on Cummera, but when you look back at those days now it makes you wonder how you even survived. Because a lot of times I can remember as a child we went to school on bread and dripping, and when you came home for lunch you had the same thing. Rations were not enough for families to survive on, and a lot of people experienced what it was like to go without, which is why I say to myself now I'll never go hungry again.

Looking back at Cummera's history it seemed that whenever the Government saw that the people could do things themselves and were becoming self-sufficient there was always a block put in their way, and this is one of the things we've been up against. Once they saw Aborigines becoming independant and progressing it seemed that this was the reason for such incidents happening like the farm blocks being taken back, the girls being taken and the strike. They were all caused by outside interference.

Even when the barges used to pull up there and load all of the wool, wheat, and other goods produced at Cummera - well all of that was stopped when they saw the people progressing and becoming self sufficient. If all of that wasn't stopped well Cummera would have been a little self supporting village today, if they had of just left it go the way they wanted it to go without any outside interference.

A lot of the managers that came there had no training to work amongst Aboriginal people with the result they couldn't communicate with the people and there was always hostility between the people and management.

There was definately evidence there to say that when Cummera was set up and even before that at Maloga they adapted easily to farming work. The same situation applied to Coranderrk which was closely related to Cummera. They farmed it successfully and were becoming self sufficient until a block was put in front of them there.

It's something that seems to happen everytime when Aboriginal people start to rise up. I can remember as a child the old paddocks there which is now the

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main road into Cummera. There were crops growing there that when you walked through them you couldn't see above your head for the wheat was too high and they had plenty of cattle grazing off the land. I feel all of this should have been passed on to the people then when they were there, instead of in the 1960's when the mission was just about closed up, and people had been under Government management for all that time - something like 80 years of Government administration and control.

The effects of a lot of these blocks and restrictions on Aboriginal people has been a lot of frustrations and anxiety for our people which is one of the main reasons I believe people resort to alcohol. Also the reason for Aboriginal people not coming together is because a lot of their souls have been broken, and the stronger people who could have worked it have moved away.

A MOVEMENT BACK?

A lot of people could go back there because of what's happening in the general community, with Aboriginal people not being able to meet the high costs of living for rent and other commitments. There could be a movement back onto the riverbank or onto Cummera which I feel is something that will eventually happen and there are a lot who want to go back there now, specially the older ones.

If people wanted to move back to Cummera they would have to be equipped with the proper facilities to live there. A lot of the older ones have said that they want to move back there. For this to be done a lot of things would have to change such as the different values the younger ones have today in relation to the land. They don't seem to value the land like the old people but that's something that could be changed.

TODAY:

A lot of people still go back there and there is still that affinity with Cummera.

It's probably more so with the ones that have lived there who still call it home.

*Kevin Atkinson (Shepparton 1980)*

Looking back at it it's a situation that you wouldn't recommend for anyone else to grow up in, because at my time the education standard was very low and poor. I think this is one of the things I'm experiencing now - the inadequacy of the reserve as far as training for outside work goes. So I suppose on the good side of it there probably wouldn't be too many like myself who's finding it hard now, because the younger ones have been to white schools and at least they've had the opportunity to gain a good education where I didn't have no opportunity at all.

RESTRICTIONS

There were a lot of restrictions on the reserve and that was another demoralizing part of living on the reserve. You were always under restrictions and
rules made for us to live by. I don't regret a lot of things that have happened but I feel if I did have any regrets for things that are related to the present day situation, I'd say the inadequate education in the past has still got some effects today. It's proven not to be a disadvantage at this stage but, well! I suppose due to the fact that I'm trying to overcome it - you might say it holds me back a little bit.

**GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES**

It makes you wonder what was their attitude with reserves. Right from the very start they didn't seem to have no long term line of thinking on programming. One time they wanted to abolish the place, and yet they were doing nothing about programming for that time. They thought "Well where are we going to put these people when they do get out amongst the general community to compete...We'll have to educate these people and train them for some sort of skills when they go out there." But they did none of that.

If that education and training had of been provided then people would have found it easier to adjust to the mainstream, and it would have also helped in the takeover of the farm.

I think in those days too they would have had a pretty high rate of success because people had to succeed to survive sort of thing...but things have changed a lot now compared with say 30 years ago or more. I think if the administrators would have had the foresight to provide these real necessities in the early days, and educate and train people on the reserve to equip them, we would have been well on the way to more of a success rate today.

**OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND**

I think that appeared to be the attitude of the Government. The reserve was a place where people could be gathered and placed out of sight out of mind type of thing, and "we'll put someone there to keep an eye on them and keep them walking down the straight road."

**MOVEMENT BACK?**

At this stage, No. I don't see anything coming up in the near future, but in the long term, I imagine the clock will do a complete turn and something will come up again. Because Cummera I feel has a history of ups and downs. I think it's down at the moment but it will get up again.
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